



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

November 17, 2014, to March 26, 2015
and Index

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker



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Alberta Hansard

Monday, November 17, 2014

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The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Casey, Ron, Banff-Cochrane (PC)
Cusanelli, Christine, Calgary-Currie (PC)
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Horner, Doug, Spruce Grove-St. Albert (PC)
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Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND)
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Quest, Dave, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (PC)
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Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
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Towle, Kerry, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W),
 Official Opposition Deputy Whip
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC),
 Government Whip
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W),
 Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 61 Wildrose: 16 Alberta Liberal: 5 New Democrat: 4 Independent: 1

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		Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

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Naresh Bhardwaj	Associate Minister of Persons with Disabilities
Manmeet Singh Bhullar	Minister of Infrastructure
Robin Campbell	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Jonathan Denis	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Gordon Dirks	Minister of Education
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Diana McQueen	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Frank Oberle	Minister of Energy
Verlyn Olson	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Donald Scott	Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education
Teresa Woo-Paw	Associate Minister of Asia Pacific Relations

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Amery

Deputy Chair: Mr. Fox

Eggen	Pastoor
Hehr	Quadri
Kennedy-Glans	Rogers
Kubinec	Rowe
Lemke	Sarich
Luan	Stier
McDonald	

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Casey

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

Amery	Khan
Barnes	Sherman
Dorward	Vacant
Eggen	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Olesen

Deputy Chair: Mr. Pedersen

Cusanelli	Leskiw
DeLong	McAllister
Fenske	Notley
Fox	Prentice
Fritz	Sandhu
Jablonski	Swann
Jeneroux	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Jeneroux

Deputy Chair: Mr. McDonald

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Blakeman	Quadri
Brown	Wilson
DeLong	Young
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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Deputy Chair: Mr. VanderBurg

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Forsyth	McDonald
Fritz	Sherman
Johnson, L.	Towle
Kubinec	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Mr. Xiao

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Brown	Olesen
Cusanelli	Rowe
DeLong	Stier
Fenske	Strankman
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Jablonski	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Casey	Pedersen
Kang	Saskiw
Khan	VanderBurg
Luan	Wilson
Notley	Young
Olesen	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Anderson

Deputy Chair: Mr. Dorward

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Amery	Luan
Barnes	Pastoor
Bilous	Sandhu
Donovan	Sarich
Hehr	Young
Jeneroux	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Khan

Deputy Chair: Mr. Hale

Allen	Cao
Anglin	Casey
Bikman	Goudreau
Bilous	Johnson, L.
Blakeman	Xiao
Brown	Young
Calahasen	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

3 p.m.

Monday, November 17, 2014

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

[The Clerk read the Royal Proclamation dated September 18, 2014, summoning the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to convene on this date]

The Clerk: Please be seated.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber]

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

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

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members and gathered guests, let us pray and then remain standing thereafter. Almighty God, Creator and Holy Spirit, You are the author of all wisdom, of all knowledge and understanding, so we turn to You and ask Your blessings on all who are present here today. We ask for Your guidance in order that truth, justice, and good service may prevail in all of our judgments for the benefit of all Albertans. Amen.

It is now my great pleasure, ladies and gentlemen, to invite Mr. Robert Clark, who will be accompanied by the Royal Canadian Artillery Band, to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. I invite all of you to join in in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members and Guests:

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

Unidentified Speaker: Wow.

The Speaker: Wow indeed. Thank you, all. You're invited every Monday for that same purpose should you wish.

Please be seated.

Presentation to the Assembly of Hon. Jim Prentice Member for Calgary-Foothills

The Speaker: It is now my great pleasure to invite the longest serving member of our current Alberta Legislature, the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, to proceed to the main doors of the Chamber.

Hon. members, I have received from the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta the report of the returning officer for the constituency of Calgary-Foothills containing the results of the by-election conducted on October 27, 2014, which states that a by-election was held in the constituency of Calgary-Foothills and that the Hon. Mr. Jim Prentice was duly elected as the Member for Calgary-Foothills.

[Ms Calahasen escorted Mr. Prentice to the Mace]

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present to you the Hon. Mr. Jim Prentice, the new Member for Calgary-Foothills, who has taken the oath as a member of this Assembly, has inscribed the roll, and now claims the right to take his seat.

The Speaker: Congratulations. Let the hon. member take his seat. [applause]

Thank you. The rest of us can be seated.

I would now invite the Premier to rise. Mr. Premier, if you would, please proceed to the main doors to escort in the next newly elected member.

Presentation to the Assembly of Hon. Stephen Mandel Member for Edmonton-Whitemud

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have received from the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta the report of the returning officer for the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud containing the results of the by-election conducted there on October 27, 2014, which states that a by-election was held in the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud and that the Hon. Mr. Stephen Mandel was duly elected as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

[Mr. Prentice escorted Mr. Mandel to the Mace]

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting the Hon. Mr. Stephen Mandel, the newly elected Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, who has taken the oath of office as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, has inscribed the roll, and is prepared to take his seat, assuming his right.

The Speaker: Congratulations. Let the hon. member take his seat. [applause]

Presentation to the Assembly of Hon. Gordon Dirks Member for Calgary-Elbow

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have received from the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta the report of the returning officer for the constituency of Calgary-Elbow containing the results of the by-election conducted there on October 27, 2014, which states that a by-election was held in the constituency of Calgary-Elbow and that the Hon. Mr. Gordon Dirks was duly elected as the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

[Mr. Prentice escorted Mr. Dirks to the Mace]

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the Hon. Mr. Gordon Dirks, the newly elected Member for Calgary-Elbow, who has taken the oath of office as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, has inscribed the roll, and is prepared to exercise his right to take his seat.

The Speaker: Congratulations. Let the hon. member take his seat. [applause]

Presentation to the Assembly of Mr. Mike Ellis Member for Calgary-West

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have received from the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta the report of the returning officer for the constituency of Calgary-West containing the results of the by-election conducted on October 27, 2014, which states that a by-election was held in the constituency of Calgary-West and that Mr. Mike Ellis was duly elected as the Member for Calgary-West.

[Mr. Prentice escorted Mr. Ellis to the Mace]

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the hon. Mr. Mike Ellis, the newly elected Member for Calgary-West, who has taken the oath as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, has inscribed the roll, and is prepared to exercise his right to take his seat.

The Speaker: Congratulations. Let the hon. member take his seat. [applause]

Entrance of the Lieutenant Governor

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

[The Mace was draped]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the brass section of the Royal Canadian Artillery Band will now play a brief musical interlude. The piece to be performed today is entitled *Prelude No. 14* by Dmitri Shostakovich.

The RCA Band, Canada's oldest regular army band, was formed in Quebec City in 1879. It was subsequently stationed in Montreal and Halifax. It has seen service in both world wars and in Korea, and it has travelled across Canada and even beyond our borders. Reconstituted in Edmonton in 1997, the band is today under the direction of Captain Patrice Arsenault, CD, who is in the Speaker's gallery. Bienvenue, M. Arsenault.

May we now proceed with the interlude. Thank you.

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

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

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

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

[A fanfare of trumpets sounded]

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

His Honour: Thank you. Pray be seated.

Good morning – sorry. [interjections] You're all late.

Speech from the Throne

His Honour: My fellow Albertans, welcome to the Third Session of the 28th Alberta Legislature. It is my honour to deliver the Speech from the Throne as Alberta's Lieutenant Governor.

Today we are in the midst of Metis Week. So I begin with a special greeting to Albertans of Métis descent. I invite all Albertans to learn about and celebrate the many contributions of Métis Albertans to our province.

We come here together to serve the people of Alberta, a province that has been blessed beyond all measure with the gifts of abundant natural resources, rich soil that sustains our agriculture and forestry sectors, and the beautiful forests and prairies, lakes and rivers, mountains and foothills that are our natural heritage.

But we value most what Albertans themselves bring to our province: an entrepreneurial spirit, hard work and innovation, a commitment to excellence, and the ethics of compassion and service to others. All these things make Alberta a place of promise and opportunity like no other.

As the elected representatives of the people of Alberta we all share a great responsibility: to capture that promise and seize the opportunity so that future Albertans, whether they are born here or are among the tens of thousands of newcomers who join our province every year, will have the best quality of life possible.

Ladies and gentlemen, your government will do exactly this. Nine weeks ago we put Alberta under new management. Our new government understands that we will be challenged like never before to balance strong fiscal stewardship and accountability with meeting the needs of a growing province. Today we are home to just over 4 million people. By 2040, in a little more than a generation, we will be home to more than 6 million. The decisions we make in the next five years must lay the foundation for our prosperity and success for today and for all those future Albertans.

This government is focused on the clear priorities of Albertans, reflecting Albertans' values and ambitions for today while ensuring that a strong foundation is set for future generations. Five key principles underline our efforts: a focused commitment to sound, conservative fiscal principles; ending entitlements and restoring public trust; maximizing the value of our natural resources and respecting property rights; establishing our province as an environmental leader; and increasing Albertans' quality of life by being a leader in the areas of health, education, seniors' care, and skills training.

We will deliver good, prudent government, characterized by accountability and transparency. We will work tirelessly to earn and keep Albertans' trust. We will serve Albertans with the honour and respect they deserve. We will keep our province on a firm fiscal foundation, characterized by balanced budgets, a small cabinet and a small government, low taxes and no sales tax, a responsible program of capital investment, and a disciplined savings plan.

And we will deliver excellence in all the things Albertans want and need: top quality health care; education and skills training; safe, respectful care for our seniors; modern, efficient roads and infrastructure; vibrant cities and inclusive communities; and a clean, healthy environment.

The government's priorities will be those set by Albertans themselves, and the government's actions will reflect Albertans' values. We will always remember that we are here to serve the people of this province.

A Focused Commitment to Sound, Conservative Fiscal Principles

Albertans rightly expect their government to use taxpayer dollars wisely and to achieve the best possible outcomes for money spent. This government will deliver in a manner that is both transparent and accountable to Albertans.

Our province was built on solid, conservative fiscal principles that have served Albertans well. However, a budget tied to volatile energy prices imperils our fiscal resilience over the long term. We must align spending with a realistic assessment of the financial capacity we can sustain responsibly, without risking the prosperity of our children and grandchildren. Your government will be cautious in budgeting, prudent in spending, and diligent in saving.

At the same time Alberta's tremendous population and economic growth have shown us the peril of failing to maintain what we have and the importance of investing in what we need. To ensure fiscal

prudence and discipline, your government will continue to use conservative revenue forecasts for budget purposes.

The results-based budgeting review will be completed with a focus on more efficient and effective program delivery. The rate of increase on spending for government operations will be kept below the rate of population growth and inflation.

At the same time we will protect what is most important to Albertans. Government will maintain a contingency fund to protect priority programs from revenue volatility and to respond to emergencies like flood mitigation. New emphasis will be placed on better maintaining our assets and on investing to extend the life, use, and cost of what we have.

We will pursue opportunities for more innovative delivery of needed provincial capital infrastructure. We will only borrow for capital purposes, never for operations, and only with a clear debt repayment plan in place. We will introduce a straightforward budget presentation to ensure that Albertans have a clearer understanding of the province's finances and where and how their taxpayer dollars are being used. And we will issue a semi-annual update on Alberta's savings plan to report to the people of Alberta on the performance of their savings.

Ending Entitlements and Restoring the Public Trust

Public service is a privilege, and the actions of public servants must be guided by this fundamental principle. Your government pledges to honour the trust Albertans have placed in their elected representatives and respect those it serves in everything we do.

A review has already begun of agencies, boards, and commissions, to ensure they are performing to the maximum benefit of Albertans. New accountability legislation and complementary Treasury Board directives will begin to reshape the legislative framework governing ethical standards and accountability measures for those who serve Albertans. Actions here will strengthen conflict-of-interest guidelines for political staff, extend cooling-off periods for political staff and senior civil servants, eliminate excessive severance packages for political staff, eliminate sole-sourced contracts in all but exceptional circumstances, and clarify the distinction between the role of registered lobbyists and government consultants.

Maximizing the Value of Our Natural Resources and Respecting Property Rights

Our province's natural resources are the cornerstone of the strongest and best performing economy in Canada. In addition to conventional resources like oil, natural gas, and coal, Alberta is rich in renewable resources, including biomass, wind, hydro, and solar resources. And our natural conditions come together with human ingenuity to make our province a world leader in agricultural production and forestry.

Many people come to Alberta in search of opportunity. And they find it here, in an economy that runs on entrepreneurialism, innovation, and hard work. Albertans are truly global citizens with aspirations and abilities that extend far beyond our province's borders.

But limited access to global markets restricts Alberta's potential and costs Albertans and Canadians billions of dollars every year, limiting our prosperity and ability to control our economic destiny.

Your government will focus on enhancing market access for all our exports so we can diversify our client base, capture global prices, and open Alberta to the widest range of emerging opportunities.

Alberta will focus its efforts on the Asia Pacific region, which holds the greatest potential for growth in exports. Much focused work has been done here, including through the Asia Advisory Council, which considered opportunities to expand economic, research, education, and cultural opportunities between Alberta and Asia.

There are also emerging opportunities in our traditional market, the United States, and in Europe, where the conclusion of negotiations on the Canada-EU free trade agreement, once ratified, will further open the world's largest market for Alberta's products and services.

Government will develop a focused regional strategy to expand Alberta's presence in key markets, ensure the right supports are in place for exporters, and build the relationships that will underpin long-term, mutually beneficial trade partnerships.

Our success in the 21st century will depend on how well we seize the opportunities that exist in the Asia Pacific region. That is why we will continue to work closely within the New West Partnership, a powerful partnership across British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, representing a market of nearly 10 million people and economies worth half a trillion dollars, to drive national focus toward the urgency of ensuring that Canada's market access challenges are addressed.

Yet we have a 20th-century export infrastructure preventing Alberta and Canada from realizing its full economic potential. There is a lack of pipeline infrastructure to move energy products to tidewater. There is a shortage of rail capacity to move agriculture, energy, and forest products to export terminals.

Despite sustained advocacy and multiple World Trade Organization rulings in our favour mandatory country of origin labelling requirements in the United States continue to be a significant barrier to beef and pork exports into that country.

Your government will continue to work in partnership with other Canadian provinces, territories, and the federal government. These efforts will include advocating for expanded export and transportation capacity, whether by truck, air, pipeline, or rail, to improve access to all markets, including Atlantic Canada, the west coast, the Gulf coast, and others. Alberta will also seek a fundamental renewal of the pan-Canadian agreement on internal trade in order to achieve a broad, comprehensive agreement that will eliminate trade barriers within our country and create an open, efficient, and stable domestic market.

Alberta is also taking steps to support innovation in the development of new products, including value-added opportunities in the resource sector. Our province already produces high-quality food products while demonstrating leadership in environmental stewardship, animal welfare, plant health, and food safety. We will make annual investments to enhance agricultural research and innovation and further develop the food processing industry. Government has introduced the rural economic development action plan and is continuing to implement the Rural Alberta Business Centre to support continued economic growth in rural Alberta.

We are also making investments to support economic growth all over Alberta, beginning with our transportation infrastructure. Every day Albertans rely on our provincial highway network to get them to school and work safely. As a province we also rely on this network to develop our natural resources and get products to market. With over 28,000 kilometres of paved highway and more than 4,000 bridges we know that proper maintenance and renewal are essential to ensuring that Albertans have safe, reliable travel.

In addition to completing major projects like highway 63 and the ring roads, we must focus more on rehabilitation, intersection improvement, and bridge maintenance and repair, especially across rural Alberta. Investment now means improved safety for

the travelling public and less spent replacing aging infrastructure later.

Work continues on the development of a long-term transportation strategy, reflecting public consultations last spring, including the importance of public transit, the need for more free-flow highway corridors, and the desire to reduce our environmental footprint.

Market access, product innovation, and investments in infrastructure are all key elements of a thriving free-market economy. But its foundation must be the recognition and protection of private property. Private ownership of land is a fundamental and essential principle of our democracy and our economy. This government respects the property rights of Albertans and has heard the strong recommendations provided through the Property Rights Task Force. The introduction of Bill 1 today will begin to foster a culture of respect by acting on what landowners have told us already. Bill 1 signals the beginning of government's commitment to rebuild relationships with property owners in Alberta.

Other steps that will be taken to strengthen Alberta's economy include new supports for small businesses and exploring how government can continue to deliver public land titles services in new ways that provide enhanced access for Albertans.

Alberta will also work in partnership with employers, municipalities, and the government of Canada to integrate labour force strategies that provide durable solutions to the challenges of people without jobs and jobs without people. These will include tackling the mismatch between some of the educational paths Albertans follow and where the jobs are, removing barriers to labour mobility, and recognizing that local, national, and international workers are crucial to the success of our province. We will also continue to provide supports for those who are looking for work or who are underrepresented in the workforce, including people with disabilities.

Establishing Alberta as an Environmental Leader

If we talk about being a leader in the energy, agriculture, or forestry business, then we are in the environment business. Our customers expect this, and Albertans themselves demand it. Clean air, fresh water, and thriving biodiversity are part of our identity as Albertans and Canadians, something which Alberta shares with visitors from around the world through our exceptional tourism industry.

But we cannot just spread the word on the steps we have already taken. Alberta must take meaningful, effective action to show we are as serious about the environment business as we are about the energy business. This includes ongoing work with stakeholders and industry on the development of a new tailings management framework and taking action to protect the Athabasca River and its neighbouring ecosystems.

Alberta must build on the leadership that made us the first jurisdiction in North America to regulate greenhouse gas emissions and among the first to put a price on carbon. We will bring all parties – industry, environmental groups, aboriginal groups, and all affected Albertans – to the table to find common ground on environmental, economic, and social priorities.

In the year ahead our work will expand through the development of a new climate change framework that will outline strategies to drive emissions reductions. This means moving increasingly towards lower emissions sources, including natural gas and renewables. It means ensuring Alberta communities are more resilient to the impacts of a changing climate. It includes advancing efforts to monitor, measure, and report on our progress. It means pursuing local and global partnerships and alliances to

maximize our results. We will ensure that Alberta industry remains competitive, and we will meet the challenge of demonstrating real environmental leadership through meaningful action.

Enhancing Albertans' Quality of Life

Every effort of your government is focused on the fundamental goal of ensuring Albertans have the best quality of life possible. Albertans want to know that there will be schools for their children, supportive care and services for aging parents, and access to high-quality health care for everyone. They want to know that even while we deliver on fiscal promises, we are focused on ensuring our health and education systems, our communities, and cities will be able to meet the needs of our province as it grows to become a home for 6 million Albertans. They want to see smart investment and system improvement, getting full value for the money we do invest, reflected in system improvement across all areas of government.

Nowhere is this need more urgent than in the delivery of their health care. Albertans want a system that is patient focused and sustainable. They want to see outcomes improve. We know there is tremendous local knowledge in our communities and great expertise in our front-line health care workers. We want to empower health care providers to have more input into decision-making at the local level. This will take shape through refined relationships with health advisory councils and through a renewed focus on clinical standards, with input from medical professionals and key stakeholders.

Your government is focused on improving flow into and through the health system through multiple, integrated initiatives. This includes the continuing care capacity plan that will open 464 existing continuing care spaces and create more than 1,500 new spaces. This is in addition to the 1,400 spaces already set to open between 2016 and 2018. New continuing care spaces will ensure that seniors and others with complex needs receive the care they need in safe, comfortable, and appropriate settings while freeing up beds in hospital wards and emergency departments. Your government is committed to providing the right kind of care and housing options for seniors, at the right time, and as close to home as possible.

Additional work is also under way to address specific challenges within the health system, including patient access, waiting times, the need to speed up the transfer of patients from ambulances, the challenges of rural and remote communities, the availability of mental health supports for Alberta's children, and the need to develop a wellness strategy for Albertans.

A good education is the first step to a productive, fulfilling life. Albertans rightly expect excellence in education. Government must focus on providing students with the quality education they will need to thrive in the future. The recent announcement of 75 school projects brings the three-phase plan for Alberta's school infrastructure to 230 capital projects, creating more than 78,000 new spaces. This is the largest school construction project in Canadian history, and it is essential to keep pace with 10 years of record growth in Alberta's student population.

We are also committed to improving the way we teach and support our students and teachers. This government will work to ensure that the basics of literacy and numeracy are the foundation for all student learning from kindergarten through grade 12. We will also work to ensure students have opportunities to acquire 21st-century competencies such as innovation, communication, and collaboration.

We are working with education partners to deliver innovative learning opportunities such as dual-credit programming, which

allows high school students to develop high-demand skills and get a head start on postsecondary learning or workplace training through one of the many institutions under the Campus Alberta umbrella. Your government will work with postsecondary institutions to meet our province's need for skilled entrepreneurs, professionals, researchers, and workers. We are exploring new ways to strengthen the system that will allow all learners to access and transfer within Campus Alberta. Innovation investments will be aligned to better support and encourage innovative thinking and revenue generation within the Campus Alberta system.

We will also target supports for apprentices, low-income, northern, and aboriginal learners, all of whom have a vital role to play in meeting the growing need for skilled workers across Alberta.

Excelling in health, education, seniors' care, and skills training means investing in the structures these systems need. Government is broadening the planning horizon for its capital plan with the development of a five-year intermediate plan and a 25-year long-term plan. These will ensure priority needs will be met in an orderly and cost-effective way.

We also recognize the need to take care of the infrastructure that is already in place and have begun to deal with the maintenance backlog using a planned and deliberate approach. To ensure transparency and accountability, your government will introduce regular, twice-yearly report cards on the status of infrastructure projects across the province. The first will be tabled in the Legislature during this session.

Strong, modern, culturally vibrant cities and municipalities are at the heart of our province. Your government will provide Alberta municipalities with a solid foundation for growth. We will continue to provide significant, predictable funding to support local infrastructure and services through the municipal sustainability initiative. We will review the Municipal Government Act, working in partnership with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, all of our other municipal partners, and other stakeholders. And we will build on the recent signing of the framework agreement with Edmonton and Calgary and work with both municipalities to achieve the key milestones in the framework by spring of 2016.

Your government is also focused on being better partners to aboriginal communities, including those living in urban Alberta. Aboriginal people have important contributions to make to our cities, but sometimes the transition from rural or isolated communities to urban centres can be challenging. Your government will work directly with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities along with urban aboriginal organizations and federal and municipal governments to develop and support initiatives to ease transitions to urban centres and into new opportunities. We will devote new energy to addressing the unacceptable gaps in education achievement between aboriginal and nonaboriginal students by building partnerships and support for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people to use their skills, knowledge, and perspectives in the workforce.

In addition, a new bill will be introduced to improve protection for condo owners and buyers, improve transparency and accountability of condo boards, and create a faster, more affordable dispute resolution system.

Your government will work with the Premier's Council on Culture to develop a culture plan to promote sustainability and long-term growth across Alberta's vibrant arts and culture sector.

And work on a new volunteerism strategy will commence to ensure that our province's nonprofit and voluntary sector, comprising almost 25,000 charities and organizations, remains strong in its exceptional contributions to Albertans' quality of life.

Your government is also working to ensure children, low-income Albertans, and others who are vulnerable are protected. Changes in the justice system will put the needs of children and families first through reforms focusing on early and final resolution of disputes and by improving the efficiency of the maintenance enforcement program. Legal aid funding is being increased to allow more low-income Albertans, including AISH recipients, to access the justice system.

From prenatal to young adult, plans are under way to support young Albertans by tackling youth homelessness under the 10-year plan to end homelessness and through the early years strategy. They will provide important supports for Alberta's children and youth, helping them transition between community systems and support services to healthy adulthood.

Finally, for the many Alberta communities that are still recovering from the 2013 flooding, government is taking immediate action to resolve outstanding disaster recovery program appeals before the end of this year. A comprehensive flood mitigation plan will include the construction of a south diversion of the Highwood River and a dry reservoir near Springbank. These are components of a program that ensures Alberta communities are better protected from future flooding through solutions that are affordable, environmentally defensible, and quickly actionable.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, this is your government's plan for Alberta. It begins with the understanding that government's role is to serve Albertans honourably, respectfully, and ethically. Government's priorities must be those set by Albertans themselves.

It follows that our province must remain on a firm fiscal foundation, characterized by the sound, conservative fiscal principles that have served Alberta well. We must make the most of the many natural gifts bestowed on Alberta and through wise management and hard work turn the blessings we have been given into long-lasting security and prosperity. We must act now and act together to conserve our greatest gift of all, the natural splendour, majesty, and beauty of Alberta.

And we must work together thoughtfully and deliberately to preserve and enhance the tremendous quality of life enjoyed by Albertans. This is a precious legacy handed down to us from those who built our province. And it is our most solemn duty, in turn, to bestow what we received on our own children and grandchildren and everyone who will one day call this great province home.

This is your government's commitment to this Assembly and to all Albertans.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

God bless Alberta.

God bless Canada.

God save the Queen.

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

The Speaker: Ladies and gentlemen, I would now invite Robert Clark, accompanied by the Royal Canadian Artillery Band, to lead us in the singing of *God Save The Queen*. Please remain standing at the conclusion of our singing.

Hon. Members and Guests:

God save our gracious Queen,

long live our noble Queen,

God save The Queen!

Send her victorious,

happy and glorious,

long to reign over us;
God save The Queen!

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

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

The Speaker: Thank you.
Please be seated.

[The Mace was uncovered]

The Speaker: Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, today we welcomed four new members to our Legislative Assembly. As we know, Alberta became a province on September 1, 1905. Since that time there have been 28 general elections in Alberta and 104 by-elections, the most recent of which were held on October 27.

The 1905 federal statute establishing Alberta as a province and the Legislative Assembly of Alberta was the Alberta Act. It specified that the Legislative Assembly would be comprised of 25 members. The first official census of our newly created province was held in 1906, and it determined that our population was then 185,412 people. Accordingly, at that time there was 1 elected member per 7,416 residents.

In 1909 during the Fourth Session of the First Legislature the members of the Assembly passed the Legislative Assembly Act. That act increased the number of elected members in the Assembly to 41. The population of our province was of course growing at an astounding pace. This fact was borne out by the next official census, in 1911, when our population totalled 374,663 people, more than double the population of 1906. Therefore, there was now 1 member for every 9,138 residents.

Over the years the number of elected members has grown, just to keep pace with the burgeoning population of Alberta, as follows: in 1913 there were 56 members, in 1930 63 members, in 1957 65 members, in 1970 75 members, in 1985 83 members, and as of our last adjustment back in 2012 there are now 87 members. Today, according to the latest estimates, our population now boasts a resounding 4,121,692 people, which means we now have 1 elected member for every 47,376 residents. Quite a jump.

[The Premier returned to the Chamber]

In 2008 the Legislature Library undertook a project to establish definitively how many individuals have been honoured by being elected to this Assembly since 1905. Once elected, each member takes a special oath, signs the oath of allegiance book on the day he or she is sworn in, and begins his or her duties. The stats and numbers that I mentioned earlier reflect on our place in the illustrious history of the province of Alberta, and as members get elected to this Assembly, each of them gets a number. Let me recite three of them for you. Member 1, of course, was our first Premier, the hon. Alexander C. Rutherford. Member 46 was R.B. Bennett, who served as an MLA from 1909 to 1911, then as Prime Minister of Canada from 1930 to 1935. Member 93 was Louise McKinney, who was also the first woman elected to this Assembly and, of course, helped champion the cause of having women become recognized as persons. Through the aforementioned 28 general elections and 104 by-elections a total of only 833 individuals have taken their place in this Assembly as an elected member.

We take our responsibilities very seriously. We all believe strongly in the work we do here. We all believe strongly in the democratic process, we all believe in the healthy legislative debate

in which we engage in this Chamber, and we are reminded of the events that just took place on Parliament Hill, which in turn remind all of us of just how precious those rights and freedoms are to each and every one of us as contributing members of society and that all of us, each and every one of us, has a role to play, be it great or be it small, in ensuring those rights and freedoms are maintained and used for the greater good of us all.

Thank you.

Tablings

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

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Bill 1 Respecting Property Rights Act

Mr. Prentice: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 1, the Respecting Property Rights Act.

It is a great honour to rise today and introduce our new government's first piece of legislation, Bill 1, Respecting Property Rights Act. Mr. Speaker, I am passionate about property rights, and during the leadership race this summer I made a commitment to restore trust with landowners and introduce legislation to ensure Albertans' property rights are respected. Bill 1 is the first step to accomplishing this.

We reviewed the existing legislation and listened to the concerns of Albertans. By repealing the Land Assembly Project Area Act, we are responding to Albertans' concerns. Further, Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the Property Rights Advocate Act the 2012 and 2013 Property Rights Advocate's reports will be referred to committee for review during this fall session. We look forward to hearing from the committee following their review.

Property rights are a bedrock and a foundation of this province, so much so that we as a province incorporated the protection of property rights into the Alberta Bill of Rights. I am standing up today in defence of the property rights of Albertans, as I have my entire life. It is the responsibility of this government to find a balance between individual rights on the one hand and the rights of the public and the province as a whole on the other. By introducing Bill 1 today, this government is keeping its commitment to the people of Alberta to ensure a balanced approach to property rights. It's our commitment to a clear and fair process, Mr. Speaker, a process that respects this Legislative Assembly and respects the input of members of this Assembly in that process.

It gives me great pleasure to stand today to introduce this bill to address landowners' concerns and uphold their rights.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a first time]

Motions

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I move that the speech of His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor to this Assembly be taken into consideration on Tuesday, November 18, 2014.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move that the Assembly stand adjourned until Tuesday, November 18, at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:14 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, November 18, 2014

Issue 2

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Speaker
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Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Campbell, Hon. Robin, West Yellowhead (PC)
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Casey, Ron, Banff-Cochrane (PC)
Cusanelli, Christine, Calgary-Currie (PC)
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DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
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Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W)
Fox, Rodney M., Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
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Goudreau, Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (PC)
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 18, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Dear Lord, as we begin this first week of work in this Assembly, help us to proceed with the respect and honour that our institution deserves, and fill our hearts and minds with wisdom and determination to always do what is right for our constituents, for our province, and indeed for our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

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

Today I would like to welcome members and/or representatives of the Stevens family, the Hutton family, and the Diachuk family, all of whom I will introduce to you a bit later. In addition, I would also like to acknowledge the Alexander family, with whom we have been in contact but none of whom were able to join us in person today. Nonetheless, we know they are here with us in spirit.

Mr. Ronald Gordon Stevens, QC
September 17, 1949, to May 13, 2014

The Speaker: In 1997 Mr. Ron Stevens was elected to serve as the Member for Calgary-Glenmore in this Assembly. Prior to his election he had a successful career as a civil litigation lawyer and was appointed Queen's Counsel in 1996. He served in this Assembly for 12 years and held the positions of minister of gaming, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, and Deputy Premier from 2007 through 2009. With his strong work ethic and keen intellect, Mr. Stevens made many contributions to our province through this Assembly. Of particular note, he sponsored the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act. He also introduced the private member's bill which ultimately gave us our official dress tartan. Mr. Stevens resigned in May of 2009 to continue to serve Albertans as a justice of the Court of Queen's Bench.

Mr. Drew Hutton
October 8, 1953, to August 18, 2014

The Speaker: Mr. Drew Hutton served as the Member for Edmonton-Glenora from 2001 until 2004. Prior to being elected, he was the executive director of the Glenrose Foundation from 1998 to 2000 and held various roles within the Alberta civil service for almost 20 years. Mr. Hutton believed in giving back to the community and worked with many charities and organizations, including the Kidney Foundation and the United Way. He was an accomplished Masters runner and volunteered with the Edmonton Festival Marathon Society and with the Edmonton 2001 ITU triathlon championship committee. Most recently Mr. Hutton was serving as the director of U.S.A. trade and investment in the Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Bill Wasyl Diachuk
October 8, 1929, to October 17, 2014

The Speaker: Mr. Bill Diachuk served as the Member for Edmonton-Beverly from 1971 until 1986. In his first term he was elected as Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees and served in that role until 1975. In 1979 he was appointed minister responsible for workers' health, safety, and compensation and held that position for seven years.

Throughout his life Mr. Diachuk was actively involved in the community. He served as a separate school trustee, volunteered with numerous organizations and associations, assisted farmers as far away as Brazil to set up sustainable herbal tea crops, and helped build a children's park and a lung clinic in Lviv, Ukraine. Over the years Mr. Diachuk received many honours, including the Michael Luchkovich award, the Shevchenko medal, the Stars of Alberta award, and was made an officer brother within the Order of St. John.

Mr. Robert Keith Alexander
July 23, 1930, to November 12, 2014

The Speaker: Born in Vulcan, Alberta, Mr. Keith Alexander was elected as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud on November 2, 1982, and served until November 5, 1985. In 1,100 days of service in the 20th Legislature Mr. Alexander made his presence known by chairing the committee on regulatory reform and by sitting on numerous other committees. Mr. Alexander was a former champion amateur golfer whose many victories secured him a place in both the Canadian Golf Hall of Fame in 1985 and in the Alberta sports hall of fame in 1986. Of particular note was the invitation, which he honoured, to play in the Masters alongside Byron Nelson.

In a moment of silent prayer I would ask you to remember Mr. Stevens, Mr. Hutton, Mr. Diachuk, and Mr. Alexander as you may have known them. Please rise.

O Lord, grant rest eternal unto each of them, and let light perpetual shine ever upon them. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, continuing onward, we have with us today members and/or representatives from the Stevens, Hutton, and Diachuk families, and I would ask that they rise and remain standing as I call their names, and then we can welcome them all at the end with our thanks through our applause.

Representing the Stevens family is Jeremy Chorney, long-time family friend of the family, of course, and of former member Ron Stevens.

Representing the Hutton family are Marcy Hutton, wife of former member Drew Hutton; Mackenzie Hutton, daughter of Mr. Hutton; Jordan Schell, nephew of Mr. Hutton; Stacy Schell, niece of Mr. Hutton; Jodi Schell, sister-in-law of Mr. Hutton; and Andrew Keats, family friend of Mr. Hutton.

Representing the Diachuk family are Ollie Diachuk, wife of former member Bill Diachuk; Teresa Diachuk, daughter of Mr. Diachuk; and Brenda Diachuk, daughter of Mr. Diachuk.

We also want to reach out to the Alexander family, whom I referred to earlier, none of whom, unfortunately, were able to join us today. Nonetheless, please know that our thoughts and prayers are with you and with all.

Please join me in welcoming and thanking our guests. [applause]

1:40

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: We have school groups, that are traditionally first, and I think we have the hon. Minister of Health ready to make an introduction, followed by Sherwood Park.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a group of 37 grade 6 students from Monsignor William Irwin Catholic school in the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud, who are seated in the public gallery. These students are here this week to participate in the Legislature school. Their teacher, Mr. Nick Freeman, and a parent, Mike Smith, are joining them. I ask the students and their teacher from Monsignor William Irwin elementary school to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 58 grade 6 students, very bright and talented grade 6 students, from St. Theresa Catholic middle school. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Kurt Davison and Ms Stefanie Kaiser, and by Cathy Kennard, Trinity Senuk, and Vanessa Jans. I ask that the group from St. Theresa Catholic school please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

If not, let us move on to the next category of important friends, guests, and acquaintances and begin with the hon. Premier, who, I believe, has an introduction to make.

Mr. Prentice: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also acknowledge the family and friends of Ron Stevens, Drew Hutton, Bill Diachuk, and Keith Alexander together with the other guests.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you Mrs. Karen Prentice. Mrs. Prentice is my spouse of 31 years, as you may have guessed. She is a successful personal lawyer in her own right. She has succeeded, while I have been occupied with other matters, in raising three daughters and is now providing the same leadership to raising two grandchildren. She also sits on a number of charitable boards in Alberta and, indeed, across the country. I would ask Karen to please rise – I would not be here without her – and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. Would you like me to do them one right after the other?

My first introduction. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of this Legislative Assembly Charlene Preston. Charlene is my constituency assistant in Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. She's a friend, she's an adviser, and honestly I could not do as good a job as I do without her help. If Charlene could stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, it truly is an honour and a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House three very special members of my own family: our daughter Jessica, who is here and has taught me more about kindness than I will ever know; our daughter Madison, who is an amazing spirit and a member of the seventh squadron Penhold air cadets and who

won the top cadet at summer camp this summer before Penhold closed; and, of course, my mom, Bertha, who has always stood beside me in hard times, good times, knows I'm not perfect and that I make lots of mistakes but who has always been proud of me and makes me want to work harder each and every day. I would ask all of you to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, followed by the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to be associated with a great group of people who work in my department. They're very outward looking, and they deal with Albertans every day. They are trained by a group of people within my department who are here today, 16 people from my ag-industry extension and training branch. I'd like to call their names, and they can rise as I call them and stay standing. They are Lois Hameister, Susan Lacombe, Chris Onciul, Karen Carle, Eugene Balogh, Stephanie Irvine, Deb Ratcliff, Charles Young, Mark Kelly, John Gillmore, Lee Harper, Caitlynn Reesor, Barb Shackel-Hardman, Lori McRae, Sharon Stollery, and Cameron Horner. These people do great work for the people of the province of Alberta and our department. I'd like to thank them and welcome them here today. I'd ask my colleagues to join in welcome with the traditional welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, followed by the leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two very important people in my life. In fact, if it weren't for them, I don't think I would be here. I'd like to introduce my parents, Brian and Gay Fawcett, who have come here for the throne speech and to watch question period today. They successfully raised three boys – I don't know how they did it sometimes – with a tremendous amount of sacrifice, compassion, and understanding. I know that we don't always say it enough, but, Mom and Dad, I love you and thank you for being here. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Alberta Liberals I would like to thank the families of Drew Hutton, Ron Stevens, Bill Diachuk, and Mr. Alexander for sharing them with the province of Alberta. Our thoughts and prayers are with you, and you have our sincerest condolences.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mark Hercina and Trudy Ng. Mark and Trudy are correctional peace officers from Red Deer. Mark sits on the pension committee with AUPE and is a member of local 3. Trudy is a secretary for local 3, chapter 12. Mark and Trudy are hard-working employees of this great province. As AUPE members they represent the thousands of employees that keep our province safe. Their focus on pension rights illustrates their commitment to serving this province. On behalf of the Alberta Liberals of the Legislature I would ask Mark and Trudy to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition, followed by the Member for Calgary-West.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my very special guests, Ray Martin and Raj Pannu. It's a great honour for me to have both Ray and Raj here today to show their support during my first question period as leader of Alberta's NDP. No pressure there at all. Of course, my guests are no strangers to this House. Ray Martin was leader of our party from 1984 to 1994, with Raj leading the charge from 2000 to 2004. Just like my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, they have both left tremendous legacies for me to follow. I'm grateful to have three former leaders as my friends and mentors to help me settle into my new role. I would now like both Ray and Raj to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my guests, Mr. Ron Liepert and Ms Lisa Davis. Former Alberta Finance minister and former Calgary-West representative Mr. Liepert is no stranger to this Assembly and will be continuing his political career as the Conservative candidate for the new riding of Calgary Signal Hill in the next federal election. Ms Davis managed my by-election campaign and is a recognized community leader and a strong advocate for school infrastructure in Calgary-West. My guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you two gentlemen who are visiting all the way from Faisalabad, Pakistan: the physician Dr. Najaf Gill, followed by his nephew who is a local entrepreneur. I would request that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

1:50 Statement by the Speaker

Rotation for Questions and Members' Statements Questions to Members Other than Ministers

The Speaker: Hon. members, the clock reads 1:50. That means we have to start question period. However, before we proceed with the daily Routine and the first question period of this session, I'm obliged to make a brief statement about changes in the rotation for Oral Question Period and for Members' Statements and the role of legislative secretaries in this Assembly. This statement is further to my November 10, 2014, memo to all members, which included the projected sitting days calendar and the Oral Question Period and Members' Statements rotations for the Third Session of the 28th Legislature. I note that my office has not received a House leaders' agreement varying the rotations outlined in the attachments to that memo, so we will proceed on the basis of those rotations.

The change to the rotations since last session is made necessary by the changes in caucus membership. The only difference from the standings when the House leaders' agreement on rotations was

reached in May 2012 is that there is one independent member, who was formerly a member of the Wildrose caucus. In keeping with the practice of an independent member being entitled to ask one question per sitting week, the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre will be able to ask the sixth question on day 4 of the rotation, which will be Monday, November 24, as today is officially day 1 in the rotation.

The Official Opposition is entitled to the first three questions each day, the Liberal caucus is entitled to the fourth question, and the ND caucus is entitled to the fifth question. The Official Opposition may ask the sixth question each day except for day 4 in the rotation, when it will be the turn of the aforementioned Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. The Official Opposition will be entitled to ask the eighth, 12th, 14th, and 16th questions each day. Members of the government caucus will be entitled to ask the ninth, 13th, 15th, and 17th questions each day. The Liberal caucus may ask the 10th question each day, and the ND caucus the 11th question. The 18th question will rotate, with the Official Opposition entitled to ask it on days 1 and 3 of the rotation – that would be today and Thursday – with the government caucus asking it on day 2, and the Liberal caucus being entitled to the 18th question on day 4 of the rotation.

With respect to the rotation for Members' Statements this has also been modified to provide for one statement for the independent member every three weeks. This is reflected on the projected sitting days calendar that I sent to you under cover of my November 10, 2014, memo.

I should also point out that there is a motion on the Order Paper for the sitting to be extended past December 4, 2014. If this motion passes, there will be a new projected sitting days calendar issued and sent to everyone.

Another difference from the last time the Assembly met is that there are now four legislative secretaries and one special adviser, who have been appointed by the government. I want to reaffirm past Speakers' rulings that have been made on the role of legislative secretaries and/or similar positions. Essentially, as the occupants of these offices are not members of the Executive Council, they are not entitled to respond to questions during Oral Question Period on matters of government policy.

As my predecessor Speaker Kowalski said on April 16, 2008, at page 13 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day, "Without detracting from the work they perform, for the purposes of the Assembly members occupying these positions are considered private members as opposed to the government." The point of Oral Question Period is to hold the government to account. Legislative secretaries are not members of Executive Council and therefore cannot respond to questions on behalf of the government. Speaker Schumacher made the same point, and you can find that at page 2854 of *Alberta Hansard* for November 7, 1994.

If members have any questions about the rotations or any other matters, for that matter, regarding things in this statement that I've just said, I would encourage you to contact my office as soon as possible.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. First main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I hope you'll indulge me with a few extra seconds on the clock to first congratulate the Premier on winning the leadership of his party and securing his seat.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Ms Smith: The Premier claims that we are now under new management, so I will keep this simple and ask him the first question that I asked in the Assembly to the member who was the head of the old management. With oil heading towards \$70 a barrel, this government will have a multibillion-dollar hole in its budget. How will the Premier get out of this budget hole? Will it be by increasing the deficit, by raising our taxes, or by wiping out what's left of our savings?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Prentice: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me just respond by thanking the hon. member for her warm and generous welcome. We have all as members of the Assembly arrived here in different ways, on different personal journeys, but we all are here to serve the interests of Albertans. I look very much forward to working with the hon. member and indeed all members of the House. As we've seen in the throne speech, this government tends to be very focused on the desires and wishes of Albertans, and I look forward to working together to achieve exactly that.

If you might indulge me, then, Mr. Speaker, to respond to the question, Albertans are already the lowest taxed people in the country by far. This is an enormous advantage, which we intend to maintain.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I just want a little more clarity on that answer because the pundits are speculating that the Premier is considering new revenue streams. That is code for new taxes. As his party has indicated, they believe Albertans should be paying for all sorts of new things like driving down a highway. Will the Premier assure Albertans that he won't create any new taxes or raise any of our current taxes to pay for his spending promises?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, what I have said publicly and will continue to say is that \$75-per-barrel oil represents a low-price environment, that every single family and businessperson in this province is well aware of. This is not business as usual. This will require some tough decisions on the part of the government. Our government will bring forward an update specifically on the finances of the province relative to this position in the current fiscal year. That will be done by the Minister of Finance in the week ahead. It will provide Albertans with a very clear picture of the current fiscal situation. It is a time for prudence and caution.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, you see that he didn't say no when I asked that question.

There were also a lot of spending promises in the by-elections as well as yesterday's throne speech. However, the throne speech did say that the government will maintain the sustainability fund, which, of course, suggests that they won't be dipping into our savings. So it's either going to be higher taxes or more debt or both. Now, the Premier used to be a senior banker. Will he tell us how much debt he thinks it would be prudent for Albertans to take on?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question. I think the best authority on matters relating to banking is probably Moody's Investors Service, which today actually issued a report concerning the creditworthiness of our province and made the very specific observation that even prices as low as \$60 per barrel for west Texas intermediate crude carried through for the entire year of 2015-2016, as a hypothetical, would not impair the triple-A credit rating of the province of Alberta. That's

fiscal strength. We intend to maintain that through prudence and discipline.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition. Second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: I can summarize that, Mr. Speaker. I guess I would say that it's yes to both more taxes and more debt.

Property Rights

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, all summer we heard the Premier declare that he truly understands property rights and that he would fix this government's past mistakes. Just yesterday he rose in this Assembly and made the same promises, and we were hopeful. Albertans were hopeful. Then we saw the seven-word sentence which is the text of Bill 1. Does the Premier actually believe that one act, that has never even been proclaimed, is the totality of what this government needs to do to fix and protect Albertans' property rights?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question. This hon. member does believe that the land assembly act is a piece of legislation that is overreaching and should be repealed. Of course, that is the effect of Bill 1.

More than that, however, Mr. Speaker, as this matter proceeds to committee, the two reports of Alberta's Property Rights Advocate from 2012 and 2013 will be referred to the committee. I would expect the committee and indeed all of the parliamentarians who are assembled here to work together to arrive at solutions that respect the process that the government has been through but also the process that the Property Rights Advocate has recommended.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the problem is that when this government thinks that your property rights might get in the way of what they want to do, they write legislation that allows the cabinet to take away your rights without due process and without full, fair, and timely compensation. They did that with the bills commonly known as Bill 50, Bill 36, Bill 24, and Bill 2, among others. Why isn't the Premier addressing the real issues now that he has the chance?

2:00

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to fair and just and timely compensation, as one who practised law in this area for over 20 years would observe, it really is the provisions of Alberta's Expropriation Act and the Surface Rights Act which require examination. This is what the Property Rights Advocate has recommended. This is certainly what I have heard over the course of the summer in this province. Those are two pieces of legislation where very specific recommendations will be before the committee relative to how to move forward. That's the essence of Bill 1, to arrive carefully, with the work of everyone in this Legislature, at how to deal with property rights in our province.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Bill 36 overrides those acts, and as a lawyer the Premier should know that.

On property rights it is clear that the Premier has overpromised and underdelivered, but it's not too late. My colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka will be introducing a private member's motion that would enshrine property rights in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms for Alberta. If it passes, a similar motion will be debated in Ottawa. If the Premier is sincere about protecting property rights in Alberta, he can declare his support

for this constitutional change right now. So how about it, Premier? Are you sincere?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is, as the hon. member has observed, my first day in this parliamentary session; however, I have been in other parliamentary sessions. I would observe that it's good practice to actually comment in this Chamber upon legislation once it's introduced, and I intend to do that once it's put forward. My record over the course of a lifetime in advocating on behalf of landowners and property rights, dealing with the legislative framework that we have in this province is very clear. That is a path that I continue to pursue and pursue as leader of this government.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader for her third and final set of main questions.

Ms Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The motion has been introduced; it's on the Order Paper today.

School Construction

Ms Smith: In his very first speech this Premier asked Albertans to judge his government on the progress it will make. To help the Premier, I will regularly ask him about his progress, so let me start with schools. So far they've built only 18 of Premier Stelmach's 22 promised schools. Only one of Premier Redford's 50 promised schools is actually under construction, and this Premier has now promised another 55 schools. Can the Premier tell us how his new management team will actually get schools built when the same managers haven't been able to get the job done?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, firstly, as the Premier of this province I have very strong views about the need to build schools and to properly educate our children and to ensure that we have classroom space. So I have spoken very definitively to this, and one need only look at the throne speech of the government to get a sense of the commitments which the government has made and intends to stand by. The ministers of my government have been instructed to proceed on that path. At this point in time across the province we are engaged in the largest construction project relative to public schools in Canadian history. It is a challenging job. We have excellent ministers, that are hands-on, that are dealing with this.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has promised to have nearly all of the new schools announced by Premiers Redford and Stelmach ready for the 2016 school year. Now, that's on top of all of the major renovations that were also promised, but this government has only succeeded in actually building 18 of those schools in the last four years. Can the Premier tell us exactly how his new management team is going to complete the remaining 49 schools in just 23 months?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the hon. member to watch and learn from the process. In the hands of very capable ministers, including the Minister of Infrastructure, the Minister of Education, and other ministers, we will be well along. There are innovations that are being made, and these schools will be constructed in the way that has been projected.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I seem to recall Premier Redford saying exactly the same thing.

If you peruse the list of promised school projects on Alberta Infrastructure's website, you'll see that most of these promised 49 schools don't specify the construction or design method. Most haven't been designed. Only a few are at the tender stage, and only one is under construction although there have been several sod turnings. Isn't the Premier afraid that when Albertans judge his progress on schools, they will find that he has overpromised and underdelivered?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I trust in the judgment of Albertans always, as I did in the recent by-elections, and the hon. member can do the same. We've struck a very specific cabinet committee that will supervise the construction of these school projects. Nothing is more important to all of us who sit in this Legislative Assembly than ensuring that we have classrooms for our children. We'll be moving ahead with the construction projects which have been put forward. I trust the ministers to execute on this; I know that they will do so effectively. Over the course of the next several years 78,000 new classroom spaces will be opened.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to be back. Congratulations and welcome to the Premier and the newly elected government members.

Government Policies

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the Premier talks a lot about ending entitlements and sweetheart contracts, restoring public trust, and making appointments based on merit, yet his very first act as Premier was to appoint his buddies as emissaries to Saskatchewan, Washington, and Hong Kong. To the Premier: given your recent record how can you expect Albertans to believe that this talk of new management is anything more than just slick Tory talk all over again?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, if I might just speak firstly of Mr. Merrifield, who is Alberta's representative in Washington, there is a critical vote taking place on the Keystone pipeline at 3:30 today, Mountain Standard Time. This is a vote which is critical to our province. It may or may not be the end of that process, but it is critical to the future of Alberta. Mr. Merrifield is infinitely capable as the most expert person in terms of these affairs in Washington. He agreed to set aside his life and serve Albertans in that position and, frankly, is doing an exceptional job.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, apparently only friends can make critical decisions.

The Premier said that his decisions would be based on sound conservative fiscal principles. When plans for a diversion canal and a dry reservoir west of Calgary were announced, the government said that it would wait for a robust economic appraisal by engineers before deciding if it would proceed, yet just three days before the by-election the Premier jumped the gun and announced that the project was a go. To the Premier: why didn't you wait until you had all the facts before you made this huge decision? Was this sound fiscal planning or just a by-election tactic?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps because of changes to our climate, perhaps climatic circumstances, the weather has changed, and we are seeing more risk of flooding in southern Alberta, particularly in spring with the thaw. What's important in the river basins which we're speaking of – the Bow basin, the

Elbow basin, and the Highwood basin – is that we undertake flood mitigation projects which are environmentally defensible, which are cost-effective, and which can be actioned quickly because on my watch as Premier I do not want to see another flood in any of the communities that were affected in 2013. That's the purpose of these projects.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, nobody in this building wants to see another flood, and we all want to make the right decision.

Recently, the Calgary board of education put out a top 10 list of their modular school projects, yet the then unelected Minister of Education used his position to announce the approval of two modular classrooms in the very riding that he was running for public office in. The folks charged with running the education system, the CBE, were not even aware of it and ranked six other projects as higher needs. To the Premier: how does this decision reflect on your promise to do things differently? Isn't this the same sort of political trickery that characterized previous PC governments?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. This government is concerned and listens to the priorities of Albertans. That is the value that drives the decisions that we make, whether it comes to building new schools, whether it comes to modular programs for our school boards, whether it comes to maintenance funding for schools that need attention. That's my priority as Minister of Education, to ensure that we're responding to the needs of parents.

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

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to join other members in offering my congratulations to the Premier on his new post.

However, I would also like to remind him that his authority today depends entirely on the election of his caucus on a very clear set of promises, not the least of which was a commitment to end child poverty, a subject which was ignored in yesterday's throne speech. This government has broken an unending list of commitments to Alberta families, and thus far it looks like the record will continue. So my question to the Premier is this. The old management broke promises, and now this management is breaking promises. How is that new management?

2:10

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I similarly welcome the hon. member to this Legislative Assembly in her current role.

Child poverty is of concern to all of us and certainly of concern to myself as Premier, and this is something that we intend to deal with. Now, this was a matter that I touched upon in terms of aboriginal issues in the throne speech. We are very concerned about the circumstances of aboriginal children, particularly in an urban context. I think the throne speech could not have been clearer about the importance of dealing with those issues, the importance of education for aboriginal children but also making sure that these issues are . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, first supplemental.

Ms Notley: The throne speech was clear on not talking about the plan to end child poverty in five years. That's what was clear.

Now, two and a half years ago Albertans voted for 50 new schools; not one has been built. They voted for more access to postsecondary education and, instead, got much less. They voted for 5,000 seniors places and will get about half of that. My question to the Premier: do you or do you not believe that you are

responsible for implementing the platform your caucus was elected on?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would say to the hon. member that the throne speech was very clear on the five priorities that this government is focused on: a focused commitment to ensuring that we have sound conservative fiscal principles, to ensuring that we restore public trust, end entitlements, to a focus on our natural resources, to a focus as well on being an environmental leader, but most importantly and significantly to a focus upon the people's priorities, and they include education, they include health care, and they include the living circumstances of people in our urban communities.

Ms Notley: So it appears to me the answer is no.

After promising not to be your father's PC Party, it looks like dad is back in charge. Albertans need to decrease their expectations. They shouldn't count on PC promises of the past, and after 43 years in government no one could ever have predicted that oil prices might fluctuate. This story is as old as the hills, almost as old as this government. Why should Albertans believe anything coming from this government when breaking promises is just business as usual?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, over the course of the past six months I have criss-crossed this province, firstly campaigning for the leadership of my party, more recently in the by-elections, which I would also refer this hon. member to. Over the course of that time the priorities of Albertans have been made very clear to me. We have been listening to Albertans. The throne speech, which we tabled yesterday, could not have been clearer that we are responding directly to the priorities of Albertans when it comes to the issues that concern them relative to their quality of life: education, health care, attending to senior citizens, and the quality of our life in urban and rural Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you. Thank you for observing the 35-second rule.

We'll now proceed to question 6. No preambles after this, please. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Hospital Occupancy Rates

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In February of 2012 the Health Quality Council released a report on emergency department overcrowding. It said clearly: reduce hospital occupancy rates to below 85 per cent, or you're putting patients at risk. Back then the government accepted this recommendation, and they pledged action, yet hospitals across this province today routinely run at 110 per cent capacity, emergency departments are jammed, and surgeries are being cancelled. To the Minister of Health: why is patient safety still at risk two and a half years after Albertans were promised action?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, recently the government of Alberta issued applications for new long-term care facilities, which allowed us to look at how we're using acute-care beds in hospitals. We're moving people from there into long-term care beds. This will allow us to open up facilities for those individuals that are dealing with the concerns of emergency facilities. Those emergency departments will then have 20 per cent set aside so that people can move into the departments in a way that they'll be properly taken care of.

Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: No, Minister.

Well, even the CEO of Alberta Health Services doubts that your plan will work. Given that the day after your announcement she said, and I'm going to quote: truly, I don't think we'll ever get to the 85 per cent occupancy rate, but if we can smooth it out where we have 98 per cent occupancy and then there's an occasional blip where we have too many patients, well, that would be better. Minister, are jammed hospitals and blips in the system really the best Albertans can hope for from an \$18 billion health care system?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that was an accurate quote of what the head of Alberta Health Services said. She has always indicated that 95 per cent would be a proper number to search for within our system.

Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'll be sure to send that quote to the minister, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the two-and-a-half-year-old Health Quality Council report spells out the solutions for you – reduce occupancy rates by accurately estimating the number of acute and long-term care beds required now and over the next decade – has this estimate been done, Minister, and will you table it so Albertans know what's happening?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we're in the process of valuating the long-term implications of the need for acute-care beds. We've recently set up a program where we've been able to move 750 people out of acute care into long-term care beds. The start of that process will continue as we move down the process in order to create more acute-care beds as a result of the development of long-term care facilities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Keystone Pipeline Project

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier on behalf of the people of Calgary-West. We know that market access is critical for this province because it's important to get our oil to customers who need it. One of those opportunities is the Keystone pipeline in the United States. What has your government done to advocate for this important project given that it faces a critical vote in the U.S. Senate today?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, our prosperity in this province depends very much upon our access to the most integrated energy marketplace in the world. And I would just say that there will be a vote today at 3:30 in the U.S. Senate on Keystone. The results are uncertain as we speak at this point in time.

We have been working together with members of the American legislative branch. Specifically, I spoke yesterday with Senator Heidi Heitkamp, who is a Democrat senator and a cosponsor of the bill, and also with Senator Hoeven, who is a cosponsor of the bill, which is in the Senate. We remain hopeful and optimistic, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. My first supplemental, Mr. Speaker, is again to the Premier. If the Keystone vote in the Senate is successful today, what are your next steps to get Alberta oil to market?

The Speaker: Mr. Premier, it's a hypothetical question, but proceed.

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, this is a project which is certainly in the interests of our province and our country. It's also a project which is in the interests, I would submit, of the United States of America since under the free trade agreement our prosperity is based upon this project and our integrated energy system.

I would also point out, Mr. Speaker, that we have other allies in the United States: Governor Christie. Of course, the governor of New Jersey will be coming to Alberta on December 4. I'll be meeting with him. We'll continue to work in a constructive way with senators, governors, and representatives in the United States.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my second supplemental is again to the Premier. If the Keystone vote is not successful in the Senate today, what are your next steps to get Alberta bitumen to U.S. refineries?

The Speaker: Again, there's some hypothesis in there, but please proceed with your answer anyway.

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, market forces have of course continued to be inexorable. Canadian oil, Alberta oil, indeed, is making its way through to the Gulf coast by rail, and this will continue to be the case. The real debate in the context of the Keystone pipeline is not whether Canadian oil will be carried by market forces to the Gulf coast but whether it will be carried in the most safe and efficient mechanism possible, which is by pipeline.

So we remain optimistic. We will see what happens in the days ahead, but we remain cautiously optimistic, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Education minister. Might I start by congratulating the minister on his election victory and welcoming him to the Chamber.

2:20

School Construction

(continued)

Mr. McAllister: Since the last election, Mr. Speaker, this government has promised to build 105 new schools in the province: 50 from the former Premier, 55 from the current Premier. I'd like to ask the Education minister: of those specific 105 schools announced since 2012, how many of them are under construction, not in the planning stage but under construction, and is that cause for concern?

Mr. Dirks: I thank the member opposite for his important question. One of the things that this government has said is a top priority is to ensure that we are responding to the growing enrolment pressures that Alberta is facing as we have 40,000 new people moving to our province every year, and that equates to 18,000 children and 25 new schools that we need every year going forward. So we have made a commitment, Mr. Speaker, to respond to the pressures that are before us, and we will continue to do that in the years ahead.

Mr. McAllister: The number is somewhere around zero, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the price of oil is now south of \$75 a barrel, a lot of people are skeptical of this government's promises. In fact, their own members are skeptical, given that when the Premier made the school announcements, the now jobs minister said, and I quote: he's acting like a candy man handing out so many promises. Will

the minister go on record today, then, and guarantee Albertans that these 105 schools will be built and open for our kids in September of 2016 as they promised?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that the parents and residents in Cochrane and in Airdrie, where we just turned sod on three new schools, believe that we are moving in the right direction, and so do the parents and the teachers and the students in the many other communities across our province that are going to be receiving new schools in the next few years. That is our commitment. We'll continue to build. We'll continue to ensure that every community that needs a school is going to get a school. That's our priority.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, the minister is doing a lot of shovelling, but I don't think it's sod that he's turning.

During the by-election campaign he approved modulars for a school in his riding even though that school was way down the list, at number 7 on the priority list for the Calgary board of education. Albertans are cynical, calling it blatant electioneering. Boards are elected to make these decisions. Does the minister recognize that this was wrong? Will he apologize for this misuse of power and assure us that he won't do this thing going forward?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, my commitment is to ensure that we are responding to the priorities of Albertans. Now, Albertans said very clearly, "We need new schools; we need new infrastructure; we need modulars for those schools that are experiencing student enrolment pressures," and as minister I am committed to ensuring that we are responding to the priorities to Albertans.

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

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to congratulate the Minister of Health on his election and appointment to cabinet.

Health Care Wait Times

Mr. Amery: Now the question. Mr. Minister, during the recent by-election campaigns in Calgary and Edmonton, health care was the number one issue on voters' minds. They told us that we do have an excellent health care system provided that they get through emergency departments. We had issues with wait times in emergency rooms when our Health budget was \$3 billion; we are still having problems with a budget of over \$18 billion. What are the minister's plans to improve the situation in our emergency rooms?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the steps we are going to take in the city of Edmonton. We've put in some transition beds, which allow ambulances to come to the facility, drop off their patients, have proper care. They'll go into transition beds so they don't have to back up the emergency departments. We're looking at contracting the delivery of transfer systems in rural areas, which allows us to have more ambulances available.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member, first supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Family care clinics were supposed to alleviate hospital emergency wait times. However, this doesn't seem to be the case. What is the minister's plan for the family care clinics?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government approved three family care clinics, and we're in the process of dealing with nine other ones. We made a decision that the professionals within the health care industry do not support family care clinics. We believe that primary care clinics are the way to go, and that's what we're going to focus on.

The Speaker: The hon. member, second supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, since many of our constituents blame the long wait times on the shortage of doctors, is the minister planning to accelerate the accreditation of foreign trained medical doctors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The College of Physicians & Surgeons is the one that accredits various physicians. We are dealing with them and trying to encourage them to bring more people in, but there is a three-month study period. It takes time, and they are the ones that approve it.

School Infrastructure Priorities

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, in the dying days of the by-election the Minister of Education circumvented the normal process of allowing school boards to set priorities for their local community and ordered two new modular classrooms to be put up at William Reid school, this despite the fact that the Calgary board of education had an extensive list of schools that needed modular classrooms ahead of William Reid, coincidentally located in Calgary-Elbow. Can the minister tell me why he made this decision that directly undercuts local autonomy of school boards?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've indicated in the House today on a couple of occasions, a great priority of ours is to respond to the needs of Albertans, to listen carefully, to hear what they have to say, and then to ensure that we're providing the school capital infrastructure that we need, whether that's new schools, modulars, or maintenance upgrades. That's my commitment as minister, to continue to do that in collaboration with school boards across the province.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I hope the minister listens to the question this time. He's seemingly having trouble hearing today. William Reid needed modulars, but you know let's delve a little deeper. There were 16 school projects that needed modulars ahead of William Reid school, again located in Calgary-Elbow. Why was the decision made, and are you going to continue . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, over the last number of weeks we as a government have responded to numerous capital needs for schools and school boards across the province. Many of those have come to me as Minister of Education. In consultation with my cabinet colleagues, we have made the decision to respond to those that are urgent, that are critical. And we'll continue to do that, whether it's modulars, as I have indicated, whether it's new schools that need to be built, whether it's upgrades, maintenance, infrastructure renewal. We'll continue to make that our priority in the days to come.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is categorically false. The only decision he has made is to provide two modular classrooms to William Reid school.

What other decisions have you made as Minister of Education besides that that directly saw those modular classrooms go to the Calgary-Elbow riding?

Mr. Dirks: Well, I thank the member opposite for his supplemental. If he had been carefully watching what had been happening, he would know that there have been a number of announcements that have been made providing infrastructure for a variety of school boards across the province, and that includes jurisdictions like Rocky View and Calgary and others that we've been working with. Wherever there are priorities when it comes to education infrastructure, this minister and this government will be listening and will be responding.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Airdrie.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I add my congratulations to the Premier and other members who have been recently elected to this Assembly.

Postsecondary Tuition Market Modification

Mr. Mason: Since the 1990s tuition in Alberta has nearly tripled while this province continues to have the lowest postsecondary participation rate in the country. Alberta's young people are being priced out of their own advanced education system. The government put a cap on tuition in 2006, but they are again leaving the door open to even more increases through so-called market modifiers. My question is to the Premier. Will you commit to enforcing a real cap on tuition by rejecting these proposed increases, or is this just another broken promise from this PC government?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And thank you for the question. Our goal in Alberta is to have an excellent post-secondary education system, and that's exactly what we're achieving. A top-quality postsecondary education system gives our graduates the skills that they need to excel in Alberta's economy. An individual learner's education is a shared investment between taxpayers and students. Market modifiers are one tool that is used to ensure that our programs remain competitive with other top-quality programs across the country. The market modifier applications are currently under review.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that non answer. The question is this. You put in place a cap on tuition. The post-secondary institutions are approaching you with so-called market modifiers that will jack up tuition for students at the U of A, in some cases by more than \$5,000 a year. Are you going to stick to the cap that you promised Albertans and keep the freeze on tuition, or are you going to allow the U of A and other institutions to jack up tuition to make education unaffordable for the kids of this province?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, our goal is to have a quality education system in Alberta. That's got to be the goal of Alberta's post-secondary education system. I spent the last few months travelling

across Alberta. I've heard that from both students and from the institutions. They want to make sure that our education system maintains its quality and excels at its educational goals. One point that I want my friend to realize is that we also have a great system of funding postsecondary students. We have a great system that lets them access the money that they need so that they can get a great education in Alberta.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, we're getting quite an education here today from this minister, I'll tell you that.

This government cancelled the remission program, so student debts are higher than ever. It's clear that many Albertans can no longer afford to attend the universities and colleges that they and their parents pay taxes for, and that's just wrong, Mr. Minister. So will you take a clear stand against further tuition increases and reject these market modifier proposals? Yes or no?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, our government invests in scholarships, bursaries, grants, and student aid to make postsecondary education accessible to those facing barriers. Once again, I'm going to repeat: we need to make sure that we have a quality education system in Alberta. That's got to be the goal. We want our students to continue to enter the workforce so that we are providing the workers that our economy needs for tomorrow, and we're going to continue that work. We have received applications for tuition modifications. Those are going to be considered carefully.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie, followed by Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Anderson: Congratulations to the Finance minister as well on his new role.

Provincial Debt

Mr. Anderson: As you know, my Wildrose colleagues and I have repeatedly, almost daily, warned your government about the budget predicament we would be in if oil fell to the \$75 range. We said that the waste and mismanagement had to stop or we would be facing tens of billions in debt. Well, that day is now here, and we are staring at structural deficits that will in just a couple of years from now result in the highest provincial debt in our history. Minister, your government is responsible for putting us in this mess. How are you going to get us out?

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you Mr. Speaker. Let me start off by saying that we will balance the budget this year. Let me say that my mandate from the Premier is to make sure that we return to fiscally prudent, conservative principles in budgeting, and we'll do that.

Mr. Anderson: Sorry, Minister, but you and your government have been giving that same platitude for five years now. We need action.

Let's start with this. I brought a bill forward last year on behalf of the Wildrose that would cap severance for all government employees, not just political staffers, at \$100,000 for less than five years of work to a maximum of \$200,000 for anything over five years. It is a simple, common-sense solution that will save Alberta millions of dollars each year. Will you agree to implement that policy?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say that right now we are in the process of looking at different efficiencies throughout

the government of Alberta, and we'll continue to work on that plan. It's a plan in progress. I would suggest that the member stay tuned for our fiscal update on November 26. We'll continue to work to make sure that we have a balanced budget moving forward and that we'll have a balanced budget for 2015 and 2016.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Anderson: Oil is at \$70 a barrel. You need \$110 oil just to not go further into debt and balance the budget. This is a simple and straightforward way to save a lot of money without affecting front-line services. Given this Premier's commitment to ending the culture of PC entitlement, will you take the first step in doing so and commit right now to ending obscene severance packages for all government employees, including senior AHS officials and other quasi-government agencies, and not just for a few dozen political staffers? Surely you know this is the right thing.

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, I can't be any more clear that we are now looking at efficiencies within government. We will have a fiscal update next week, and we'll continue to work toward balancing our budget for 2015-16.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Education System

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The relationship over the past year between teachers and their association and our Education ministry can perhaps be best described as challenging. Can the Minister of Education tell us what actions he plans to take to restore a positive and mutually beneficial relationship with teachers and their professional association?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring a bright future for all of our children. After parents teachers are, of course, the single most important contributor to student success, and I value the excellent work our teachers do each day across the thousands of classrooms in our province. Working with education stakeholders is a very significant priority for me. I've already met with a number of them in the past weeks, and I will continue to engage with our teachers and with their representative organization to ensure that we secure a positive future for all kids.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that hopes were very high for progress in meeting the needs of special-needs students after the high profile special-needs review and given that there has since been wide disappointment amongst many parents and teachers, what will the minister do to fulfill the promise of developing the full potential of students with special needs?

Mr. Dirks: I thank the member for the question, Mr. Speaker. Every student in Alberta deserves a high-quality education, and as a national leader in education funding our commitment is strong in this regard to ensure that we are providing the kind of education we need for special-needs children. Total funding this fiscal year for special needs is over \$400 million. We trust our school boards to make the very best decisions to meet the special-needs education requirements for our children, and parents who have concerns about special-needs programming are encouraged to work with their school boards to address those issues.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that the Premier and minister have made public commitments to build

substantial numbers of new schools, what steps will the minister take to ensure that school boards have the necessary financial resources to make sure that these new schools have appropriate levels of staffing?

Mr. Dirks: I thank the member for the question, Mr. Speaker. One of our government's top priorities certainly is education and preparing our kids for the future. We will continue to invest in schools and students. We have been tasked with coming up with a long-term, stable, predictable funding plan for education. We know this is the right approach. We are a national leader in education funding. Government invests nearly \$40 million every day for our students in our schools. We'll continue to ensure that all of our new schools are appropriately staffed and that every student in those schools receives the high-quality education that they deserve.

Medical Laboratory Services in Medicine Hat

Mr. Barnes: The Medicine Hat Diagnostic Laboratory has been providing high-quality local care in Medicine Hat and Brooks for decades. This government's decision to end lab testing in this centre shows that the new PC regime still supports the same failed centralized planning methods in health care. I have a petition with 11,605 signatures, which I will be tabling later, from people upset that this centre, which serves up to a thousand patients per day, will be closing. To the minister: why have you decided to ignore the needs of more than 11,000 Albertans and move diagnostic testing in Medicine Hat?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, we've invested a great deal in new facilities in the Medicine Hat hospital, and we think that that's a place where we can make sure that proper care is taken.

The Speaker: The hon. member, first supplemental.

2:40

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government incorrectly believes the decision to centralize diagnostic services in Medicine Hat may save \$5 million after start-up costs but has assigned no dollar value to these start-up costs or what could be very, very expensive re-establishing collection services throughout Forty Mile, throughout Cypress county and Medicine Hat, does the minister have a business plan to ensure his planned savings don't disappear after the costs of re-establishing collection take effect, or is he just throwing our taxpayer money away?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, the operation of the health care system is under the guise of Alberta Health Services. They are the ones that are in control of making sure that these investments are made in areas to ensure that they're done in an effective, efficient manner.

Mr. Barnes: Given that even Alberta Health Services has stated that the Medicine Hat Diagnostic Lab provided excellent, high-quality service and there doesn't seem to be a plan and given that the minister campaigned on a health care system that provided more regional control and access, will the minister really do something new, keep an election promise, and stop shutting down professional local providers in favour of more centralization?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the Premier has been quite clear in his direction to myself that we are to look at how we can decentralize the system, to be able to put more services in local areas, ensure that each community has input into the system. We will continue to do that. It's my hope that we will over the next little while begin to look at how we can work with local communities to deliver greater services so that at the end of the day they feel more comfortable and more passionate about their health care system. This government is committed to community health care support. We will continue to do that. I truly believe the answer is working with communities to solve problems.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Special-needs Assistance for Seniors

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My office has been hearing from seniors who are experiencing considerable delays under programs for lower income seniors in the province. These are the special-needs assistance program and the Alberta aids to daily living program. One senior was told that consideration of assistance to replace a hot water tank would take approximately 12 weeks, then in October he was told that the program was catching up on applications from the end of July. My first two questions are for the Minister of Seniors. Why are some seniors waiting so long for decisions on their applications for special-needs assistance?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. It's a good question, and I commend him on being such a great advocate for his constituents and for seniors across the province. The special-needs assistance is a great program. It's there to provide financial assistance to eligible low-income seniors, for assistance with purchasing things in their homes like hot water tanks or other things. I am advised that the process applications were taking a little bit longer throughout the summer. It generally takes three to four weeks. However, between July and October we've had heavier demand. Unfortunately, it has been taking 12 weeks, which is unacceptable, and we're taking steps to deal with that.

Dr. Brown: Hon. minister, what can be done to speed up the consideration of those applications and to make sure that those essential payments go out in a timely manner?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'd agree that that's very important. We've made changes to speed up the application process, which includes hiring additional staff. We also prioritize the applications so that we can get some of them through faster that are more critical, things like a roof replacement or a pending utility disconnection. Some of those things have a higher priority than other items that are in the queue. But, like I said, we've added staff, and we want to get the timeline to get these applications through down to a more manageable and reasonable time frame.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, my second supplemental is for the Minister of Health. What guidelines, Mr. Minister, exist for the timeliness of decisions to be made on the Alberta aids to daily living program and the payment from them?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, the aids to daily living program provides medical equipment to Albertans with disabilities and

chronic illnesses. The program has a variety of clients with special needs. The problem with the program is that these clients have special needs, and therefore it's difficult to quantify each individual, so we do that on an individual basis. For example, those with hearing aids could be done in one day, while other problems might take longer, so it's really a matter of the individual and how we can put the program to deal with their challenges.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we concluded all the introductions that were on my sheet at least. If there are any others, we could revert. Does anyone object to reverting to Introduction of Guests quickly?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you have an introduction?

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you some great public servants, the trustees from the Calgary board of education. With us here today I think we have Joy Bowen-Eyre, the chair of the committee. We also have Lynn Ferguson, Amber Stewart, Trina Hurdman, and Pamela King. Also with them is Judy Hehr, vice-chair. While doing that job, she also serves as my mother, and she is also a grandmother to three great boys. Please rise and accept the warm applause from this House. Thank you for standing up for public education.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? No others?

Calgary-Hawkwood, we noted that you were listed to speak and introduce some guests. For the record do you want to mention who they were? I know they've left.

Mr. Luan: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate that.

I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two hard-working and committed businessmen in Calgary's Chinatown. They both are community leaders, too. Both are well known to a number of my colleagues in this House. The first one is Mr. Peter Pat, who is the owner of the famous Peking Garden restaurant in Calgary and also the former president of the Chinese business chamber of commerce. Mr. Pat travels frequently between Shanghai and Calgary promoting business and trade between China and our province.

The second guest is Mr. Peter Lau, who is also a famous feng shui master. For those who know, that's fortune-telling. He continuously is blessing all of us in this House, working hard and making the best decisions for Alberta.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to acknowledge them. Because of a last-minute incident they couldn't make it here, but they appreciate the warm welcome from this House.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Let us proceed with Members' Statements. Calgary-Lougheed, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Addictions Awareness

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We live in a breathtakingly beautiful province blessed with incredible, invaluable opportunities, but with this come growing pains, pitfalls, and problems. As past chair of AADAC and in the portfolio of wellness I learned first-hand of the horrors of addiction. However, we also witnessed Alberta's evolving and life-saving treatment, education, and prevention programs. I rise today to mark National Addictions Awareness Week, the focus of which is youth substance abuse prevention.

Our teenage and adult years are a crucial time of growth, change, and brain development, and substance abuse during these years can result in addictions, mental health problems, and chronic disease. Despite warnings of dangers 15- to 24-year-olds report the highest past-year use of illicit substances and are five times more likely than older adults to report harm due to drug use.

Substance abuse also costs Canadians many billions of dollars in direct health care costs every year. Thankfully, Creating Connections: Alberta's Addiction and Mental Health Strategy guides the government's actions in addressing addiction and mental health issues, and our provincial wellness framework, Health for All, Wellness for Life, is also a leader in this respect. These strategies enhance the ability of the government to work closely with families, schools, and community partners towards reducing the impacts of addiction and mental illness.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to advancing care and services for addiction and mental illness needs while reducing and preventing substance abuse in the first place, and I encourage all Albertans to utilize the online resources of the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and to join in the conversation during National Addictions Awareness Week as we consider how in the past, present, and future we prevent substance abuse amongst our precious young Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Calgary-Shaw, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Official Opposition Achievements

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2012 we in the Wildrose were asked by Albertans to serve as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, and we have been diligent, focused, and principled in our service. We have done what an Official Opposition is supposed to do. We have opposed, exposed, and proposed. We have opposed on behalf of Albertans but not simply for the sake of opposing, we have exposed on behalf of Albertans what historically will be considered some of the most egregious examples of waste and mismanagement this province has ever seen, and we have proposed on behalf of Albertans, with well over 100 amendments to government legislation and through positive policies, ideas, and solutions that put Albertans first.

2:50

Recently we have seen many of our policies and good ideas put into place, implemented with great success and public appreciation. Whether it is the lunacy around the government fleet, the pettiness of the licence plate debate, or the reversal of the cold-hearted closure of the Michener Centre, it seems that this government may just be listening for the first time.

Following another Wildrose lead, we see the promise of new schools and new long-term beds. One can hope, for the betterment of all Albertans, that these are real, genuine promises that will result in real, genuine schools and real, genuine beds. These are

big commitments, and I would remind the Premier that we will continue to represent all Albertans, regardless of whom they voted for, as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, holding this government to account.

Now, it is clear that the governing party is no fan of the opposition. The Premier himself seemed to question the need for an opposition at all, calling opposition seats in this House misrepresented, a startling reminder of just how arrogant this government can be, which is odd on so many levels given the fact that without this opposition, where would the governing party be? Certainly not under new management. Albertans deserve good government, and, Mr. Premier, they also deserve good opposition. We've done our job. We're waiting to see if you can do yours.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Fort McMurray Northern Kickoff Game

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2014 Grey Cup game is just around the corner, and while some of us are taking out the old chili pots, I'm extremely pleased to introduce yet another CFL game that's quickly approaching us. On Saturday, June 13, Fort McMurray will host the 2015 northern kickoff game. As part of the grand opening of Shell place, the Edmonton Eskimos and Saskatchewan Roughriders will take to the field for a head-to-head showdown in what will prove to be an exciting rematch of this previous Sunday's western semi-final game. This preseason exhibition game will be the most northern CFL game ever played, and it's just the kickoff to a full schedule of community events over a four-day period.

This October we were delighted to see the completed installation of the field turf on the SMS equipment stadium. Once that green turf was down and the white lines were painted, you could really see what a beautiful accomplishment this will be for our city. Shell place is a forward-thinking facility designed for a growing and vibrant community. Facilities like the shared social profit space, a hub for community organizations to operate affordably, has been designed to showcase the creative and collaborative values that the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo has become known for.

The Nexen stage, partner to the SMS stadium, is characterized by a striking curved canopy structure designed to mimic the northern lights and will become the main stage for endless possibilities of sporting events, concerts, festivals, and community events.

Fort McMurray is buzzing, Mr. Speaker, and I invite all of my fellow colleagues to mark June 13 in their calendars and come up to Fort McMurray to experience this energy for themselves. We already anticipate that the northern kickoff game will be sold out, and the beautiful amenities at Shell place should not be left to the imagination. Fort McMurray is not only a great place to do business, but it's also a great place to live, raise a family, and make lasting memories. I don't mind saying it again because it's the truth: community is at the heart of Wood Buffalo.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

School Wellness Initiatives

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've long been an advocate of wellness as a fundamental plank in the delivery of our health care services. Currently more than half of adult Albertans and

nearly one-third of Canadian youth are overweight or obese. The health risks associated with obesity such as diabetes, heart attacks, cancer, and strokes cost Albertans an estimated \$1.27 billion – that's billion – a year.

Alberta's suicide rate is the second highest in Canada, suicide being the leading cause of death among males 10 to 49. I firmly believe, Mr. Speaker, that if we can instill a culture of physical, mental, and social wellness in our youth, these statistics will decrease.

I'm pleased to say that in the constituency of Leduc-Beaumont and across the province dedicated people are working towards this goal. The ministries of Health and Education are part of a joint initiative with the University of Alberta in the Alberta healthy school community wellness fund. The wellness fund enables school districts to infuse this into schools by focusing on healthy eating, active living, positive social environments, mental health, and healthy relationships. To date the wellness fund has provided support for 239 projects.

I'm very proud to say that within my constituency Black Gold regional schools has been a leader in promoting health and wellness in our youth. Starting with the healthy hearts initiative in 2004, they were recognized in 2013 with an award of distinction from the healthy school communities award program. Their Healthy Schools Committee, created in 2008, continues to instill this mantra. I'm very pleased to say, Mr. Speaker, that this culture of wellness has taken a foothold in schools in my community and many others. It is my hope that this attitude will continue to infect all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Before we continue on, I'm going to recognize quickly the Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask for unanimous consent of this Assembly that we waive rule 7(7) so we can continue with the Routine past 3 p.m.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Let us move on with the next speaker, Edmonton-Manning, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin, I would like to congratulate the Premier and my colleagues the hon. Minister of Health, the hon. Minister of Education, and the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

School Growth Pressures in Edmonton-Manning

Mr. Sandhu: I rise today to speak on the issues of education spaces in my riding of Edmonton-Manning. Last month's schools announcement did address the need for new school spaces, out of which one school, Pilot Sound, is in my riding, which is one of the fastest growing communities in our province.

We are aware of the shortages of schools within northeast Edmonton as we have a growing community. Working with school trustees and city councillors, we have spent many hours debating how to reduce enrolment pressures. As a group we know it is time for a new way of thinking. We also know we need to involve all community groups, including government, developers, leagues, parents, and residents, to encourage input on a shared-use space for everyone in the community.

The benefits of a joint-use agreement for schools between both the public and Catholic school boards must be considered. These

joint ventures would allow for the sharing of facility space, including libraries, gyms, playgrounds, transportation services, community meeting spaces, and even daycare spaces, Mr. Speaker, yet each school board could still keep their own individual learning spaces separate.

Mr. Speaker, sharing resources means savings in terms of cost and tax dollars, land, and manpower. Sharing resources builds trust, teamwork, and strong communities, which brings a new way to build the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

New Premier

Mrs. Towle: Under the old management we saw a government that was removed from everyday Albertans, often dismissing advice from opposition, front-line workers, and Albertans who did not fall in line with the PCs. It created a government that looked old and tired. The Premier talks a lot about being under new management, saying that things would be different, and we all had high hopes that it would be different, respecting elected officials and working together to move Alberta forward.

Sadly, the new management is looking a lot like the old management. This past weekend the Premier called ridings that were not Progressive Conservative misrepresented. It's the same kind of language Premier Redford used when she called ridings orphaned or when Premier Getty called the opposition un-Albertan.

Perhaps the Premier has forgotten his own time in the House of Commons, when voters elected him to misrepresent the federal riding of Calgary Centre-North as an opposition MP from 2004 to 2006. One of the things that Albertans found so off-putting about the PC government was arrogance. This Premier has chosen not to learn the lessons of the past and to attack Albertans at their core, their right to democracy.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier may want to talk to the almost 725,000 Albertans who did not vote for a PC government in the last election, the same Albertans that exercised their right to vote for change. Insulting them and democracy is not a respectful start to show the PCs are under new management.

The Wildrose believes we need a new generation of leaders that focuses on the future, doing what is right, doing what is fair, and putting Albertans first. We believe that all of our colleagues are public servants, voted to be here by Albertans from across our great province. There is so much we can do in this province by working together, by once again focusing on principled and caring government. In the days when we see people giving up their lives for the right to vote, the right to choose, and the right to democracy, no leader should question those freedoms.

3:00

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities I am pleased to table five copies of the committee's report dated November 2014 regarding the committee's review of the draft publication ban (court applications and orders) regulation. This review fulfilled requirements found in section 131.1 of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and was undertaken following a request by the Minister of Human Services.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of the committee for their contributions to the review process. I would

also like to thank the staff from Alberta Human Services who shared their expertise with the committee and the LAO staff for their support throughout the review process. Finally, I would like to thank all the stakeholders who contributed their ideas and opinions to the review.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Notices of Motions

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I had on November 12 sent you a letter notifying you that I intended to raise a point of privilege under Standing Order 15(2) at the earliest opportunity when the House reconvenes. I will give you notice now that I intend to raise that point of privilege at the appropriate time following Routine, and I will hand over to the pages the notices that can be handed out to everyone else.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 3

Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce Bill 3, the Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014.

This bill will authorize a trade union to collect, use, and disclose personal information about an individual if related to a matter under a labour relations dispute. This amendment to PIPA addresses the Supreme Court of Canada's ruling that if PIPA restricts collection for legitimate labour relations purposes, it is in breach of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I believe that with this bill this government will be protecting Albertans' personal information while balancing a trade union right of freedom of expression.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move pursuant to Standing Order 75 that Bill 3 be moved to the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 4

Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 4, the Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014.

The proposed changes will strengthen Horse Racing Alberta's governance structure. They are in line with the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. They also support the Premier's commitment to strong public agency board governance and increased accountability and transparency.

The proposed amendments will decrease the total board membership from 12 members to 11 members. This new board structure will also see an increase in public members from three to six, including the board chair. It will consist of five industry-nominated members. It is also important to note, Mr. Speaker, that all appointments to HRA's board will be based on merit and experience as promised by the hon. Premier.

Affirmatively, these modest changes to HRA's governance structure strike the right balance between public accountability and industry representation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

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

Bill 5

Securities Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 5, Securities Amendment Act, 2014.

As you know, the regular review of amendments to Alberta's Securities Act is required to keep pace with changes in technology, new products, and market innovations and to support the ongoing reform of the system. The amendments being proposed in Bill 5 will ensure the Securities Act is improved where inefficiencies or other impediments to the effective regulation of Alberta's capital markets have been identified.

The amendments are related to a variety of topics, including continued harmonization of general derivatives provisions, incorporation of representatives of registered brokers and advisers, enhanced enforcement provisions, recognition of oversight of the Canadian Public Accountability Board as an auditor oversight organization, fee study provisions, and consequential amendments to related legislation.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans want a security regulatory system that balances the need to protect investors with the need to operate our capital market efficiently to help grow our economy. They also expect provincial security commissions to work co-operatively for the good of investors across Canada. These amendments support both of these objectives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Bill 6

Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2)

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 6, Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2).

The bill brings together minor and housekeeping amendments to a number of acts under three different ministries. The amendments are intended to streamline and provide efficiency, clarity, and consistency for the individuals and businesses who are affected by the acts. The acts included are: from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs changes to the Safety Codes Act; from the Ministry of Jobs, Skills Training and Labour changes to the Workers' Compensation Act; and from my ministry, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, housekeeping amendments to combine the Farm

Implement Act with the Farm Implement Dealerships Act and repeal of the omnibus Dairy Industry Act of 2002.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Southwest, I understand you have two tablings.

Mr. Jeneroux: Yes, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I'd like to table five copies of each of the following reports. In accordance with section 19(5) of the Auditor General Act the report by the Auditor General titled Report of the Auditor General of Alberta, October 2014. Copies of this report were distributed to members previously.

In accordance with section 4(2) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act the report by the Chief Electoral Officer entitled 2013 Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer: The Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act for the 2013 Calendar Year. Copies of this report were also previously distributed to members.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you. That completes that.
Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today with the appropriate number of copies. The first is the 2015-16 modular classroom plan passed by the Calgary board of education, which clearly shows William Reid way down the list of those schools that need modulars.

I have an open letter from the by-election from the Minister of Education to parents of Elbow Park and William Reid and Earl Grey schools describing the process he went through to come to that decision.

Those are my tablings.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I have Edmonton-Centre, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today on various topics. The first is from a father who was very concerned about the treatment of his severely autistic son during repeated visits to the Stollery centre this summer. It looks like four visits in all.

The second is a letter that was forwarded to the constituency of Edmonton-Centre from the federal constituency office. Delphine Buhr would like her issue brought to attention in that the amount that is granted to diabetics for testing strips, needles, and syringes is only \$600 and it has been that for the last 10 years. She's finding that a great strain.

3:10

Finally, near and dear to my heart, this is directed towards all members of the Assembly. It's produced by the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees pay equity committee. It just talks about what we have failed to do around the issue of pay equity in this Assembly and affecting all Albertans.

Thank you very much.

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and table a follow-up to the question that I asked the Minister of

Health when I said it was clearly said about the 85 per cent versus the 95 per cent, and I'm pleased to table the comments that were made by the CEO at the time, Vickie Kaminski.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of an article that was in Calgary *Metro* entitled Promises, Promises, five things the Premier would do should he become Premier. I referenced it in the questions; probably appropriate that I table it. The one sentence that I referred to, where the then leadership candidate, now minister of jobs, wondered if it'd be possible, given the province's financial situation, to build the schools, says that the now Premier was acting like a candy man, is here in the *Metro*, and I'd like to table five copies.

The Speaker: Are there others?

If there are no others, then I'll table something as well. Hon. members, it's my pleasure to in fact table five copies of the Property Rights Advocate's annual report, which was distributed to members electronically and was also deposited with the Clerk as an intersessional tabling on June 2, 2014, all in accordance with section 5(3) of the Property Rights Advocate Act. Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Olson, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council annual report, 2013-14.

On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Klimchuk, Minister of Human Services, responses to written questions 42 and 43, asked for by Mr. Wilson on December 2, 2013. Written Question 42: "From May 1, 2009, to May 1, 2013, how many individuals were trained to complete supports intensity scaled interviews, and what specific training is required in order to qualify them to administer the interview?" Written Question 43: "From May 1, 2012, to May 1, 2013, how many clients did the persons with developmental disabilities programs serve, and how many completed the supports intensity scale interview process?"

The Speaker: Thank you.

We have no points of order, but we do have a point of privilege. Let me recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you and to speak to members of the House regarding the point of privilege that I'm raising. Specifically, in referencing the letter that I sent giving notice – I do hope that I managed to send this on to every member that was in fact part of the point of privilege; I certainly tried to do that.

Specifically, on March 11, 12, and 13 members for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, Edmonton-Rutherford, and Spruce Grove-St. Albert interfered with the ability of all members of the Assembly to fulfill their duties, specifically the Leader of the Official Opposition and the leader of the third party in that they specifically questioned on this issue. What is at question here is a trip to Grande Prairie,

Alberta, on October 25, 2012, where no government business was scheduled or took place.

Let me give a brief context, Mr. Speaker, of what happened. The Premier or other Executive Council books a plane for use by members of the government for October 25, 2012. This was a trip to Grande Prairie. There were no media events scheduled. There were no events scheduled at all except for a partisan event. The plane also carried the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, among others. I can refer to the manifest as to who was on the flights, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure you have access to this, but I'm happy to table it if you'd like. I will make sure that copies are tabled, and I will supply you with a copy of it.

Now, on March 11, 2014, on page 164 of *Alberta Hansard*, a question was asked by the Leader of the Official Opposition, and in the response the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford said, "I was one of the cabinet ministers that was present with the Premier in Grande Prairie at that time. We made an announcement, as the hon. members should know, with respect to the expansion of the Grande Prairie hospital." Later he says, "This is one example of the important government business that we do using the aircraft that are funded by the taxpayers of [Alberta]."

Mr. Speaker, on page 203, which takes place on March 12, 2014, in *Alberta Hansard*, we have the Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert saying, "As the Deputy Premier has been saying, we do separate out the party business from the government business, and this is a clear case of that, actually." He goes on to say, "The members who were on the plane going up to Grande Prairie were on government business."

I continue on, Mr. Speaker, to page 239 – oh, no, I've missed one, sorry. I know I've missed one. I did. On page 204 of *Alberta Hansard*, also spoken in the Assembly on March 12, 2014, the Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert said, "The flight in question was for members who were on government duty." Later he says – and let me quote the whole sentence here – "Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, there were a number of items that were scheduled to happen that day in Grande Prairie."

On page 239 of *Alberta Hansard*, on March 13, 2014, we have the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti making the statement that:

This gives me the opportunity to talk about all the flights I took around Alberta that week. That week I flew to Lethbridge, I flew to Medicine Hat, I flew to Edson, I flew to High Prairie to announce hospital announcements, and the fifth one in that roll of announcements happened to be in Grande Prairie.

And there is one other one that I have misplaced, and I apologize to you for that.

Those were the statements that were made in this House, I think very clearly demonstrating those members saying that they had gone to Grande Prairie on a government plane to do government business.

Now, with the benefit of the report of the Auditor General released in August 2014, the Special Duty Report on the Expenses of the Office of Premier Redford and Alberta's Air Transportation Services Program, we, in fact, do find on page 27 a very helpful chart and additional information, in which it noticed that for the event, the northern Alberta leaders' dinner, taking place on October 25, 2012, in Grande Prairie, in answering the question of whether government business was also conducted at the location, the answer is no. So the Auditor General has said: no; there was no government business conducted at this location. He does make a note that on three of the dates in the table multiple government aircraft flew to the same destination as a partisan event, and he includes that particular example. No question, there was no government business that took place, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

Now, they took this government plane to a partisan event, which was, as I said, a northern Alberta leaders' dinner, with no scheduled or actual government business taking place. The Auditor General did investigate and states that no government business took place. There was no government event. There was no media notice. There was nothing on the Premier's schedule. There was a press release that came out, but it had nothing. It had no media availability that went along with it. There was no indication that there would be someone speaking to it in person or responding, appearing in public, appearing before the media in any way, shape at all.

I will point out that there was a partisan media event that was held in the lobby of the venue in which the fundraising event was taking place. I will look for the description, but it was something along the lines of a typical media event that takes place introducing members of caucus when they are doing a fundraising event in a given location. So the only media event that happened, Mr. Speaker, was a partisan media event.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have three ministers involved at the time, some of them not, so I'm referring to everyone by their constituency name. But I will note the three departments that are involved: Executive Council, Treasury Board, and International and Intergovernmental Relations. The Auditor General on page 17 of his report notes that enforcing the policy that was brought forward in October of 2012 is the responsibility of the department of Treasury Board and Finance and that the ministries of Executive Council and IIR are responsible for approving expenses incurred by the Premier and office staff, but I'm assuming that also extends to other ministers and ministries. Then it goes through the guiding principles, and I'll give you three out the six. "Travel, meal, hospitality and other expenses must support government business objectives." Another one. "Prior approval to incur expenses is obtained where appropriate," and "claims should be able to withstand scrutiny by the auditor general of Alberta and members of the public; be properly explained and documented, reasonable and appropriate."

Those are three of the six policies that are to be followed and are overseen and okayed by the three departments that I have mentioned. So one way or another these three departments book, co-ordinate, or pay for the use of the government planes.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we go to see why this is a point of privilege in particular, I go to the *House of Commons Debates*. Points of privilege exist in this book anywhere between pages 88 and 139, but it seems to me that the two privileges that are granted to us that have been interfered with are the ability to do one's duty, which is obstruction, and also freedom of speech. In particular, I want to draw the Speaker's attention to page 98, where it talks about how important it is that members are prudent and careful with that privilege of freedom of speech and don't abuse it and about why there are long-standing practices and traditions observed in the House to counter the potential for abuse. Speaker Parent is quoted that he expects "that members would always bear in mind the possible effects of their statements and hence be prudent in their tone and choice of words."

So we have, as mentioned at other times, a test, and the test is three points. One, was there a misleading statement? Two, can it be established that the member knew that it was a misleading statement? Three, did the member intend to mislead the House? I would argue that all three of those tests have been met in this case.

Certainly, it was a misleading statement, and I've given you the statements that were actually made in the House according to *Hansard*. They are very clearly stating that the government plane

was used for government business. I've also given you the references to go and look up in the Auditor General's report in which he says: no; there wasn't. Now, I will note that the Auditor General makes a note on page 1 of his report, in which he says that he had access to schedules, reports, staff, bookings, and a number of other things, which he was able to use to ascertain that in fact there was no government business that took place there, and that does indeed appear on page 1 of his report: "interviewed employees of the Ministry of IIR," records from Treasury Board, records and meetings with staff. He names a number of other places he went to look for expertise.

As for the question of whether the members knew that this was an inaccurate statement, a misleading statement, I would argue that I don't know how they could not have known. All members in this House are busy. I've never heard an MLA say that they weren't busy. I've always heard about how busy they are. Therefore, we live by schedules, Mr. Speaker, all the time. Our schedules are done by our staff, but we know there's a schedule, and we're constantly checking it to see what we do next.

Now, in this particular case, with all of these highly scheduled people and with the backup of the Auditor General having looked at all of these records, schedules, and reports from these three, including, Mr. Speaker, on page 26, where the Auditor General makes notice that, in fact, "office staff told us that the dates for Progressive Conservative Party fundraising dinners held throughout the province are well known in advance," the members certainly knew that they had a partisan fundraising event that day. There was nothing else scheduled, so when those members made those statements in the House, they had to have known they had a partisan event scheduled and they had no other events scheduled.

What's the other reason that you — against the fact that they thought that they were going to do some media and therefore this trip was okay. Well, I know that this particular government has a platoon of aides to help them with media. I think that at one point they had more than George Bush's entire staff working for the Public Affairs Bureau. There is no lack of people to assist them with media, and in fact that is done all the time. You cannot go to a media event without there being many staff there to assist these people. In fact, no one was assigned to help anyone do media that day, so I would argue that the ministers know when they have media, and there was no in-person media availability for government that day, and they knew it. They knew that saying that they were there for government business was a misleading statement.

All right then, final question. Did they intend to mislead the House? Mr. Speaker, I think their own words give that. There are quite a few examples in *Hansard* on the dates and pages that I gave to people in which there are other examples of how to answer the questions that were asked without giving a misleading statement saying: I was on government business. I would say that the Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert was the superstar there. He can sidestep like nobody's business. You know, here's one of the answers that he gave, appearing on page 164 on March 11 of *Alberta Hansard*.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, we care a great deal about what the taxpayer is charged for travel around the province. We also care about getting to other areas of the province that cabinet ministers are expected to get to. Yes . . . cabinet ministers use our planes. That's what they're for, for us to get us around to meet with Albertans and greet Albertans.

Lots of talk. That was his answer to the question. Never once did he say: "I went to this place. I went to Grande Prairie on this date for government business." So, clearly, members are able to get around to pivot, to redirect, to misdirect the attention and the understanding of people using other ways to talk about this.

3:30

There are lots of very fine examples. This government is practised at it. If I had to give them a gold star for something, it would be for their ability not to answer questions. They are very, very practised at it. So there are examples here of where they answered the same questions even in the same sequence, Mr. Speaker, from the same people without making misleading statements. I argue to you that if they could do it without saying those statements, they knew when they made those statements that they were misleading the House because they knew there were other ways to say this.

When they said things like, "I was one of cabinet ministers that was present with the Premier in Grande Prairie at that time. We made an announcement, as the hon. member should know," — a little bit of sarcasm in there — "with respect to the expansion of the Grande Prairie hospital," well, they didn't. I believe that these members knew. For three days they answered questions in this House, and they knew that stating that there was government business that was done on October 25, 2012, was an incorrect statement.

I ask you to find that there is a *prima facie* case of privilege, specifically against the Members for Spruce Grove-St. Albert, Edmonton-Rutherford, and Grande Prairie-Wapiti, on the reasoning that they misled the House and interfered with members' ability to fulfill their duties, specifically the Leader of the Official Opposition and the leader of the third party.

Dr. Swann: Calgary-Varsity apologized.

Ms Blakeman: Calgary-Varsity apologized? Oh, yes. I know what you're saying. Yes, indeed, one of the other members that was involved with a return plane trip, also not on government business, did declare publicly that she should have done better homework as to whether it was for government purposes or not. Given that, Mpr. Speaker, I would ask you to find this case of privilege.

I would sincerely hope that the members are able to apologize to the House. I hope that can be an outcome from this, but I will wait for your decision on this issue. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on Standing Order 15. My colleague from the Liberal opposition has dealt with much of the law on this, but I do have some comments that I would like you to respectfully consider. The matter for debate today is whether or not the House was in fact misled by the members in question. The term "misled," as you know, is a prohibited term in debate, particularly in question period. It is one of the items listed in *Beauchesne's*, one of the items you can't say in normal circumstances. I do agree with the member that this is a serious matter and that this type of decorum, of course, must always be kept in this particular Chamber.

To succeed, though, on this point of order, Mr. Speaker, requires the member opposite to demonstrate indisputably not only that members misled the House but that they also intended to do so, as she has indicated, thus members in question would have had to have made statements in the House which they knew at that time — the key, again, is "at that time" — to have been incorrect.

The details surrounding the particular events in question, of course, Mr. Speaker, have been the topic of much discussion over

recent months, both within these walls and beyond, and it's important to know that over the course of the new discussion, new information has emerged. As stated in the letter to you from my colleague in the Liberal opposition, the new information that became available for the Auditor General's report was released on August 7, 2014, months after the statements in question were made. Of course, there is an active investigation under way into this matter, and I will speak no further about that for obvious reasons.

I will point out that this report, as suggested by the member herself, became available months after statements were made in the Assembly, and at no point in the Auditor General's report is there even a suggestion that any of these three members knew any different than the statements that they made in the House. It stands to reason, therefore, Mr. Speaker, that if there were discrepancies between the information presented by the members on the dates in question and the information revealed by the report, these are differences of perception, and there was not an intent to mislead the House on the dates in question.

I have done a bit of research on this, Mr. Speaker. According to *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*, third edition,

there are three elements to be established when it is alleged that a member is in contempt by reason of a statement that the member has made: the statement must, in fact, have been misleading; it must have been established that the member making the statement knew at the time the statement was made that it was incorrect; and, in making it, the member must have intended to mislead the House.

It is, therefore, this government's respectful position that these three conditions have not been met in this case and, therefore, that the alleged point of privilege should not succeed.

I would further suggest that if there is a disagreement between the members of the House, according to *Beauchesne's* 31(1), as is often stated in this Chamber, "A dispute arising between two Members, as to allegations of facts, does not fulfill the conditions of parliamentary privilege." I would also ask you to consider, Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne's* 494, which states, "It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted." Moving forward a bit, "On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident." I believe, Mr. Speaker, that what we have here would be appropriate for a point of clarification rather than a point of privilege.

Those are my submissions, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you for your time.

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, I rose on a point of privilege on March 12, 2014, where I submitted that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had misled the House, based on the circumstances that we were aware of at the time. I will not take up the time of the Assembly by returning to the facts of October 12, 2012, since they are in *Hansard* and have been well summarized by the Member for Edmonton-Centre, but I would like to offer a few points.

On March 12, 2014, Mr. Speaker, your ruling referred to two concepts, the role of the Speaker and the necessity for the House to accept two contradictory accounts. *Beauchesne*, second edition, paragraph 494 says:

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their

own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible. On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

I appreciate the Government House Leader's reference to that same statement. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the reason why he did have that in his statement – and I'm going to refer to a statement that you made in your ruling, sir – is that "as such, we must accept that the members who spoke, spoke, I hope, with honour and with their own conviction and their own belief." Now, of course, at the time you couldn't have known.

You know, the Government House Leader also suggests that there is new information that changes the facts. Well, the AG report should not be what is required for someone to understand the facts of their own life. It just shouldn't. You don't need to find a report later on. Not only that, that report, for the reasons he referenced, may not have mentioned the other members in question in this point of privilege, Mr. Speaker. That report was based on our former Premier alone, not on the other members. That was his mandate.

I will continue. The ruling you made also referenced the Speaker's role as established by *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition. "The Speaker ensures that replies adhere to the dictates of order, decorum and parliamentary language. The Speaker, however, is not responsible for the quality or content of replies to questions."

There was some discussion at the time about the use of flights by several members of the governing party. The question was: did they fly to Grande Prairie intending to conduct government business, or was the purpose of the trip solely to attend to the business of a partisan nature? For this point of privilege, when they repeatedly made statements in the House to the contrary, did the members know that the purpose of the trip was partisan, and did they purposely make statements to hide the fact?

On March 12, 2014, there were various accounts from members of this House about the nature of that trip, which made a ruling on the question impossible at the time. This is no longer the case because of the Auditor General's special report in August and the response to it. The significance is that what may have seemed to be two legitimate accounts of the same thing when this matter was last before the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, is now clearly and broadly recognized as a flight taken for partisan purposes. So whether these government flights could plausibly be thought to be for government business is no longer in question. The Auditor General issued a report that made it clear that they were not. Further, almost immediately the governing party publicly admitted that they were not and promised to repay the funds. As a result, it is clear that the statements made in this Assembly on March 11, 12, and 13 were misleading.

3:40

Now we must determine the following: did the members know that the statements they were making were misleading when they made them and in doing so intend to mislead the House? The members in question repeatedly claimed over three days that the flights were for government business. There is a very clear motive for doing so. There was a great deal of scrutiny of the government fleet at the time, and admitting misuse of the fleet would have meant significant political damage to both those involved and to their besieged party leader, who was also involved. If any of these members did know there was only party business but insisted

otherwise, the motive would obviously be to mislead the House into thinking that use of the government aircraft was justified.

When making the case for contempt the first time, as the Speaker is aware, we cited numerous facts that demonstrated the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, in particular, had been briefed on the issue and had multiple opportunities to admit his error but continued to make statements that would lead the House to believe that there was government business that day in Grande Prairie. He and the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti were also the main individuals involved with the announcement that day. If it was not clear before they got onto the plane on October 25, it should have become abundantly clear by the evening, when all they had done was a scrum outside the party fundraiser, that they conducted no government business despite taking the government plane.

Other information we provided, however, makes it pretty clear that they did know even before getting on the plane because they had no absences scheduled for question period that day. There were no media notified about a government announcement, and the closest thing to government business was a 4 p.m. press release that went out while they were in the air.

It has become increasingly clear that these two members were indeed aware of the truth and had prepared their defence, and based on paragraph 494 of *Beauchesne's*, I understand, Mr. Speaker, you had to take them at their word. When making your ruling, I would ask the Speaker to consider that this matter has not been dealt with during the original point of privilege I raised on March 12 given that the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti in his response in defence of that very point of privilege said the following, and I quote according to page 214 of *Hansard*:

Mr. Speaker, just briefly, as I don't want to drag this out. I'm not a lawyer, and I feel like I'm on trial here. You can say what you want, you can call me a liar, but I was at the news conference with a whole roomful of media people. I can probably name some, but going back two years, they may not remember. I can guarantee you there was a media announcement there that day with the Premier and with the minister, and I can stand up in here as an eyewitness and confirm that. You can call me a liar if you like. I was there.

I get no joy out of highlighting this for you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it pains me. I am fully aware of just how serious an allegation of misleading this House is, and it is due to the grave and serious nature of this allegation that I believe it must be addressed.

Given the revelations of the Auditor General report in August confirming there was no government business that day in Grande Prairie, there is only one conclusion we can reasonably draw. As a result of this, Mr. Speaker, I would support the point of privilege by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. I believe there is sufficient evidence to justify the Speaker's rule as such and to refer this matter to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The House leader for the ND, briefly, if you would, please.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I'm rising as well to support this Standing Order 15 by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. We're discussing the most serious breach of privilege that there can be, in my mind. As we know, the concept of breach of privilege is predicated on the idea that the Members of the Legislative Assembly must be free to carry out their duties and perform their functions as elected representatives. Certainly, the ministers knowingly making untrue statements in the House constitutes a grave attack on the dignity of the Assembly.

Particularly troubling in this case is that there are so many untrue statements that were made in response during Oral Question Period. Question period is one of the most fundamentally important forms of our parliamentary democracy, and it has been compromised here. Opposition members are elected in this House to hold the government to account and to represent concerns of constituents. Oral Question Period is one of the only opportunities we have, as well. If government ministers do not approach question period with the same commitment and respect, the ability of opposition members to carry out their duties is compromised.

First and foremost, the point of privilege must be brought forth at the first available opportunity. I think this was made abundantly clear by the previous opposition speakers. At the time of the independent officer's report's release the New Democrats first raised the issue that the Auditor General's findings indicated a clear case of prima facie breach of privilege based on the statements of the minister in question here, so we're glad to support and to discuss this point of privilege today, the first day back at the Legislature.

To be clear, the Speaker of this House on November 7, 2007 – and this can be found in *Hansard* on page 1860 and 1861 – confirmed the principle that a point of privilege, misleading the House, can be raised about statements made several months prior, when the misleading nature of the comments was not yet confirmed or discovered at the time that they were made. Also, I'd like to note that in a previous ruling on a point of privilege from November 7, 2007, page 1860 in *Hansard*, the Speaker also said: "These purported questions of privilege allow members to allege that someone is deliberately misleading the Assembly, which is something they could not say in the ordinary course of debate under [the] rules of debate." Mr. Speaker, the previous rulings on points of privilege related to deliberately misleading the House, for example. Again on November 7, 2007, Speakers have confirmed that there are tests that need to be met, and I think that the tests clearly have been outlined already.

The case before us has been made so straightforward by the Auditor General's findings and was so well canvassed by the members for Calgary-Shaw and Edmonton-Strathcona on March 12, 2014, that I only need to briefly repeat how the situation meets all of the elements of this test. The Auditor General himself confirmed that by claiming that these people were in Grande Prairie on October 25, 2012, for government business, the members for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, Edmonton-Rutherford, and Spruce Grove-St. Albert did in fact make untrue statements. I have to note that the Member for Calgary-Acadia on March 12 incorrectly agreed on the record that these members were being truthful when they made these statements as well. Clearly, the members knew that these were not true when they made them. The supposed government business never did transpire, nor were the members involved in such business in their time in Grande Prairie.

We now have further confirmation from the Auditor General that this supposed government business, in fact, never happened. We do know that we have a case that is not just a mere difference of opinion or a question of interpretation. The Auditor General's report constitutes a clear finding of a fact that there was no government business in Grande Prairie on October 25, 2012. There are clear statements on the record from the members in question that they were conducting government business, and there are direct quotes, in fact, that you can find in *Hansard*. It seems reasonably clear that this, in fact, was a deliberate misrepresentation of the truth.

In other words, is there sufficient grounds on the face of it to conclude that the effect of their statements was that the House was

misled and that there was a consequent impediment to the ability of opposition members to carry out their duties? If the answer is yes – in my mind, it clearly is – then the question of privilege merits further consideration by a committee of the Legislative Assembly. It is for this committee to wade through the evidence and for the Legislative Assembly itself to make a final determination.

We know that there are parallel investigations that are taking place in regard to the use of government airplanes. We know that there is an RCMP investigation in a parallel case of misuse of government airplanes. I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that this adds some import of weight to the debate and the deliberations that you must undertake today. Number two, of course, the Auditor General, an officer of the Legislature, has made clear determinations on this issue as well.

We certainly believe that there is a clear case of breach of privilege, and I welcome your deliberations here today, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

3:50

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, about 35 or 36 minutes of debate have already occurred on this particular point. However, I would extend the courtesy to any other members, particularly those who may have been named, should they wish to make a comment at this time. If they do, I would welcome that, and if not, we will move forward. Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Mr. Horner: Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very, very briefly because, yes, I had been named in this point of privilege. I take the accusations very, very seriously. It is a very significant event to be accused of such things in this House. In the 14 years that I've been privileged to spend in this Assembly, I have never, nor do I know of any of my colleagues who have, ever intentionally misled this Assembly and did not do so in 2012-2013 or even up till today. This is something that our honour and integrity are based upon, and I would not and I know that my colleagues would not intentionally mislead this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, and we'll let the record show Spruce Grove-St. Albert. Thank you for correcting that.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity, and I will be brief as well. Like my colleague from Spruce Grove-St. Albert, I would want to take the opportunity once again, as I did when the earlier point of privilege was raised, to confirm for this House and for all of my colleagues that I certainly did not mislead nor did I intend to mislead this House in response to any of the questions that were asked of me with respect to this particular matter.

I think that in the previous point of privilege you graciously allowed the opportunity to explain a number of the circumstances surrounding that trip that were particularly poignant to the question of whether or not the House was misled or there was an intent to mislead the House specifically on my behalf. I have and I will continue to conduct myself with the utmost integrity and respect for the House, Mr. Speaker, and that includes, first and foremost, the commitment to be truthful and forthright in answering questions that are put to me.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I stated last time, I'm not going to go into a lot of detail here. I guess my integrity is called into question. The guys have accused me of lying in the House. I do have a newspaper article I'd like to table that was actually written just on August 14 of this year, 2014. It's from the editor of the *Grande Prairie Herald-Tribune*, the newspaper that was there. She states that they were at the press conference that we did and that we did make announcements, and she totally says in this article that Drysdale was telling the truth. I was there; this editor was there. None of those people were there. So I guess: who do you believe? I'll table this.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. A lot of points have been raised here, and I do recall having heard a similar point of order or point of privilege – I can't recall; I think it was a point of privilege – which Calgary-Shaw correctly identified as having occurred back in the spring. So I'm going to review that. I'm also going to review the tabling which the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre provided to all of us – and I just received my copy of that – regarding some flight manifests. I want to go through that as well. Similarly, I'm going to go through all of the references that were just put on the record with respect to issues that the Auditor General raised in his report, and I want to review the context within which they were used to argue today's points. I will also review other documents that were referenced by other speakers, and I'm going to carefully review every word that was put down today into *Hansard*.

That being said, with more than 35, 40 minutes of time on this, there's a lot to still consider. I want to be very diligent because as all of you know, a point of privilege is the most serious charge that one member can make against another here. As such, I will take one day or more to deliberate, consider, and then write the appropriate ruling. So that ends the discussion on that matter for today.

Mr. Clerk, you can proceed to Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If it pleases this Chamber, I'd be pleased to go through all of the motions at once. Would that be acceptable, Mr. Speaker? Thank you.

2. Mr. Denis moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve into Committee of the Whole, when called, to consider certain bills on the Order Paper.
3. Mr. Denis moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve itself into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

Evening Sitings

4. Mr. Denis moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) commencing the week of November 24, 2014, the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings

for consideration of government business for the duration of the 2014 fall sitting unless on motion by the Government House Leader made before 6 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the following sitting day.

Adjournment of Fall Session

5. Mr. Denis moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the 2014 fall sitting of the Assembly shall be extended
- (a) up to and including December 18, 2014, or
 - (b) until the Government House Leader advises the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded, whichever occurs earlier, at which time the Assembly stands adjourned.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. All of those motions are not debatable, and we'll have to vote them one at a time.

So I'm going to call the question on Motion 2 first.

[Government Motion 2 carried]

The Clerk: Government Motion 3.

[Government Motion 3 carried]

The Clerk: Government Motion 4.

[Government Motion 4 carried]

The Clerk: Government Motion 5.

[Government Motion 5 carried]

The Speaker: While I have the floor, let me just make the notation here that normally these should be presented one at a time. However, I did acknowledge the Government House Leader because they were all nondebatable, so we proceeded on that basis. Nonetheless, they will be recorded as having been voted individually.

So let us proceed.

Amendments to Standing Orders

6. Mr. Denis moved:
- A. Be it resolved that the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta effective March 4, 2014, be amended as follows:
 1. Standing Order 52.01(1) is amended
 - (a) in clause (a)
 - (i) by striking out "Culture" and substituting "Culture and Tourism";
 - (ii) by adding "Seniors," after "Education,";
 - (b) in clause (b) by striking out "Tourism, Parks and Recreation,".
 - B. And be it further resolved that this motion takes effect upon passage.

[Government Motion 6 carried]

The Speaker: I should have mentioned that this is a debatable motion, but I didn't sense anyone rushing to speak. Thank you.

Government Motion 7, please.

Committee Membership Changes

7. Mr. Denis moved:
Be it resolved that the membership of the Assembly's committees be replaced as follows:
- (1) Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund: Mr. Casey, chair; Mrs. Jablonski, deputy chair; Mr. Amery; Mr. Barnes; Mr. Ellis; Mr. Horner; Mr. Lukaszuk; Mr. Mason; and Dr. Sherman.
 - (2) Standing Committee on Legislative Offices: Mr. Jeneroux, chair; Dr. Starke, deputy chair; Mr. Bikman; Ms. Blakeman; Dr. Brown; Ms. DeLong; Mr. Eggen; Mrs. Leskiw; Mr. Quadri; Mr. Wilson; and Mr. Young.
 - (3) Standing Committee on Private Bills: Mrs. Leskiw, chair; Ms. Cusanelli, deputy chair; Mr. Allen; Mr. Bilous; Dr. Brown; Ms. DeLong; Ms. Fenske; Mrs. Fritz; Mrs. Jablonski; Ms. Olesen; Mr. Rowe; Mr. Stier; Mr. Strankman; Dr. Swann; and Mr. Xiao.
 - (4) Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing: Mr. Luan, chair; Mr. Rogers, deputy chair; Mr. Bilous; Ms. Calahasen; Mr. Cao; Mr. Casey; Mr. Ellis; Mr. Kang; Ms. Olesen; Ms. Pastoor; Mr. Pedersen; Mr. Rodney; Mr. Saskiw; Dr. Starke; and Mr. Wilson.
 - (5) Standing Committee on Public Accounts: Mr. Anderson, chair; Mr. Young, deputy chair; Mr. Allen; Mr. Amery; Mr. Barnes; Mr. Bilous; Mr. Donovan; Mr. Hehr; Mr. Horne; Ms. Jansen; Mr. Jeneroux; Mr. Luan; Ms. Pastoor; Mr. Sandhu; and Mrs. Sarich.
 - (6) Special Standing Committee on Members' Services: Mr. Zwozdesky, chair; Mr. VanderBurg, deputy chair; Mrs. Forsyth; Mrs. Fritz; Mr. Griffiths; Ms. L. Johnson; Mr. Lukaszuk; Mr. Mason; Mr. McDonald; Dr. Sherman; and Mrs. Towle.
 - (7) Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future: Mr. Amery, chair; Mr. Fox, deputy chair; Mr. Dallas; Mr. Eggen; Mr. Hehr; Mr. Horne; Ms. Kennedy-Glans; Mr. Lemke; Mr. Luan; Mr. McDonald; Mr. Quadri; Mr. Rogers; Mr. Rowe; Mrs. Sarich; and Mr. Stier.
 - (8) Standing Committee on Families and Communities: Ms. Olesen, chair; Mr. Pedersen, deputy chair; Ms. Cusanelli; Mr. Eggen; Ms. Fenske; Mr. Fox; Mrs. Fritz; Mrs. Jablonski; Mrs. Leskiw; Mr. McAllister; Mr. Quest; Mr. Rodney; Mr. Sandhu; Dr. Swann; and Mr. Weadick.
 - (9) Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship: Mr. Goudreau, chair; Mr. Hale, deputy chair; Mr. Allen; Mr. Anglin; Mr. Bikman; Ms. Blakeman; Dr. Brown; Ms. Calahasen; Mr. Cao; Mr. Casey; Mr. Fraser; Ms. L. Johnson; Mr. Mason; Mr. Xiao; and Mr. Young.

4:00

The Speaker: Thank you. This motion is debatable.

Seeing no speakers, let us move on then. Hon. Government House Leader, you have the opportunity to close debate.

Mr. Denis: I would ask to close debate.

[Government Motion 7 carried]

Constituency Week

8. Mr. Denis moved:
Be it resolved that Standing Order 3(6), which provides for one constituency week for every three sitting weeks, not apply to the 2014 fall sitting.

The Speaker: Thank you.

This motion is also debatable. Are there any speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this motion, which I disagree with. I do not think that we should be carrying on to the point of exhaustion making important laws for the public. I think that we should retain the standing orders. It was something that was passed with great wisdom by this House and I think something that should be retained with respect to the physical and mental health of members and also the staff that have to be here as well.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

If not, the hon. Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Denis: Close debate, Mr. Speaker. We're following a commitment here that was made to allow the Assembly to meet for the same number of days as originally scheduled for the 2014 fall sitting. I would respectfully remind this House that this change is specifically only for the 2014 fall sitting, owing to the unique circumstances of having to delay the start to accommodate for four by-elections. We're committed to having constituency weeks in the spring.

Government members are also impacted by this motion as they also appreciate the ability to meet with constituents. However, we all have to make some sacrifices to ensure the Assembly has the max amount of time available to conduct its business. One final point to consider is that between October 27, the day we originally scheduled to come here, and December 18, MLAs will have the same total weeks in and out of the Assembly as outlined in the sessional calendar that was published on January 15: three weeks in their constituencies, five weeks in the Assembly.

The Speaker: That closes debate.

[Government Motion 8 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1 Respecting Property Rights Act

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in second reading on Bill 1, the Respecting Property Rights Act, on behalf of the Premier.

As the Premier has often stated, Alberta is under new management. Our government is focused on the priorities of Albertans, and we're working hard to reflect Alberta values in the direction that we have set and in the bills that we will pass in this House. In keeping with this, Mr. Speaker, our Premier has given a clear direction on providing Albertans with a government based on respect, accountability, and a common-sense, conservative perspective.

Mr. Speaker, I respectfully cannot think of anything that is more common sense than respecting Albertans' property rights, and that

is what Bill 1 achieves. Bill 1 marks the beginning of a new relationship between this government and Alberta's farmers, ranchers, acreage owners, and others who play a fundamental role in the economic future of this province.

Bill 1 includes a preamble to establish the importance of property rights to this government and the repeal of the Land Assembly Project Area Act. In the review of the existing legislation and listening to the concerns of Albertans, it had become clear that this act, otherwise known as Bill 19, does not meet the expectations of Albertans and their individual property rights. By repealing this act, we are responding to Albertans' concerns.

This was an act that was not proclaimed and not ever used but continued to be a cause of concern to those who had a vested interest in property, which, Mr. Speaker, is many people. By immediately repealing this bill, we have demonstrated that we have listened to Albertans and have acted out on our first available opportunity.

More importantly, Mr. Speaker, this bill has a preamble which demonstrates this government's philosophy and commitment to property rights. It affirms that private ownership of land is a fundamental element of a parliamentary democracy in Alberta. It looks to the Alberta Bill of Rights, which recognizes and declares the rights of the individual to the enjoyment of their property and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law.

Further, Mr. Speaker, it also commits our government to consulting with Albertans on legislation that impacts private property ownership. This preamble sets out the parameters of how this government will treat property owners and what they can expect with our government going forward. Expectations play a significant role for private investors in making investments into land and businesses. My message to the investors and all Albertans is that their property rights are and always will be protected in Alberta under the leadership of this Premier and this government.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to comment on the Progressive Conservative record on property rights dating back to the days of Peter Lougheed. Peter Lougheed knew that property rights are the bedrock of this province, so much that the protections of property rights were incorporated into the Alberta Bill of Rights. Peter Lougheed also stood up against the Trudeau government, who tried to take property rights out of provincial jurisdiction and centralize them in the hands of federal judges and the federal government in eastern Canada. It is through Lougheed's example and actions that we are here today, renewing our commitment to protecting and standing up for Albertans' interests, and that includes the interests in their own private property.

Our Premier's commitment to private property rights has been a matter of public record for decades. He has made it clear that he intends to apply the same kind of common-sense, conservative approach and responsibility and balance to this issue that he has already demonstrated on many key files.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 is a clear statement in support of property rights. It begins to address landowners' concerns, and it upholds their rights, but we won't be stopping there. Pursuant to the Property Rights Advocate Act and the 2012 and 2013 Property Rights Advocate reports these will be referred to a committee for review during the fall session. We will also look forward to hearing from the committee, following their review, to see if there are ways that we can further protect Albertans' property rights. It is our commitment to a clear and fair process that respects the Legislative Assembly and respects the input of members of this Assembly in that process.

Mr. Speaker, today I'm pleased to stand in support of Bill 1 and to stand in support of property rights. I also would ask all hon. members to stand in support of this bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I now move to adjourn debate on Bill 1.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to open the debate in consideration of the Speech from the Throne. I wish to begin by thanking His Honour the Honourable Colonel (Retired) Donald S. Ethell, Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta, for his speech. It is my privilege to stand in these historic Chambers and not only honour the traditions of the past but look forward to the remarkable opportunities that are ours because we are Albertans.

I want to thank the Premier for honouring me and the constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville in asking us to open debate on this very important speech, that ushers in the dawning of a new era and positions Alberta for future economic prosperity. The fact that Alberta is a key player in the global economy is evident in the constituency I serve. World-scale industrial sites, immensely productive agriculture and ag-related operations, innovative research, and our greatest asset, people, proudly choose to call the counties, the hamlets, villages, towns, or the city that is located in the constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville their home. We are doing our part in this constituency to propel Alberta along its path to a vibrant future.

Alberta's Industrial Heartland is a partnership of five municipalities that is attracting international initiatives that add value to our energy resources. This is the largest petrochemical production region in all of Canada, and it is a major driver of Alberta's economic viability: 582 square miles, investment that exceeds \$20 billion, with the potential for far more. We can turn natural gas into plastics and textile, and we can turn bitumen into diesel. We employ people, thousands of people. We care about their health, and we care about the health of the environment.

4:10

We take a regional approach to managing our environmental impacts because we know that to be competitive on a world scale, our environmental record must be second to none. Fort Air Partnership, one of our partners, is responsible for monitoring an area 4,500 square kilometres in size, and their work is very well respected by local residents. The Northeast Capital Industrial Association has designed and is piloting a regional approach to managing industrial noise.

We are on the move in this constituency, and we require the economic infrastructure that will get our people safely to and from

their work sites and get our goods to market. Better roads, improved rail crossings, additional pipeline capacity, and another bridge across the North Saskatchewan River are desperately needed in this, Alberta's second largest and growing economic region.

Expanding value-added here would quickly create an additional \$650 million per year in provincial corporate income taxes. However, the window for global investment for new petrochemical and hydrocarbon processing is limited. A natural gas strategy is needed now to maximize and support innovation in the development of new products and opportunities in this sector. So, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that our government has made maximizing the value of our natural resources a priority and realizes that a robust transportation plan is essential.

Adding value to our products and getting them to market is just as important to our agricultural community as it is to our petrochemical industries. As we enter a future where within 15 years we will be one of six countries in the entire world that will produce more food than our citizens consume, we know that environmental protection, efficient uses of our resources of land and water, food processing, and transportation networks will ensure that in Alberta agriculture remains the bedrock of our society. It will be here long after other industries are gone, and the Speech from the Throne clearly recognizes this. Our ag producers are resourceful. They seize economic opportunities. They are innovative and bold in their decisions. They have to be to meet the challenge of feeding the world.

Now, you'd expect to find beef, fruits, vegetables, bison, and grain grown in Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, and you would, but did you know that research at Alberta Innovates: Technology Futures in Vegreville has resulted in diversification of crops such as flax and hemp to meet the demands of the construction industry? The biochar project at AITF will unleash value in agriculture and forest residues which were once considered waste but will now contribute toward a strong bioeconomy that produces carbon-rich soil. Our government recognizes the significant value of a research-based economy and is expanding our agricultural research capacity.

Yes, in big blue sky Alberta anything is possible, but there are and will be and will continue to be challenges ahead. Over 4.1 million people call Alberta home today, and that number is expected to rise to 5 million by 2025. Now, I've heard from thousands of Albertans, some who have chosen Alberta as their home and others like me, who were born here, that there is no better province to live in, there is no better province to do business in or to raise a family. We found a place to call home that is the envy of the world. We are blessed by boundless opportunities to grow, succeed, and thrive, but we can always do better. Listening to the people of Alberta, this government, led by this Premier, has heard that we must do better when it comes to ensuring that Albertans have a health care system that addresses the challenges such as patient access, wait times, rural health care issues, and the availability of mental health supports for children, and we want our local health care providers to have input in health care decision-making. The Speech from the Throne clearly outlines that we will be moving in this direction, the direction that Albertans asked us to move in.

As a former teacher I know first-hand how the pressures of growth and an ever-changing world affect our educational system. Working with education partners, we can deliver innovative learning opportunities which will allow high school students to develop high-demand skills and 21st-century competencies to succeed, and we can do this in classrooms instead of hallways because this government is building schools for our children.

Oh, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you personally how thrilled I am that our government will be developing a long-term strategy to develop growth in Alberta's arts and culture because I believe a province that boasts a dynamic arts community will ensure that it flourishes on the world stage.

Albertans are expecting to be listened to, to be engaged, and to be respected. This government has listened and will begin its work by focusing on five priorities: one, sound conservative fiscal principles; two, ending entitlement and restoring public trust; three, maximizing value of our natural resources and respecting property rights; four, establishing our province as an environmental leader; and fifth and probably most importantly, in my opinion, increasing Albertans' quality of life by becoming leaders in health care, education, and skills training. This Premier has committed this government to action.

Now I leave you with these thoughts, Mr. Speaker. Hard work, foresight, and good fortune created this province we are so proud of. Ingenuity, determination, and good government will ensure that our great grandchildren will be equally proud to call her home. There is an optimistic spirit in Alberta that is unparalleled anywhere else in North America. That optimism abounds in the hearts of the constituents I am honoured to serve.

On behalf of the constituents of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville it is my honour and privilege to move that a humble address be presented to His Honour thanking him for his most gracious speech. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour, with great humility, that I be given the opportunity to second the motion moved by my hon. colleague the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. I want to thank the Premier for the opportunity of seconding this motion and for allowing me the chance to address this House for the first time as the representative and servant of the constituency of Calgary West. [some applause] Thank you.

As I stand before you today, it is important that I acknowledge that democracy is the cornerstone of our society and its values, and it is through our democratic tradition that I have the privilege of being here with you all now. I am lifted up and borne aloft on the shoulders of those that came before me from Calgary-West: Elaine McCoy, Karen Kryczka, Ron Leipert, Ken Hughes, and, of course, Peter Lougheed. I can see a distant shore, a shore that is the future of the great province, Mr. Speaker, and it is because of the foundation that was laid for me by generations past, a foundation laid by the determined effort and perseverance of people both in the past and present. And it is to these people that I express today my gratitude and thanks. It is the people of Calgary-West to whom I owe this truly great honour, and I see it as my humble duty to fulfill this mandate to the best of my ability.

The past influences the future, but the future is yet to be, and unlike the past the future can be changed by what we think and do in this moment in this session of the Legislature. There is a golden thread in our past, and that thread runs through each of us, yet while each thread is as individual and as unique as each person assembled here today, Mr. Speaker, these threads, while independent, are woven into the fabric we call community. Our individual threads working together make up a tapestry that we today call Alberta. These individual threads that started our provincial tapestry came from mavericks, men and women who were adventurous, hard working, and spirited. These men and

women are the past generations that broke the soil and tamed this land.

Our ancestors toiled, and they worked this land, creating farms and ranches, building communities. And when they were defeated and broken, they got up, they dusted themselves off, and they started over. This Albertan trait was never more evidently displayed than in the recent floods that affected a great portion of our province, including the community of Calgary-West. That is the Alberta spirit: a pride in our past, our strengths, and our cultural diversity. When times are tough, Albertans roll up their sleeves, and they get to work. We have the strength to view the future not as a problem but as a joyous task, a labour to embrace. It is the same independent, free spirit that shaped our past which will guide our province towards the future and the change that the future brings.

4:20

It is said that Alberta was built by mavericks. These mavericks were unique characters. They were inspired and determined risk takers, forward-looking individuals, creative and eager for change. Their collected efforts propelled Alberta in a new direction. They changed the landscape of what was into what is. Were these mavericks great men and women? Some of them, yes. Most of them, nay, the majority of them were regular people. They were and are people of our communities, our neighbours, and our constituents. Alberta was built by these hard-working people.

I often wondered what brought these people to Alberta. I think that it was not only the Canadian government's program to settle the west, but it was the unique and diverse land itself: the boreal forests to the north; the Rockies, that framed the west lands; the aspen forests and farmlands of central Alberta; and the grass rangelands of the south. Whatever the reasons, they came and then made Alberta home, and they set down roots and families. Mr. Speaker, they were our founding families. They make up the colourful portrait that is our past. They are the foundations of Alberta heritage.

I say "foundation" because today's Albertans continue to build the history of this great province. Alberta is very much a work-in-progress. Alberta started a new chapter, one that is fundamentally built on solid principles of integrity, responsibility, and accountability. Although these values were borne in the past by our forefathers and in strengthening government by Calgary-West past representative the hon. Premier Peter Lougheed, I believe this new era will be one that will allow our province to be blessed with continued growth and prosperity.

Our early tapestry was one of cultural diversity. Our present is made up of the same wonderfully diverse thoughts and ideals, races, and creeds. I'm here to represent every Albertan, not just those who voted for and supported me. I will to the best of my ability ensure that all of your voices are heard. To those that did not vote for me, please allow me the chance to earn your trust. Once again I must stress that Albertans have entrusted all members of this House with a tremendous amount of responsibility, which we should hold in the highest esteem. The government of Alberta, your government, will be ushering in a confident and constructive era that will focus on supporting and strengthening communities and families. I am sure that this sentiment is shared by all hon. members of this House.

I was once asked what a true Albertan was, and that was something that made me think: was I one? I live in Alberta. I was born and raised in Alberta. I married, and my wife and I are raising our children in Alberta. I make my living in Alberta, and I reside in Alberta. But does all of this make me an Albertan? I believe it does. But I also know that I came from stock that

immigrated to Alberta, like the majority of Albertans, some time in the past. It is that cultural diversity that makes Alberta strong. It is that very cultural diversity that makes up Calgary-West.

Our duty as elected officials is not to be taken lightly. We are all here to serve all the people of Alberta. This is the duty that is particularly near and dear to my heart. My history as a police officer serving in the Calgary Police Service allowed me to serve Albertans and support the community. I see this role no differently. In both positions I have been chosen to serve Albertans and have their best interests at heart. I would like to thank and recognize all my brothers and sisters in law enforcement throughout Alberta as they put their lives on the line every day they put on their uniforms.

I come from a long history of dedicated public servants on my father's side, with over four generations dedicated to service in the military and law enforcement. It began when my great-grandfather Corporal Albert Ellis fought in World War I and survived the slaughter of Vimy Ridge 100 years ago. The Canadian victory at Vimy Ridge is considered by many as a defining moment for Canada. This was the moment in time Canada became a nation. It continued with my grandfather Corporal Frank Ellis, who was a World War II veteran, and through to my father, George Ellis, who was a police officer and a major in the Canadian military. The Ellis family has given to this community, this province, and this country for four generations, and we will continue to give.

My mother Doreen Chobzay's side has deep roots in the coal mining communities of Canmore and East Coulee, Alberta. [some applause] Thank you. My great-grandfather Michael Chobzay was a hard-working coal miner, and my great-grandmother Mary Chobzay along with her two daughters, Doreen and my grandmother Jean, spent their time feeding the miners. What exemplified my coal mining family the most and exemplified the rooted values of truly being an Albertan was during World War II, when my great-grandmother not only fed the miners but also fed the young boys heading off to war. My family was not rich, but what little extra they had they gave to those less fortunate.

These young Alberta boys who were going off to war, Mr. Speaker, were impoverished, never knowing when or where their next meal would come. They did not resort to crime but instead embraced the values of being an Albertan. When the country of Canada called upon them to serve, these Alberta boys without hesitation were the first to sign up and defend our freedom and our right to sit in this very Assembly today. Although we may never know their names, we must remember them for what they did for each and every one of us.

I can safely say that I am rooted here. I can safely answer that previous question: I am an Albertan. My family has proudly served and taken part in working hard to build this province. My family was among the mavericks, and they worked hard to create Alberta as we know it today. I will work hard for every Albertan to ensure that Alberta remains the resilient home that we know it to be. As a Calgarian and, most importantly, as a devoted Albertan I have taken a vested interest in serving my community by doing what is right. I believe that is truly what being an Albertan is, and I know that I am not the only one who shares this view. An appreciation for family, community, a consideration for generations to come make a person appreciate the duty, the bound necessity of making one's home and community better for future generations.

This realization played a crucial role in my choice to pursue a career with the Calgary Police Service. The value system within the Calgary Police Service very much resonates with me. I have dedicated my life to serving others. I feel that this is extremely important, and I have tremendous respect for public servants.

While in the police service I became a victims' advocate. I believe in protecting victims and their rights by ensuring that there's accountability while considering the overall situation and the individual's rights.

I was the only law enforcement officer who was ever a part of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness. Sadly, today homelessness is not just reserved for individuals; it now represents families, and we still have work to do, Mr. Speaker. When you push people to the edge of society by not allowing them a place within it, you marginalize them. They are put into a powerless position just outside society. Is this the choice that Albertans are comfortable with?

My choices speak for themselves. I am a working man. I always have been, and I always will be. I am here to serve my community in whatever way I am able. Under the leadership of our Premier I feel that I am able to continue to serve others under his plan for Alberta.

The constituency of Calgary-West is rich with history, and I recognize this and honour those that have come before me. The electoral riding of Calgary-West is one of the two original Calgary ridings of the seven that have survived from the 1959 redistribution of the Calgary ridings. The other riding is Calgary-Glenmore. Calgary-West's population increased by 151.3 per cent between 1994 and 2012 compared to a 44.3 per cent increase for Alberta. The riding is made up of 14 communities, which hold 32,198 homes and a population of at least 80,870 people, and it is still growing. This tremendous growth, Mr. Speaker, has brought infrastructure issues to light. A prime concern of the riding's constituents is ready access to schools and health care and the development of the Calgary ring road.

I look forward to continue serving this community, that has had a remarkable impact on me. Community is the cornerstone in both my life and my value system, and I am happy to have my family be a part of the community of Calgary-West. I thank my beautiful wife, Hollie, and my three children – Simone, aged 10; Keaton, aged six; and Mason, aged two – for reminding me every day how important it is to work for Albertans to ensure that they are protected and are able to grow and build an even more resilient Alberta. Family and a sense of community values teach you the importance of building a better future in a way that nothing else really can, yet building for the future does not come without hard work and determination. My family's military and coal mining roots have made this very clear to me.

They have also made clear to me that in a province like Alberta anyone with determination can make a brighter future for himself and those around him. It is important that every Albertan deserves an equal opportunity to pursue the best possible future for oneself. At the end of the day is that not why we are all here today, to ensure that Albertans are given an opportunity and the best possible environment to succeed? Is this not what the past generations have committed to providing us? We have all made an important commitment to our constituents. Our communities, our friends, and our neighbours have passed us a torch, a torch of hope and a torch of trust. This torch represents their dreams and their tomorrows. We have collectively as an Assembly been entrusted with a sacred commitment to building a brighter future, not just for a select few but for all Albertans.

4:30

I promise to bring ethics, honesty, integrity, accountability, and respect to everything I do in my capacity as a servant not only for my constituents' interests but for all Albertans' and colleagues'. These values are integral to who I am and what I stand for in all aspects of my life, and in my view they are values shared by all

Albertans as well. It is with these values in mind that I decided to take my part in the province's moment of renewal under the new management of our new Premier. The Premier has laid out a sensible plan that has resonated with me and has clearly resonated with Albertans: a focused commitment to conservative fiscal principles, an end to entitlements and a restoration of public trust, maximizing the value of our resources while respecting property rights, establishing Alberta as a leader in environmental practices, and, of course, continuing the effort to establish ourselves as a leader in education, health, and skills training.

The new – and I repeat: new – management team of this province, with their reasonable, common-sense approach to decision-making, is well poised to chart a course into the future by continuing to serve Albertans and strengthen communities across this province. Mr. Speaker, it is time for our golden threads to be added to the tapestry that is Alberta.

Thank you, sir, and God bless.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, just before I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition, I would like to bring to your attention that we have seven new pages joining us today. Raise your hand, new pages, those of you who are new. Some are in, and some are out, but there they are. Please thank them.

Number two, I'm going to recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition in a moment, and pursuant to Standing Order 29(1)(a)(ii) she will have up to 90 minutes to speak. Following her speech there will be a five-minute question-and-comment period offered under 29(2)(a), and since no lists have been given to me yet about who wishes to speak thereafter, I would encourage you to send me that list so that we can then proceed in the alternating fashion. However, it is common tradition to recognize one speaker from the Liberal Party first and then one speaker from the NDs and then to do the alternating. If you want to get onto the list after those next three speakers, please send me a note, and we'll develop it accordingly.

Let me recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak in response to the Speech from the Throne. I should put everyone at ease because I did hear a few groans when you reminded people I have 90 minutes. I will not use the full 90 minutes. [some applause] Yes, I figured I'd get at least some consensus and a round of applause on that.

It is always a pleasure for me to hear His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor deliver the Speech from the Throne. It always is so hopeful, and it should be no surprise that in the throne speech we, and I in particular, once again found many things to support and be hopeful for.

One of the things I liked in particular was the recognition that we need to build better relations with our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. I was very, very pleased to see in multiple levels throughout the entire throne speech that that's going to be a priority for this government. As you know, Mr. Speaker, these issues, that are near and dear to my heart, are the reason why I am the Aboriginal Relations critic for my party. I believe it's foundational for our province to make sure that as we go forward, we go forward in partnership with our friends in our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities to make sure that they are able to share in the incredible prosperity that we know this province has and will continue to enjoy. So to see that we are going to see partnerships in social areas, education, labour force, environment, energy as well as in health care I think is vitally important for us.

I have in the past asked for some accountability around the number of dollars that flow through to us from our federal government for urban aboriginal housing as well as urban aboriginal health initiatives, and I've been unsuccessful in being able to get answers to those questions. With the renewed focus in this throne speech on making sure that we do everything that we can to ensure the integration of urban aboriginals, I'm hopeful that I'll have a better answer to that question when I ask it again in the future.

The other area that, again, it's hard to find fault with, because it sounds very similar to my own leadership campaign bid back five and a half years ago, when I was running for leader of the Wildrose Party, is to see the five core principles that have been identified as areas that this government intends to work on. Of course, listed on page 2 of the throne speech: a focused commitment to sound, conservative fiscal principles. Who can disagree with that? Ending entitlements and restoring the public trust: again, who could possibly disagree? Maximizing the value of our natural resources and respecting property rights: protecting private property rights is one of the reasons why I decided to run for provincial public office. Establishing our province as an environmental leader and increasing Albertans' quality of life by being a leader in the areas of health, education, seniors' care, and skills training: in all of that my colleagues in their critic roles, I think, have distinguished themselves in advocating for some changes in that regard. Also, accountability and transparency, one of the core principles that I think every one of the opposition parties has been asking for over the last number of years that I've been in the Legislature.

Other things that I was pleased to see and that, I'm sure, my colleague for Little Bow was pleased to see since he's been such a champion: getting a program in place for proper bridge maintenance and repair. I'm very pleased to see that that was referenced in the throne speech. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that there will be lots of questions asked on that as a progress report as we go forward over the coming months leading up to the next election.

In addition, I'm sure that my colleague the MLA for Cypress-Medicine Hat was pleased to see that there are now going to be biannual reports. Two times a year they're going to have report cards on the progress of infrastructure projects. My colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat has been tireless in putting forward a number of studies and suggestions about how to better manage infrastructure. He's now moving on to the environment portfolio, but I think he can be gratified that the government has appeared to listen to him in that regard as well.

In addition, my colleague from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills has been a champion, as have other members of the opposition, on making sure that legal aid is expanded for those on AISH in particular, so I was pleased to see that that is a commitment that was made in this throne speech.

I would like to give the government the benefit of the doubt that they are actually going to implement the agenda that was outlined in this throne speech. Sadly, we don't have much in the way of a record that would demonstrate that we should have that level of confidence. I go back to the 2012 Speech from the Throne: 10 key priorities, two of them now apparently completely repudiated. We heard, of course, the Health minister today say that the issue of family care clinics is completely off the table, and if you go back and look at that 2012 speech, there are very few areas where the government made meaningful progress, and in some cases they're walking away from it altogether.

In 2014, once again, there was actually a laundry list of things that the government intended to accomplish – five key areas, 34 different priorities – and virtually none of them has had any meaningful progress on them. Unfortunately, looking at past practice, the problem is not the ideas and the vision that are laid out. The problem is that the government has a very difficult time actually meeting any of its commitments.

We also look at the list of priorities in this new throne speech. It's demonstrating a lot of recycled promises from the past. The question is whether or not they are going to actually deliver.

It's with great sadness that I noted a few minutes ago that the Senate has failed to pass a provision that would have seen the Keystone pipeline get approved. [some applause] I know that my friends in the New Democrat opposition may be pleased to see that, but the rest of us are very unhappy to see that.

I would point out, of course, that this is something the Premier said today as a justification for why he had to appoint his friend to the position rather than have an open competition, that he thought that he had the best chance of being able to get this project approved in the Senate. Well, it failed. I'm very hopeful and will be very supportive of the Premier and this government in their aspirations to extend market access, whether it's Energy East or Gateway or Trans Mountain or some other proposal, but I have to say that this is certainly a setback right at the beginning of the Premier's term.

The laundry list of problems that are identified in the throne speech that need a solution: I guess it's pretty clear to me that we have to be mindful of the fact that the reason there are those problems is because of the members opposite and the successive years and decades of government that have brought us to a point where we have so many problems that require so many solutions. It's also part of the reason why we're skeptical at some of the approaches that they appear to be taking. There are a number of areas where they appear to be going right back into the same area of difficulty that we saw with the previous Premier. This is a government that did not get a mandate to borrow for capital purposes. They have been desperately trying over the last two and a half years to try to convince Albertans that they voted for something other than what they voted for.

4:40

I think we all remember pretty clearly that the mandate of this government was to be able to manage our finances without going into debt, yet here we have in the throne speech once again an affirmation that there's going to be borrowing for capital purposes only. The problem with that is that it seems to imply that this government has had a history of running operational deficits. There was only one year that this government in recent political history ran an operational deficit, and that was in 2008, when we had a global financial crisis. We've virtually always had an operational surplus. It's certainly not a bar to strive for to say that you're going to do something that you've always done.

The problem that we have is that we now have a government that doesn't seemingly have any intention of ever getting out of debt financing, and I don't think that this is something that Albertans want to see. They've admitted in the throne speech in multiple places that we're a province of 4 million people, growing to 6 million people by 2040. We may be at 8 million people by the end of my lifetime. So if we're going to see a 50 per cent increase in the number of people in this province – if you look at Stats Canada, they talk about how it's going to increasingly be a younger generation of individuals coming here, who will bring with them, of course, their young families, who require schools as well as medical attention – we're going to need 50 per cent more

of everything. We're going to need 50 per cent more schools, 50 per cent more hospitals, 50 per cent more long-term care beds, 50 per cent more transportation infrastructure.

So at what point does this government think we're going to be able to just wipe our hands and say, "Hey, we're done building; now we can start paying that debt back"? The fact of the matter is that we are going to constantly have to invest every single year in infrastructure. They have an unsustainable plan because their plan relies on them borrowing to be able to build this capital as opposed to budgeting for it properly every single year without going into debt.

My colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat put forward a five-year, \$50 billion, debt-free capital plan. We are going to continue to press the government to find a way to make sure that we can build our priority infrastructure without going into debt because we've seen what happens in other jurisdictions when they decide that it's okay to borrow for capital purposes. The amount of borrowing continues to go up, the amount of finance charges continues to go up, and you never ever see them making any strides toward paying the money back.

There is lip service paid in the throne speech, of course, to only borrowing with a clear debt repayment plan. Well, of course, the former Finance minister argued that that's what he had in place. If you look at the amount of money he was setting aside, it was nowhere near enough to be able to get us to a point where we would have the balloon payment available when those bonds came due. In fact, I think it would have taken 80 years to pay off the current level of borrowing with the amount of repayment plan that the previous Finance minister had set aside. I'll be looking to see whether or not that changes in the next budget, but I have to say that I'm not hopeful.

The other areas where it seems like the government is saying one thing but, I suspect, are going to do another: they talk about moving away from a five-year plan to a 25-year plan. I have to say, based on their history, that this may sound visionary when they say it and put it on paper, but when you look at their history and their record, it sounds absurd that a government that has been completely incapable of building the schools that were promised two and a half years ago would somehow be able to foresee into the future what the 25-year capital plan would be. I'll be interested in seeing what is on that list. But I have to tell you that I'm very skeptical, if they haven't been able to meet the demands that we have currently, that we can actually look at a 25-year plan with anything other than raised eyebrows and skepticism.

They talk about keeping taxes low and say that they're going to have no sales tax, but I think that underlying that message and certainly from the answers the Premier gave me today, it appears that other taxes will certainly be on the table. The fact that he was unable to give an unequivocal answer to the question of whether or not he would raise any existing taxes or bring in new ones suggests to me very strongly that Albertans are looking in the upcoming budgets at a government that is going to throw away the Alberta advantage and start looking at ways of increasing taxes rather than taking the advice, that we've been giving them for years, of getting their spending under control.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

They talk about having a straightforward budget presentation, but here we have it once again. They're not going back to the Klein-Dinning gold standard of how budgets should be presented: total dollars in, total dollars out, and what do you have left over, a surplus or a deficit? In fact, to say in a statement that you're going to have balanced budgets and clear fiscal budget presentation but

you're still going to go into debt shows me that it's completely incongruous. We're going to continue to see the amount of debt go up.

They talk about ending excessive severances for political staff. Of course, when this promise was first delivered, it talked about ending excessive severance packages for all staff. Now, the fact that they've narrowed it down to just a handful of top political staffers suggests to me that there isn't a level of seriousness about addressing this issue. It was only two weeks ago that we heard that Allaudin Merali has walked away with a \$900,000 severance payment, which is an absolute slap in the face to our front-line workers. How many LPNs could that have hired rather than continuing hand over fist to give money to these individuals who have excessive severance packages along with their excessive compensation packages.

They talk about ending sole-source contracts – but here's the fine print – in all but exceptional circumstances. Let's call this the Navigator clause because we certainly know the argument in the Legislature about why Navigator was hired on a sole-source communications contract was that it was because of exceptional circumstances. I have to wonder which contracts are going to be able to get a fast track because of that couched language.

They also have a very interesting line in the throne speech that I'll be keeping an eye on. They want to make a further distinction between registered lobbyists and government consultants. I'll tell you what I'm reading in between the lines there. What I'm reading in between the lines there is that there are certain people who are going to be recategorized from being lobbyists, who have to register and so be transparent about the work that they're doing, to being government consultants, who don't have to register and therefore don't have to be accountable and transparent about the work that they do. I think we need to keep an eye on how that is going to end up turning out.

There's a statement about greenhouse gases, "advancing efforts to monitor, measure, and report on our progress," but what I find very interesting once again is that it doesn't actually talk about achieving any targets. This is fundamentally the problem with the government's plan and its approach to market access. We will not get market access for our product until we start making meaningful and achievable actual reductions in greenhouse gases and other measures to improve our air, land, and water. Unfortunately, effort is not the same as achievement. It's a lesson that this government still has not learned.

The biggest disappointment is that there is no realistic plan to deal with health care. There are lots of platitudes. There is lots of language around giving more respect to health advisory councils, talking about continuing care beds and how that's going to somehow magically solve the emergency room crisis. But you do very much get the sense that this government believes that under their new management they're just going to be better central planners than what was happening under the previous Health minister. There's no real change in direction, no real change in approach.

They certainly have not learned the lessons that Dr. Paul Parks has indicated, that the only real way that we're going to free up capacity in our emergency rooms and be able to start making a dent in reducing the amount of surgeries and procedures is by building long-term care nursing beds as well as having transition beds so that you can stabilize patients and move them into an area where they can get 24-hour care.

It is very clear when you talk to emergency room doctors that if somebody is going to be released from hospital and they're not going to be able to get that 24-hour care, they won't release them. As a result, you end up having somewhere between 400 to 700

people who are in inappropriate care, costing \$1,650 a day, when they would be more comfortable in a proper long-term care nursing facility, getting the 24-hour care they need at \$150 a day. I see no evidence that the government recognizes that that is at the heart of their solution, and they demonstrated once again in the throne speech that they don't know the difference between continuing care beds, long-term care nursing beds, and the impact of building the wrong type of bed as opposed to the kind that we actually need.

On the issue of school construction my colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View went through it in some detail today, as did I. They've only built 18 schools since 2011. They're projecting that they're somehow going to manage to get things together to build 49 schools in the next 23 months when none of them are even started. Most of them are just barely in the design phase. I have to say that this is another example where the aspirations laid out in the throne speech are very unlikely to be delivered on.

Then, of course, the disaster recovery program. I'm very hopeful that there is going to be a resolution of the appeals by the end of the year, but this is, again, one more area where I fear a political announcement was made to aid a by-election as opposed to a realistic announcement because of the assessment of the situation. There are thousands of individuals, not only in my riding but also in the riding of the hon. Education minister, the representative for Calgary-Elbow, who have not even begun the appeal process, who have felt revictimized by the mismanagement of the disaster recovery program.

4:50

The fact that there are still so few individuals internal to the department working on these files leaves me very unsettled, not only because I fear that these individuals are going to have to wait years before they get resolution, as has happened in previous flood incidents in Medicine Hat. But what happens in the event of another flood or another fire or some other major disaster? The government has made absolutely no progress on being able to create a disaster recovery program that works. It's certainly not working for the people who have had the misery of having to deal with it for the last 18 months. We are going to continue to press the government to make sure that they make some real progress on that.

As for the flood mitigation issue, it was already discussed earlier today, the fact that projects were announced without consultation and buy-in from the city of Calgary. I think that's just one more example of seeing a government that does business under the new management the same way they did under the old management, making decisions without making sure that you've got the individuals at the table who are most impacted, brought onboard, and have the buy-in.

The biggest disappointment, though, is Bill 1, Respecting Property Rights Act. Madam Speaker, it is instructive and symbolic that this entire throne speech is anchored by a bill, Bill 1, that has a mere seven words to describe what the government is going to do. It shows how much the government is long on spin but short on understanding. Let me quote the press release attached to the throne speech. It says this: "Bill 1, focused on respecting property rights, was introduced by [the Premier] and will be the foundation of a new relationship between government and property owners."

Now, the Premier likes to trumpet his expertise on property rights, and his statements on property rights have hinted at an actual understanding of these issues. But what happens when he gets a chance to put his actual words into action? We get a one-sentence bill that repeals only one piece of legislation that we

know has been causing problems for our landowners for the last number of years, a piece of legislation, incidentally, Madam Speaker, that was so bad that even this PC government, with its long track record of stomping all over property rights, lacked the resolve to actually proclaim. Now it's being repealed. The government's actions did not live up to the talk. Really, no property rights expert, certainly no lawyer who claims to understand property rights and property rights legislation, can believe that the unproclaimed former Bill 19 is all that's wrong with property rights in Alberta.

[The Speaker in the chair]

But, really, the weakness and tone deafness of Bill 1 is symbolic of what's wrong with this entire throne speech, Mr. Speaker. Throne speeches are supposed to set an agenda for government. They are supposed to be a way for the Premier and the cabinet to signal to Albertans and the civil service what is important, what to expect, what will come. Albertans who are looking to have a forward-looking agenda that would prepare Alberta for the future and deal with the big issues we are facing will undoubtedly be deeply disappointed in this throne speech. The Premier likes to claim that the province is under new management, but the throne speech makes it clear that the new management has no strategic or operational plans. If this were a business, the market would be expressing deep concerns about how the new management has such a poor grasp of the fundamentals.

Now, let me tell you what I think should have been in the throne speech. What we saw in this throne speech offered very little departure in policy from the previous Premier. We didn't get a new strategic plan for the future of Alberta. All we really received was recycled campaign promises but no real details on how those promises will be kept or, most importantly, how they will be paid for with the price of oil now heading towards, at the very least, \$70 a barrel.

The PC government is continuing on its policy to borrow billions of dollars to pay for basic infrastructure. There is no plan for how to pay for these promises with targeted spending or actual improvements in performance of core government services. That leaves only new taxes and new fees, and I am sure that Albertans will have already noted that the PC Party and the Premier are already hedging on those two issues. This matters because the Premier made a lot of expensive promises during the campaign, but Albertans not only want promises. They want a plan for how to achieve them, and they want to understand how these will be paid for.

The Wildrose has very clear differences with the governing party. The Wildrose believes that the budget should be balanced, really balanced, every year and that the books should be an honest reflection of the money coming in and the money going out and the amount being spent on debt. The governing party will have racked up \$20 billion worth of debt by 2016. At this rate they will have \$40 billion worth of debt by 2020, or \$60 billion worth of debt by 2024, costing us billions upon billions of dollars in annual interest charges.

We believe low taxes, streamlined regulation, and a level playing field is the best way to support families, attract new investment, and diversify the economy. PCs continue to pick winners and losers.

We believe our energy business needs a stable, predictable environment to operate under. The governing party hasn't provided stability. We've seen arbitrary changes to royalty rates. We've seen cancelled leases up in the oil sands and elsewhere,

and we've seen increasing red tape that's undermined investor confidence.

We believe we need stable, low-cost electricity to fuel our continued growth and protect consumers. The governing party continues to build transmission lines that we don't need. They make consumers pay the full cost for the amount of cost overruns, and they seemingly have no ability to moderate excessive and extreme price spikes.

We believe we need to improve our reputation on the environment, and to do that, we need to make real and measurable progress on improving the quality of our air, water, and land and reducing greenhouse gases. I've already mentioned that the government has no plan to actually achieve any of its targets, but there certainly is a lot of PR around what they intend to tell the international community that they're doing without making progress.

We believe we need a new relationship with our municipalities that treats our municipal partners as another order of government and flows through a stable, growing number of dollars in a permanent transfer program with no strings attached. The governing party has created a begging model for our municipalities, where our cities and towns have to guess where they are on the priority list of projects and then also hire special staff to fill in application forms and lobby for grants.

We believe our heritage savings trust fund should grow from about \$15 billion to about \$150 billion and that future generations should be able to share in our resource wealth. If this government had even begun to manage our resource wealth properly, just reinvesting the dollars from the heritage savings trust fund back into the account, it would already be worth \$150 billion today. Instead, it not only racked up new debt, but they blew through almost \$17 billion worth of savings that were in the sustainability fund, and they continue to spend every last dollar of resource revenue every single year and are not setting enough money aside to pay the debt back when it comes due.

We believe health care should be decentralized to the local level, with day-to-day decisions for staffing and surgeries and procedures made by hospital administrators with their own budgets overseen by local hospital boards. The governing party: they've centralized our \$18 billion health system into the office of the Health minister, they have centralized EMS services, they have centralized home care, they have centralized lab services, and they have no real plan, as I have mentioned, to be able to clear up the problem that we have in our emergency rooms or build enough 24-hour long-term care nursing beds.

We believe that parents have a fundamental right to choose the kind of education they want for their kids. The governing party continues to introduce fads in the education curriculum that are impacting our students' international performance, continues to believe in fuzzy math, fuzzy report cards. In the meantime school boards are forced to charge fees to make up shortfalls. They promise schools, then they don't build them, and then they make political decisions on which projects do ultimately get approved.

We believe in free votes in the Legislature so that every single citizen can know that they will be represented on the issues that matter to them. The governing party simply doesn't.

We believe we need a return to ethical behaviour in government: no first-class flights, no five-star hotels, no lavish salaries and six-figure severance packages, no sole-source contracts, no special deals for cronies, no dumping failed politicians and political staffers into top jobs in the civil service, no buying elections with shady, last-minute spending announcements. In short, we need clean government.

Albertans are looking for a new generation of leadership with innovative ideas about how to move Alberta forward, and in looking at this throne speech, they would be disappointed. With resource revenues in steady decline, the Premier needs to do a better job explaining how his major promises can be kept while improving the outcomes for government services. Sooner or later the Premier is going to have to come to terms with reality and realize that governing is more than recycling old campaign promises or trying to distance himself from the mistakes of the last three Premiers. Albertans deserve a government ready to meet the challenges of our province head-on and to be honest enough with them about how they're going to achieve it. They didn't get that sort of government out of this throne speech.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available should anyone wish to take advantage of that.

I see none, so let us move on to the leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

5:00

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Alberta Liberals it's my pleasure to reply to this year's second Speech from the Throne. First and foremost, we must all give thanks to the Treaty 6 peoples and the First Nations of our country for giving us the opportunity to live in the best place in the world. We must give thanks to those who build and maintain our roads and bridges and buildings, and those who care for and teach our children, and those who care for our sick and elderly, and the civil servants who help run our government and our public services. We must also remember that the safety we all enjoy is because of the men and women of our armed forces – past, present, and future – as well as our front-line responders, who lay their lives on the line to protect and serve us 24 hours a day.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Liberals want to build a strong economy and a strong society. Liberals believe in fiscal, social, and environmental responsibility. Liberals believe in equality of opportunity, personal freedoms, and consideration for future generations. Liberals believe the decisions that we make today should be made through the lens of what is best for our children. Liberals believe in building a strong middle class because we believe that when more of us do better, more of us do better; we will actually have a stronger society. Liberals believe that after 43 years it really is time for new management with a new government.

Today there are a lot of good things happening in Alberta. We have a good economy and an abundance of natural resources, with more than 4 million people, hard-working, industrial people, who were either born and raised here or arrived here in search of prosperity and opportunity and to build a better life. But there are a lot of things that are substandard and must be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve the truth from elected officials, however inconvenient it may be. Once we are honest with ourselves and acknowledge that we have problems, we can get down to the business of fixing them. We have a province with a lack of sustainable, predictable, adequate funding for vital public services, funding that our municipalities desperately require.

This has resulted in delayed and crumbling infrastructure, a severely underresourced K to 12 education system, with classrooms bursting at the seams. Drastic cuts to postsecondary education and programs have led to amongst the highest tuition and fees in our country and the lowest postsecondary participation rates. Our seniors and disabled are neglected and too often

languish in hospital hallways, which directly leads to the acute-care health care crisis, despite having a big-spending health care system.

Mr. Speaker, today we have more than 90,000 children living in poverty, and poor kids come from poor families. We have a lack of protection for our LGBTQ youth. Our remand centres and prisons are full of folks with mental health, addiction, or poverty issues. Inadequate family and community supports have led to a record number of children in government care dying. One child has died in care every week for 14 years in the wealthiest place in the world, all at a time when regular hard-working Albertans struggle to get by and make ends meet.

Mr. Speaker, we must improve the lives of our First Nations, our Métis, and Inuit. We must make this a priority, and I'm glad to see that in the Speech from the Throne.

However, Mr. Speaker, we've got to ask ourselves a question. Are we better off today than we were 10 years ago? Many would say no. To top off the fact that we don't have the infrastructure we need or the public services our citizens need, this province has taken on record debt like we have never seen before. This is what happens when a government has a broken fiscal structure and ties our vital public services to the price of a barrel of oil.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve a strong economy and a strong society and a few hundred billion dollars in the bank. The problem lies in the fact that we have been under new management far too many times in the past few years, with the same old 43-year-old Conservative government, with the same MLAs and the same ministers at the helm, with the same old ideas and the same policies that have gotten us into this mess.

This week's throne speech talks about new management. Well, what's really new is only four members, who aren't that new, and 75 per cent of the cabinet ministers comprised the last new management team. The speech promises the world to Albertans from all walks of life. It talks about saving money, paying down debt, no new taxes, with conservative principles and the Wildrose policy of capping spending at population growth and inflation, with \$75 oil and no plan to pay for this, no real details.

Mr. Speaker, this week's throne speech, unlike many recent throne speeches, also talks about accountability, which is a very good thing since they've been lacking accountability on the PC government side for far too long. But so far they show every indication of continuing the PC tradition of denying, delaying, and declining the opportunity to take truly progressive steps forward. The Premier has made it very clear that he's going to take very conservative steps forward.

The government needs to demonstrate a true commitment to accountability and will need to follow some Alberta Liberal solutions. Liberal solutions to true accountability are to support gay and straight alliances in every school where students want them. Liberal solutions to accountability are to phase out coal-fired electricity generation, reduce greenhouse gas emissions so we can improve our reputation on the international stage and get our pipelines to market. Alberta Liberal solutions call for public inquiries into the deaths of children in government care and missing and murdered aboriginal women.

Alberta Liberal solutions to true accountability mean improving access to information, fixing flawed whistle-blower legislation, and having an open and transparent public hiring and contract tendering system. Liberal solutions to accountability mean imposing stricter environmental monitoring and stiffer penalties for polluters, which will improve our environmental reputation.

Liberal solutions mean giving municipalities the tools they need to responsibly serve citizens in urban areas, where the majority of Albertans now live and almost all Albertans eventually congregate,

and it includes more respect and more revenue and a shared responsibility. Liberal solutions to accountability mean delivering the right kind of health care to the right patient at the right time. And, yes, that includes committing to rebuilding the Misericordia hospital, that will benefit not only the whole capital city but the whole health system.

Liberal solutions to accountability mean forensic audits of our expenditures to ensure that Albertans are getting value for their money, and forensic audits of our royalties to ensure that Albertans are collecting what they should be collecting for the resources that belong to the people. Liberal solutions to accountability also mean that we must fix the broken fiscal structure to pay for this. We must stop the overreliance on volatile resource revenue to pay the daily bills for essential public services and talk of tax fairness. We must put the word “progressive” back in this province by bringing in progressive income tax.

Mr. Speaker, despite \$75 oil, our province is still playing catch-up and still growing. This is not a time to cut back vital public services, delay projects, nickel and dime regular working Albertans and businesses, or rack up massive public debt. It's a time to keep building our province, getting the essential public services, and paying for today's bills today, not passing the bill to the next generation. These are the things the government needs to do. They are things we've asked them to do, and they are things the government still refuses to do.

You know, suddenly, true accountability looks like real work, doesn't it? It's not as easy as simply promising to sin no more. Accountability actually requires good evidence-based policies that allow for the repair and strengthening of vital public services and our budgeting practices as well as Alberta's poor environmental reputation. It also requires a commitment to justice, fairness, and the public good.

Mr. Speaker, Liberals believe we need accountability grounded in the understanding that a strong society is just as important as a strong economy. For example, Liberals understand that true accountability means fixing a public health system that is severely and chronically underfunded and literally bursting at the seams.

5:10

We need to get rid of school fees. We need to hire enough teachers and get those teachers the support that they need to educate our children, who are the future of our province. Our schools need to be built as community hubs, with affordable, high-quality, low-cost child care as well as the wraparound services – the school nurses, the mental health counsellors, the addiction counsellors, the social workers – to give our children the care and support they need and the teachers the support they need so that they can actually invest their time, spend their time, teaching. That will require probably one of the largest investments in Alberta history into funding and running our education system, not only building the buildings but also on the operational side of things.

Liberals believe that true accountability also means making amends for broken promises and betrayals such as last year's savage cuts to postsecondary institutions, which made an already severe lack of funding even worse. Our postsecondary students need lower tuition and fees. They need more grants and more bursaries. They need a chance to pay off their student loans if they live and pay taxes in Alberta. They also need more professors and teachers and more choice of programs. Mr. Speaker, innovation, technology, and research and development are absolutely essential to building a strong economy. The University of Alberta contributes 5 per cent of the GDP to our province, which is \$12 billion to \$15 billion. Societies that out-educate us today will

outperform us tomorrow. It's time to invest massively in postsecondary education.

Liberals believe their government must take responsibility for this province's chronic and acute health care access crisis. The PC government broke the health system, Mr. Speaker. Nobody else broke it; they did. Along with other front-line staff, I'd be happy to help by providing insights and solutions. Let's admit we have a broken system. Let's make sure we bring in world-class, nonprofit, community-based home care, subacute care, palliative care, hospice care, and long-term care. Let's stop privatizing community services. Let's get every Albertan a family doctor that works with a team of health professionals and nurse practitioners to keep people out of the system and bring in real accountability measures. And let's stop changing managers. Let's just fix the system.

Mr. Speaker, Liberals believe that true accountability also requires that the government deals fairly with cash-starved municipal governments. Alberta cities and towns need sustainable, predictable, adequate funding, and municipalities must be treated as equal partners and be given the respect, revenue, and shared responsibility in the MGA review.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Liberals believe that true accountability means standing up for students who find themselves bullied in the schools because of their sexuality. Discrimination against LGBTQ students is wrong, it's hurtful, and too often deadly. I hope this government's concept of accountability extends to voting for the protections contained in Liberal Bill 202 from the hon. member for the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. The Premier must stand up to the social conservative elements in his party and his base. Accountability sometimes entails courage, and we'll see if they have it.

Alberta Liberals are going to be talking a lot about accountability this session in order to teach this old PC government what it really means to be accountable. Accountability isn't just about stopping ignoring rules or stopping wasting tax dollars after being busted for repeated lapses in ethics and judgment. Accountability is more than that. It's more than: we shall not do what is wrong. Accountability is also, more importantly, about: we shall do what is right. And that, Mr. Speaker, is what is missing in the throne speech. So congratulations to the government on promising to sin no more, but what Albertans really need is for this government to truly embrace accountability by addressing the myriad crises created by their myriad mistakes and to truly focus, first, foremost, and finally, on what is public good.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta Liberals look forward until the next election to working with the government on supporting what makes sense, on offering amendments to things that they intend to do well but aren't fully thought of, and to fight hard on behalf of Albertans when the government is totally wrong. You can count on the Alberta Liberals to fight to build a better Alberta and a strong society and a strong economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I see no takers.

Let us move to the next speaker, then, to an hon. representative from the government side. Anyone?

If not, then let us move on to the NDs. No one on the ND side right now?

Okay. Let's move on to Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a while since I got up to such a warm audience all the time. On behalf of the constituents of Little Bow it's nice to get up and do a reply to the Speech from the Throne. I guess, like everything else, I'm always

happy to see some things in writing here that we've been working on for a little while.

We'll start off with the highlighted areas I went through, about improvements on intersections. In my own particular riding, in Coalhurst, for instance, and Nobleford, I've been working fairly diligently with the Minister of Transportation on some solutions there. It's nice to see that we can work on getting some improvements done there to help the constituents of Little Bow and also the people that travel through it.

Bridge funding, as the Leader of the Official Opposition had brought up, had been cut for a little while. It's about \$75 million when you guys do jump into budget considerations. At least you put it in here that you want to help out with the repairs in rural Alberta. It's about \$75 million a year that's needed for the next 10 years just to get them up to date from where they're at. In my riding alone we have just about 20 per cent of the bridges in this province due to the large irrigation going across those. I think it's a huge economic driver.

Also, one of the counties that's in my riding is Lethbridge county, which is the only county that has over \$1 billion in cash receipts a year. That was off the 2013 numbers, I guess. If you look at that – I mean, we look at falling oil prices. I think this is a prime time to sit here and figure out where we can reinvest into agriculture. Agriculture is the largest renewable resource we have in this province, and it's always a good place that we could be reinvesting into. I do give that to the minister of agriculture, who has always been good to work with, and to his department for always getting information back so that we can work positively to get solutions and things that we can do in this province.

One of the things I'd be remiss in not touching on: the little point of the bridge on 547. I was with the minister last week at the opening of that. I was very glad to see the bridge get up and going again. The sad part was that originally it only took a year to build that bridge, just over a hundred years ago, with the modern technology of horses and pulleys and stuff like that, but due to some great engineering and stuff we banged that back together in almost 16 months. We didn't quite rebuild the whole thing. But, you know, my constituents are happy to at least be able to travel across it. Sometimes you're just happy with what you get. I can tell you that a lot of constituents were disappointed that either the bridge wasn't totally rebuilt or that it wasn't rebuilt within a timely fashion. But, either way, it's going.

One of the things in this province that we need to do – and we talk about it in the throne speech – is that we'll make annual investments to enhance agricultural research and innovation and work on food processing. One of the things there is temporary foreign workers. This is something that we need to get together on. I think all parties in this House and even our independent member will come together as a group and say that we need to somehow press the federal government into solving this problem. I know the previous Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour – some days it changes around here – the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, was always a strong advocate on it, and I believe the Member for Calgary-Hays, the new minister, is also. These are key things that keep this province rolling.

I'm really hoping that the new Premier, with his past political ties federally, will somehow be able to pull this through and get something that's going to work. This isn't just something that affects Tim Hortons and McDonald's. Rural Alberta is getting crushed by this, whether it's small businesses in the hometown I'm from, Mossleigh, in the restaurant there alone, or the feedlots down by Lethbridge, which has the largest area for feedlot feeding in Alberta. We're short-staffed. We're short of people that want to work. We've have greenhouses. These are all things that need to

be done. I had a good conversation with a feedlot owner down there last week, and he said to me, "Ian, I don't care how it gets done." I said to him, "Provincially we're working on that." He goes, "That's nice to hear, but that doesn't help the four feed trucks that I have parked every day because I don't have people to sit in them."

5:20

We're struggling there. We have Cargill, which is one of the large food processors, and also JBS. We're short-staffed. We're running at about 70, 80 per cent there for staffing because we just don't have enough skilled labour or unskilled labour that want to work there. That's a huge economic driver in our whole province. Again, we look at things like the falling oil prices. I've got some fairly simple solutions: let's reinvest in rural Alberta. I think that the Premier in his throne speech has touched on some of that, which is good to see.

Market access, product innovation, and investment: those are key things also. When we're in a province that exports just about all of the things that we grow, whether it be meat, whichever meat it is – chicken, pork, or cattle – or grain, we need to be able to always find markets. That's something that I hope the government continues to carry on, finding some more markets, and I think that they have been looking into that.

One of the things we also need to touch on is the feeder associations loan guarantees. Now, in the Speech from the Throne the government has introduced a rural economic development action plan. Part of that is that they decided to raise the limit from \$500,000 individually to a million individually for people to get money from the Feeder Associations loans. Now, with the price of cattle going up to probably record highs right now, this is key, and it sounded like a great concept. The problem is that we still need to raise the loan guarantee from the province. I believe the province provides about \$750 million right now in loan guarantees.

These are key things to our cattle feeding market right now. I really hope that at some point either the minister or the Premier would take this as something that needs to be dealt with immediately. Right now current legislation allows for the President of Treasury Board to increase the amount of the loan guarantees just through an order in council. I don't think that there's a negative effect by doing this. We need to do it right away.

People always sit there and ask – it's not a handout; it's a loan guarantee. In over 77 years the loan-to-loss ratio has remained constant at .01 per cent. Now, if anybody in here was following the stock market, you're almost guaranteed not a loss on that. I'd definitely be more than happy to be active to work in any way, shape, or form to find a solution on that for our cattle feeding market. To put the extra money in there to jump it up to a million dollars per individual sounded great, but we're cutting the other side. There's just not as much money there for that.

I guess that if we want to look at rural beds and long-term care, I'm very happy to say that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster has been in my riding and been doing lots of work with my constituents and talking about how to solve that.

Now, some of us might remember that back when we first got into this, in 2012, for me anyway, there was a little place called Carmangay that had a great long-term care centre. It got closed. Now, in case anybody has forgotten that – it was a nice way for me to learn how politics worked – since that time that building has been kept heated, kept air conditioned. A person checks on it once a day. There are almost 30 beds there; I think there are 27 or 29 beds. You could have it active almost immediately, within, I'd say, 30 days. Most of the staff are still in the area. If we want to

start looking into things that we can do to help rural Alberta and help our aging-in-place people, that's a prime place there. They've got a whole block there. You could add on to it. There are quite a few things there.

I think that as we went through that whole process, we all learned that sometimes politics keeps things open and that sometimes politics gets things closed. I'm not sure; I think it was a bit of both in that one in that they didn't keep it open. But I think this is a prime example that we can figure out. We can move forward and solve what happened before on that, and if we want to actually help out all Albertans that are aging and aging in place, this is probably a prime place we could do that at.

I'd hate to not put in a little plug for the Vulcan hospital also. There are some innovative people there that have figured out some sources for funding that would work with the government. They are more than happy to work with government and, again, have met with the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, who's come out and talked to them a couple of times and went a long way to roll out what we could do better together on that.

The throne speech touched on a couple of other things; you know, how to innovate and move forward on our high-quality food products. This summer a lot of people that were on some committees met over Fusarium. It's definitely a heated issue between northern and southern Alberta. For those that don't know, Fusarium is a fungus on seed. It's contentious, but at the end of the day in my riding it's a huge economic driver. There are a lot of seed growers down there. Now, for pedigree seed growers that's where you're going to grow your foundation seed, and then that gets cleaned and shipped across the province or into other provinces. The challenge is that we have a zero per cent Fusarium allowance right now. We're in a spot right now where a lot of the larger seed companies won't invest that money into Alberta because they can't legally sell that seed if there's a trace of Fusarium.

Now, actually, it was a private member's bill. The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, now the hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism, had brought it up. It definitely split the province. We had I don't know how many hours of meetings over this. My colleague from Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley and I could agree to disagree respectfully on what should be done. I think it's one that we can still tackle, and if this Premier is serious about getting the province pulled together, I think this is a key one.

It's a large economic driver, and when seed companies are pulling out from our province because they're scared because they can't do that, I think it's a pretty simple program if we can let the buyers decide what they want to do and through best management practices. I think that's something that in rural Alberta is, again, a driver that will help most people if we can come up with a positive solution. The problem with proroguing the Legislature like we did is that that was going to committee to come back, and now it's lost in the nether lands someplace. It's just – poof – gone. I'm hoping we can deal with that sooner rather than later. There's been a Fusarium Action Committee, since probably before I could shave, that's been in action, and nothing has ever really gotten rolling on it. I'm hoping that would be a key thing we can work on there.

You know, somewhat in closing here, I'm hoping that the new Premier – I guess we've got a new captain on the *Titanic*. It looks like he can steer it back around. I think everybody on the other side maybe saw the iceberg, and this was maybe the one time they ran back down and told him to hang a hard left or a hard right. [interjections] Hey, I'll give him credit. He's figured it out.

For a lot of the members on that side – we can all have a little fun in here; we've got to have a little fun at this job – at the end of the day you took quite a few pages out of our book, which is good. As a taxpayer in this province I'm happy that we figured out that we didn't need to replace licence plates, that we didn't need to do a lot of things, that we could probably get rid of the jets, our practice on how to account for the planes. [interjection] I never got to go on them. I didn't know what they actually looked like. Sorry about that.

We're going back to a simple finance program. I can distinctly remember sitting in here after a couple of the budgets – I'm just a farmer from Mossleigh, and I'm not real great with numbers – and the Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert at the time, as the Treasury Board chairman, always liked to explain how we needed to have a couple of sets of books. I remember it didn't work really well for Enron. You can't do that, and I'm glad to see that the new Premier figured out that that's maybe not the best management practice we should have. We should have one set of books. So I'm congratulating everybody on that side for figuring out to keep it back the way it maybe should be done. On saying that, I guess we'll see.

You know, Bill 1 sounded good coming out. I'm hoping he's open to a lot of amendments on it because I think we can add quite a few things to that and do good things for Albertans with it. Other than that, I guess we'll see how the cards play out on this as the rest of the session rolls through.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Seeing no one, I'll recognize Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a difference a day makes in politics. It's amazing. A few months ago we were dealing with the government in a most difficult time. Public confidence was waning considerably. If it wasn't at an all-time low, it was certainly heading to that point. A few months ago the Official Opposition was riding a wave of popularity as one scandal after another scandal plagued the government. Fast-forward to today, and what a change. After four by-elections the Official Opposition . . .

5:30

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but I neglected to catch a note here from the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. Might we briefly revert to the introduction of guests before they leave the gallery?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Hon. member, my sincere apologies to you and your guests. Please proceed. Thank you, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, for your understanding.

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, colleague. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the House visitors from the MD of Foothills. We have with us Reeve Larry Spilak, Councillor Suzanne Oel, Delilah Miller, Jason Parker, Rick Percifield, Ron Chase, and, from the organization itself, Ryan Payne and Harry Riva-Cambrin. These individuals are

residents of Highwood and Livingstone-Macleod. I ask that they receive the warm traditional welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Thank you very much, and thank you, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, for your co-operation in this regard and to all members. Please proceed with your speech, and our apologies for the interruption.

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech (continued)

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

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

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to talk about a couple of points that were raised in the Speech from the Throne. Most importantly, I want to really focus on the environment and property rights, which are pretty much some of the highlights that I focused on. There are many other issues that I'm sure some other members will pick up on later and comment on, but in particular the issue of the environment.

Coming up with a climate change strategy and promising to deliver on a climate change framework: this is to me absolutely paramount. It is a double-edged sword that provides good on both sides of that sword. One is that it is paramount in the sense that it's good for all Albertans to have clean air, to have clean water, to have an environment that improves their quality of life.

The other side of that sword is access to international markets. Whether we like it or not, the international markets are dictating that we have to do something to lead in our environmental rules, regulations, and demonstrate that we are a leader in the world. The beauty behind this is that our industries have the technology. They have the expertise. What we need is the leadership to bring that forward to make that work because when you even look at these pipelines that we struggle to get built, what prevents that, what is the argument that has always been the obstacle that we had to overcome is the fact that our environmental record was there to obstruct. We have that ability.

So for this Premier to step up and say that we are under new management and we are going to tackle that, there is something that came to mind. It's actually interesting because you've heard it, and you'll probably hear it again. What is different from this government than any other previous government? It's a valid question. Albertans want an answer to that, and it's not an answer you can give verbally. It's an answer that you have to demonstrate that you're actually going to do that. So the test is: will this government act? What is good to know is simply this. What the opposition has been complaining about, this government has now acted on.

They complained about the licence plate. Done. Check mark. It's gone. They complained about the airlines. Done. Check mark. It's gone. They complained about fiscal management, and boy I'm going to talk about the opposition and their fiscal management policies in a second. Stay tuned because this is going to be

entertaining because the hypocrisy of how this takes place is beyond me. [interjections]

Now, see, the beauty is, Mr. Speaker, that I actually have three cease-and-desist orders against me from the Wildrose. I'm not allowed to speak up, but I'm free from that now. [interjections]

An Hon. Member: Get a lawyer.

Mr. Anglin: No. I don't need a lawyer. I'm free. I'm free. I'm not allowed to talk about the nepotism in the party. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon members, we're about to conclude a historic day here of some of the highest level of decorum, and it all starts with giving a bait and taking a bait. For heaven's sake. The hon. member has the floor. Let him have it. Let him have it all. Please, no more interjections.

Hon. member, please continue.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, I'm not allowed to talk about the nepotism in my former party, and I won't talk about the nepotism. I'll stay with that cease-and-desist order. I'm not allowed to talk about how criticism of a party would force you out of that party or how criticism of the way they manage themselves would somehow silence you.

I've heard this before, Mr. Speaker, where these PC MLAs were criticized for not standing up and speaking out against some of the policies. What we do know from the history of this Chamber is that some of them actually did come over here and sit as independents as an objection or as a protest, whatever they personally decided. It was directed at governance, how this government is going to act with integrity or with credibility. How are you going to demonstrate that? That is the key test for this new government, for this new Premier. It's really important that they stay on this because when I hear the criticism about fiscal management, I think it's a valid criticism. It is important for all Albertans that this be transparent, that there be accountability. It's nice to know we have an act, but I will tell you that it's hard to take when it comes from a party that takes and spends its own money on what I would call a legal slush fund. I would wonder if Elections Alberta would take exception to it.

Mr. Wilson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Wilson: I rise on Standing Order 23(b)(i). The member is speaking to matters other than the question under discussion. Clearly, he is responding or attempting to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I'm not sure of anywhere in there where internal party matters and/or the view of the Official Opposition are noted, and I would ask that you remind the member to keep his comments relevant at such time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw. I had just, seconds before, in fact raised the motion and flagged it for the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, who was speaking, and I was about to stand up and say: please make your speech relevant to the motion of the throne speech; otherwise, I'd have to rule you out of order and ask someone else to take your place speaking. With that in mind, please be reminded of relevance and continue on now with that train of thought.

Debate Continued

Mr. Anglin: Oh, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The relevance is in the context and the contrast of dealing with fiscal management. I know the member doesn't like it, but I'm not here to be liked or disliked. What I'm here for is to bring truth to the contrast of fiscal management. It has to happen because if you're going to criticize somebody for not spending money properly, then you have to take into context that when you put money into a fund and you pressure people to put money into a fund and you don't even provide those people with accountability – and that goes to the accountability of the throne speech – and you give money so that it influences a political reality or a political perception to your advantage, I tell you, it is an interesting contrast. When the government brings up an issue of transparency, what I would say is that those who criticize the government should also exercise transparency, and I don't see that, actually. I mean, there has to be a balance.

The government is forced to balance that, and we should all be forced to balance that. When we talk about government, granted, we're talking about the cabinet, Mr. Speaker, but the fact is that we're all part of that government. When we are the opposition, when we are the backbenchers our job is to hold them accountable. It doesn't mean that we act differently and try to hold them to a different standard.

I will tell you this, Mr. Speaker. I have not yet seen anyone on that side actually speak up against their government and then be underhandedly thrown out via a rigged election process. No one has ever stood up and told me they've had one of those, but I would tell you that that would be absurd. I wouldn't expect that from over there. I'm not sure how that accountability measures out. What I'm looking for from this government is credibility. I would want this government to demonstrate exactly what it says. Now we're at a point in time which I think is a turning point.

5:40

When I see this government get accused of picking the low-hanging fruit, I say: yes, they did. They fixed a couple of things that the opposition said: please fix. And what I heard from the opposition was: yeah, but they did it. That's what we asked them to do.

Now there are some major points coming along. I will tell you that when the Premier brings out a property rights bill and heralds that property rights bill and that property rights bill is going to repeal Bill 19 – we refer to it as Bill 19, but it's the Land Assembly Project Area Act. I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I travelled around this province before I was elected, the last two years. I travelled to 91 communities. I held 266 town hall meetings. I spoke about Bill 19. The minister of agriculture was at some of these meetings. More than one minister was there. I discussed it, and I debated it. And when I hear the opposition say that it wasn't good enough, I'm here to tell you that it's great. It's outstanding. I want the thousands of Wildrose Party members that I signed up at my meetings to know that that is a good bill.

I fought against that Bill 19, and I debated against that Bill 19, and to have them repeal that Bill 19, that is just. That is a prime example of taking action. Is it enough? Never. I agree. We always want more. I don't want this government to be perfect. I want this government to strive for perfection. That's all I'm asking. When I travelled around this province and I spoke to thousands of Albertans, what I did find out from those thousands of Albertans, Mr. Speaker: they had some uncommon sense of fairness, and it was a common virtue. They understand due process of law. They understood the argument about property rights. So to have this

Premier step up and say, "We're going to start dealing with it," to me that is a good start. To have the opposition, who rode that on my back and on the backs of thousands of other Albertans, saying that they were opposed to Bill 19, stand up and say that now, all of a sudden, they're not – I don't understand that.

I am definitely going to support that bill when it comes along, and I'm going to ask them to do more. I want the thousands of Albertans that I spoke to, who supported me and supported the Wildrose in fighting this bill, to take note of that. That is really, really important in the progress of restoring property rights in this province. I commend the government for bringing that forward in the throne speech, and I commend the government for following through.

I don't tolerate hypocrisy. No one has even been able to shut me up on the issue of hypocrisy. I doubt it ever happens. But I am not going to talk about the nepotism that I got the cease-and-desist order on.

So with that I want to talk about the environment.

Dr. Brown: You've got parliamentary privilege here, Joe.

Mr. Anglin: Well, fiscal prudence is really important. Yes. I will stay with fiscal prudence. But I will tell you that there is humour behind it, Mr. Speaker. When a member of the opposition hires an image consultant and it doesn't work out too great, that's a waste of taxpayers' money.

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, if I may.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, I presume you're rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Wilson: A point of order, Mr. Speaker, again rising on 23(b)(i). I have no idea how this hon. member is trying to tie his comments to the response from the Speech from the Throne, and I would again ask you to remind him to keep his comments relevant.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Once again, seconds before the Calgary-Shaw member rose, I had just lifted up and indicated to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre to please make your comments relevant to certain sections of the throne speech. I realize that we give a lot of latitude, more than perhaps any other legislation, when replies to throne speeches are being given. Truly, we do give a lot of latitude. However, even I'm finding that stretch a little bit difficult today. So if you could zoom in on the throne speech, which part in particular you're commenting on, that would be helpful. The point is well made by Calgary-Shaw.

Debate Continued

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Point well taken. I will zoom in. But as it has been said here in this Chamber, have fun. I will cease to have fun at the moment, and I'll get a little bit more serious. But I'll be back to "fun" later, and then you'll have to wade again.

What I want to talk about is the seriousness of the issue of climate. The Premier did bring up in the throne speech issues of flood and flood mitigation, and what I want to say is that it is important. Some of the things the government has done in this area have helped. We are flood mapping. That is important. But

what we also have to do is that we have to study the logging in the high country. To ask a very simple question: is that affecting the flooding? I have to tell you that it's a valid question. We do need to study it. We need to look at that because some of these floods, the flash floods in particular – it's only logical to make an assumption that there is a connection, but we can't make the connection unless we study it. That has to fit into this flood mitigation system somehow, someday. That is absolutely important.

But going back to the credibility of our environmental policies, I will tell you this. The environmental rules and regulations in this province are good. What we lack is in the enforceability, and this government needs to look at that to make the system work better. We cannot – we cannot – have a track record where we say: our policies are good, our laws are good, but we're not getting the job done because we're not enforcing. That is a weak spot that this government needs to look at when it wants to set up a track record of environmental stewardship.

We're not in a position where we can follow. Because of our industry, because of our economy we are in a position where we must lead. We have no other choice in this matter. We must lead in this category if we're to be successful. That's where this government needs to strive. We need to have clean water, we need to have clean air, and we need to have enforcement.

We need a fair playing field. The carbon offset system in this province is a clear example of that. It is a playing field that needs a lot of attention by this government because the audits being conducted in that industry are not adding up. When companies can sell offsets for more CO₂ than they produce, something is wrong. Somebody needs to look into it and to make the system work or to deal with it in a more constructive way.

All I can tell you is that it is good, Mr. Speaker, that this is recorded by *Hansard*, because I'm not recording it. [interjections] I did say I'd come back and have fun. I apologize.

The Speaker: Order, please. Order.

I can hardly wait to make this offer. Does anyone wish to take up 29(2)(a)? We will go to the hon. Government House Leader, under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Denis: Thanks for recognizing me, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre what experience he has with flood mapping.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, if you wish to reply.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, flood mapping is new to me as I'm watching the government roll it out. Thank you to the minister of environment for notifying me of the flood mapping – I would call it an open house – in Sundre. It is the most important constituency location for me dealing with floods. So we had Environment and SRD people and the contractors down there with all the different flood maps, explaining to the public how they did it, answering questions. It was extremely important, because we had a very large turnout, and it's a huge issue.

There are other issues that are really important. I'm hoping this government will expand upon them: to look at not just the flood mapping but to go beyond that and look into causes of floods as far as what I said earlier, what the logging does, what development does along those waterways. That's extremely important to keep this under control.

Again, Mr. Speaker, like everything else, my biggest criticisms of previous PC governments all had to do with process, due process, having a process that was fair and just. You don't always

get the decision you want, but at least there's a process. That's important. The opposition could take a lesson from process, but they don't hear that just yet.

Anyway, it is the same in property rights, absolutely. If you take a look at what's being repealed in Bill 1, if you look at the processes there, they actually took those out of section 15 of the Government Organization Act, so when we repeal that bill, we'll go back to the Government Organization Act. Those processes there, in my view, are far fairer and just for landowners who are affected by any type of expropriation, and that's why I am so supportive of the bill as one of the best starts in dealing with this issue.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll sit down. Thanks.

5:50

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, did you have a point that you wanted to make or a question to ask under 29(2)(a), or are you satisfied?

Mr. Lukaszuk: No. I think I've heard enough, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You're satisfied. Okay.

Anyone else under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing no one, let us move on then to Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For some reason something comes to mind about why people go to NASCAR races, to see the car wrecks. I think we've just had an example of that.

This is an interesting time in the history of our province, Mr. Speaker. The third different governing Premier presented a Speech from the Throne, over a six-year period without a change in reigning party. That's got to be some kind of record. To paraphrase P.T. Barnum, who was obviously wrong, apparently you can fool all the people all the time or at least enough of them to form a majority government.

But all kidding aside I think we can feel the sense of relief here in Alberta and in this House. The Wildrose helped expose a number of embarrassing facts that proved the necessity of a new leader across the floor. I know that all Albertans are grateful to us; they just have a funny way of showing it in by-elections. Seriously, though, we all know that things couldn't carry on the way they were, with the significant waste, entitlement, and disconnect between the government and the taxpayers.

We know that no matter how red a Tory your leader may be, it has to be a whole lot better than what we've endured over the past six years. Alberta couldn't really wait till the next general election to have some of these serious issues of waste and mismanagement addressed. In his first action our new Premier demonstrated his willingness to think outside the PC box and borrowed some good ideas from the Wildrose playbook. The government air fleet is gone, and the associated waste and misuse has ended.

The Premier acknowledged that we still live in Wild Rose Country, saving millions on unnecessarily removing that pesky reminder and free advertising of the Official Opposition on every licensed vehicle in our province. [interjections] You don't think that was a factor? I'm sure I wasn't the only one who was glad for many reasons that the Alberta Party wasn't the Official Opposition, or the over-the-hill, out-of-touch gang may have suggested removing the name of our own province from the licence plates.

In an acknowledgment of the burden of bureaucracy our new Premier set up another layer of it to help small-business people figure out which department is making their lives the most miserable, under the guise of: "Hi. I'm from the government, and I'm here to help you." I wonder: were existing personnel redeployed

or new ones hired? Was someone promoted to become the manager? Does she or he have a secretary and an assistant?

I'm sure we can expect to see other Wildrose ideas borrowed, repackaged, and claimed as original. But we're okay with that because it's not about who gets the credit; it's about doing what's right for all Albertans, and that's what Wildrose is all about.

We see now a new bill addressing the issue of property rights, one of the three core universal rights, a right that was stunningly left out of the repatriated Constitution. Criticism has already befallen this new Premier's Bill 1. Hopefully, he will support and implement Motion 501 from my colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka. It will in concurrence with Lethbridge MP Jim Hillyer's private member's bill in our federal Parliament amend the Constitution for Alberta and entrench property rights.

This right has been a protected, cherished right and acknowledged in common law as inalienable since 1215, at the signing of the Magna Carta, a right that has been legislatively trampled on by iterations of our government with full knowledge and little respect: Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act; Bill 24, Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act; Bill 36, Alberta Land Stewardship Act; Bill 50, Electric Statutes Amendment Act; and more recently Bill 2, Responsible Energy Development Act.

Let's take a few moments to consider just a few of the costs and problems of this calculated regulatory taking. Under Bill 19, now scheduled and announced to be gone, the government gave itself the right to freeze Albertans' land indefinitely, restricting rightful owners even from building a garage on their own property. I commend the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre for his tireless efforts in lobbying against that bill.

Under Bill 24 the government stripped Albertans of the historic right to control the pore space under their soil, which can be a major source of revenue for those who lease their underground for gas storage, for example.

Although Bill 50 was repealed, it was too late. Damage had already been done under this nightmare legislation to the tune of \$16 billion plus and counting, and new power lines, many of them believed to be unnecessary, went through with no public hearings or needs assessment.

Bill 36, the worst of all, tells Albertans loudly and clearly that the government has no issue with tearing up water licences, grazing leases, natural resource leases, and much more simply because the minister may feel like it.

Of course, all this comes without the right to compensation or appeal for Albertans who are victims of these terrible policies and with no access to courts. Let me illustrate. Keith Wilson uses the example of a dairy farm owned by a family who holds the title to the land; a confined feeding operation, approval issued by the Natural Resources Conservation Board; and a water licence. Bill 36 calls the latter two rights statutory consents. It used to be the case that confined feeding operation approvals could only be rescinded under certain circumstances such as the surrender of the approval or the sale or the abandonment of the land. Well, the government argues that by rescinding these statutory consents, this family's title to the land is not affected. It's obvious that that

farming operation will no longer be viable without them, which violates the exploitation component of property rights. Without the protection of statutory consents there cannot be a functional economy.

According to Mr. Wilson under the new land-use framework the government can decide what Albertans can and cannot do on private land in a way that has never been seen before in Alberta and possibly in any parliamentary democracy. It used to be that Albertans, like most people in free societies, were able to do whatever they wanted on their land as long as no activities were generally harmful. Now Albertans may only conduct activities on their land that achieve specific outcomes determined by cabinet, and even if that overturns something the government had explicitly permitted, either yesterday or generations ago, you have no guarantees for compensation.

Let me tell you about my friend Sharon Unger. She and her husband built a lovely home overlooking a picturesque valley with an unobstructed view of the Rocky Mountains. A couple of years ago they were in a position where they needed to sell their house. They had received a market value offer, but it was withdrawn when the purchasers discovered something that they themselves didn't know. AltaLink was considering the construction of transmission lines right across the valley and their beautiful view. Attempts to get a definitive answer from AltaLink on which of the three possible routes being considered was the one fell on deaf ears. She was desperate. The Property Rights Advocate was unable to help. To this day this injustice remains unresolved. This multibillion-dollar company, guaranteed a 9-plus per cent return on all its costs by this government, could have bought this house with petty cash and added it to the expenses and boosted its own profits.

Why is this right fundamental to all Albertans, no matter where they live or how they earn a living? What is property? Everything you own. You worked hard for your money. It's a tangible representation of the value society and the free market placed on your time, talents, and energy. You use it to purchase food, clothing, shelter, transportation, entertainment, escape, whatever. Whose stuff is all that? Easy answer – duh – it's yours.

Should you be allowed to enjoy the fruits of your labours? Should there be restrictions on your use and enjoyment? Well, no matter what the speedometer on your car says, for safety's sake, yours and others, there are some limits.

But what about real property? Well, you can't build your house too close to your neighbours or the sidewalk or have view-obstructing trees or fences on a corner lot, and so on. Maybe the style is restricted by the community or neighbourhood association. But these rules are all in place, or if changes are contemplated, you have a right to a say about it or the courts for redress or appeal.

What if the government said you could no longer access water or sewer lines? Would that affect your use and enjoyment?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the House now must stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Issue 3

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Diana McQueen	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Frank Oberle	Minister of Energy
Verlyn Olson	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Donald Scott	Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education
Teresa Woo-Paw	Associate Minister of Asia Pacific Relations

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Amery

Deputy Chair: Mr. Fox

Dallas	McDonald
Eggen	Quadri
Hehr	Rogers
Horne	Rowe
Kennedy-Glans	Sarich
Lemke	Stier
Luan	

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Casey

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

Amery	Lukaszuk
Barnes	Mason
Ellis	Sherman
Horner	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Olesen

Deputy Chair: Mr. Pedersen

Cusanelli	McAllister
Eggen	Quest
Fenske	Rodney
Fox	Sandhu
Fritz	Swann
Jablonski	Weadick
Leskiw	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Jeneroux

Deputy Chair: Mr. Starke

Bikman	Leskiw
Blakeman	Quadri
Brown	Wilson
DeLong	Young
Eggen	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Zwozdesky

Deputy Chair: Mr. VanderBurg

Forsyth	Mason
Fritz	McDonald
Griffiths	Sherman
Johnson, L.	Towle
Lukaszuk	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Mrs. Leskiw

Deputy Chair: Ms Cusanelli

Allen	Olesen
Bilous	Rowe
Brown	Stier
DeLong	Strankman
Fenske	Swann
Fritz	Xiao
Jablonski	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Luan

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rogers

Bilous	Pastoor
Calahasen	Pedersen
Cao	Rodney
Casey	Saskiw
Ellis	Starke
Kang	Wilson
Olesen	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Anderson

Deputy Chair: Mr. Young

Allen	Jansen
Amery	Jeneroux
Barnes	Luan
Bilous	Pastoor
Donovan	Sandhu
Hehr	Sarich
Horne	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Goudreau

Deputy Chair: Mr. Hale

Allen	Casey
Anglin	Fraser
Bikman	Johnson, L.
Blakeman	Mason
Brown	Xiao
Calahasen	Young
Cao	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 19, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Holy and Great Creator, guide us in our discussions, our deliberations, and in our actions that they might exemplify what a democratic system looks like in its finest hour. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Dr. Starke: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parenthetically, I'd like to complain about the e-mail distribution centre that had only me getting the "wear native full costume" e-mail today. But thanks anyway.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I'm very, very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some of my guests. I'll start with the guests that are seated in the Speaker's gallery, but if you wish, I can go on to those that are also seated in the – we'll go with the Speaker's gallery first.

Mr. Speaker, it's my very great pleasure today to introduce, here to support my statement on the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the honorary consul for the Federal Republic of Germany from the Calgary office, Herr Hubertus Liebrecht, and his son Alexander. I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you. Others will be introduced shortly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin now with school groups, starting with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I would like to introduce to you and through you 48 students from Julia Kiniski elementary school, located in your constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Dale Mandryk and Ms Suzi Vladimirov, and parent helpers Mr. Doug Herbert, Mrs. Melissa Poppe, and Mrs. Cindy Dunphy. They are sitting in the members' gallery. I ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two school groups to introduce. The first one is from St. James Catholic elementary school. There are about 35 visitors here, I believe in both galleries. Amongst the teaching assistants and also the teachers and parents are Mr. Robert Harris, Mrs. Sheila Janki, Mr. Raymond Bradshaw, and Ms Jacqueline Fabian. I wonder if those students and visitors from St. James could stand up and receive a welcome from the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addition – I appreciate that, doing two – from St. Gabriel school, a school that is about four blocks away from my home, we have Mr. Guy Knight and Miss Louise

Kermath with 19 St. Gabriel school students as well. I wonder if they could stand and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other school groups?

If not, let us revert to Introduction of Visitors.

Introduction of Visitors

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Jim McPherson. Jim was elected as an MLA for the constituency of Red Deer in 1982, which was the last election in which Red Deer was represented by a single MLA. Jim jokes that it now takes two of us to keep up with the work that he was doing. Jim continues to be a champion for our community and in 2012 was named the city of Red Deer citizen of the year. A chartered life underwriter, chartered financial consultant, and chartered financial planner, Jim is here today with the group from Advocis, meeting with members of this Assembly. Jim has obviously risen. Please provide the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Let us move on. I guess we're back to Vermilion-Lloydminster for the continuation of your guests.

Dr. Starke : Yes. Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you several members of Alberta's German community who have joined us here today to provide support to my member's statement on the fall of the Berlin Wall. You'll notice they did get the memo, so this is just great. I'd like to first of all introduce Oswald Serlach, the prince, and Joan Armstrong, the princess, of the Mardi Gras Carnival festival put on by the Blauen Funken. I'd also like to introduce Ole Berger, the president of the Blauen Funken, and a long-time member of the Blauen Funken, Harald Bodenberger, who was born in the city of Berlin.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, it's my very great pleasure to introduce Karl Weidle, the president of the Victoria Soccer Club, 1st DFC, a long-time dominant club in club soccer, and I think Mr. Weidle has been president of that club for over 25 years; a good friend to many in the Assembly, Arnim Joop, the publisher of the *Albertaner*, the German-language newspaper; Arnim is behind me – excellent – and Karl as well; and other members of the German community that I'll ask to rise as I say their names: Horst Fleischhauer, Sylvia Kiel, Marvin Schaaf, Reiss Kruger, Elaine Monk, Wolfgang Haupt, Nadja Kunze, and Madeleine Streich.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my guests Soraya Zaki Hafez and Maria Syed from the Canadian Council of Muslim Women. The CCMW is a national organization started 32 years ago in Edmonton by the late

Dr. Lila Fahlman. She travelled across Canada to promote the idea of empowering Canadian Muslim women and giving them the tools to be active members of Canadian society.

Sitting with my guests from the CCMW is Ms Zarqa Nawaz, who was the producer and director of the CBC series *Little Mosque on the Prairie*. She's recently released a book entitled *Laughing All the Way to the Mosque*.

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

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm blessed in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar to have Metro college's English as a second language program very close to my constituency office. I wanted to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of students from Metro college accompanied by their instructor and teacher, Cheryl Thomas, who is always very engaged in the community with these students. I believe they're seated in both galleries, and I would like to have those students and Cheryl Thomas stand up and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly, please.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly three guests here in recognition of the flags of remembrance initiative, developed and hosted by Veterans Voices of Canada. On October 25, 2014, Veterans Voices of Canada provided Albertans with an opportunity to pay tribute and recognize the strength and sacrifice of Canadian armed forces men and women. One hundred and sixteen Canadian flags were displayed along highway 11 east of Sylvan Lake, and each one represented over 1,000 Canadian soldiers.

1:40

With pride I would like to ask my guests, who are seated in the members' gallery, to please rise and remain standing as I mention their names: Mr. Allan Cameron, founding CEO and president, Veterans Voices of Canada; my military hero, who I sponsored for the flags of remembrance, Warrant Officer (Retired) John Hofman, Canadian Army regular force and Canadian Army reserve force; Mrs. Josephine Hofman, married to Warrant Officer (Retired) John Hofman for 39 years. Heartfelt thanks and best wishes to these outstanding Albertans. Lest we forget. I would now ask the Assembly to please join me in providing the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am an Albertan, and I am proud of it. I am proud that we routinely lead the nation in economic growth, I am proud that we as a people volunteer more time and donate more dollars to charity than any other province in Canada, and I am proud that we have the lowest tax regime in the entire country. We have no sales tax, no payroll tax, no capital tax, and no health premiums. That is indeed something to be proud of.

It puts us a cut above the rest of the country and indeed most of the world in economic freedom and opportunity.

The funny thing, Mr. Speaker, is that despite this wonderfully low tax environment Alberta collects more tax revenue from its citizens on a per capita basis than any other province in Canada, and there's a reason for this. Low taxes drive economic growth and job creation, which, in turn, leads to more people paying taxes.

I want to reiterate what the Wildrose has always stood by, that our low tax environment is our single greatest competitive edge and that it must be preserved at all costs. However, once again it appears that that competitive edge is under threat. With oil diving towards \$70 a barrel, there's all kinds of speculation that our new Premier is in the market for more money. It seems there is a belief that if the government only had more money to spend, everything would be all right.

Now, the Premier wasn't around for this, but his government couldn't pay for everything it did when oil was at \$100 a barrel without going into debt. I think he needs to consider that perhaps more revenue isn't the answer. Mr. Speaker, it's time for us to ditch the tax talk and start living within our considerable means. That means not reflexively spending every dollar that we happen to come into possession of, that means setting annual spending limits and prioritizing those funds accordingly, and it means identifying areas of wasteful spending and eliminating them. That's the Wildrose plan, and it's the plan that's right for Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Energy Industry

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the U.S. Senate rejected the approval of the Keystone XL pipeline. Though there will be inevitably another vote on the matter, with a new Republican majority in the Senate, early next year, such a bill is likely to be vetoed by President Obama.

The government is clearly disappointed in this development, but it provides an opportunity to rethink the policy of exporting unprocessed bitumen and consider adopting a value-added strategy for our resources. We need to refine and upgrade products right here in Alberta instead of shipping raw resources and the jobs that go with them down pipelines to Texas. Pipelines and extraction produce relatively few good, long-term jobs. Upgrading and refining, by contrast, produce lots of high-paying and permanent jobs. A recent feasibility study concluded that upgrading bitumen in Alberta could increase the province's GDP by \$6 billion a year and create 18,000 new jobs.

Peter Lougheed challenged Albertans to think like owners. That means not only adding value but ensuring that we receive a fair share of royalties for the resources which we all own together. Under Lougheed Alberta set a goal of receiving 30 per cent of the value of the resources in royalties and taxes and sometimes exceeded that. The PC government is currently collecting 9 per cent, which is less than under the Social Credit government.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, since the days of Ralph Klein we have been warning that unless Alberta took its environmental obligations seriously, it would become increasingly difficult to find markets for our energy products. If this government is serious about improving Alberta's access to markets, Alberta needs environmental strategies that are more than just press releases and trips to Washington. Words need to be followed by real actions.

Like Premier Lougheed, New Democrats stand for adding value, making sure we get our fair share, and high standards of environmental stewardship.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Fall of the Berlin Wall 25th Anniversary

Dr. Starke: [Remarks in German] Most honoured Mr. Speaker of the Assembly, 10 days ago, on the 9th of November, the entire world marked one of the most important and unforgettable events in our world history, the destruction of the Berlin Wall.

To the world the wall was the most obvious symbol of the tension between East and West during the Cold War, but for Germans and people of German ancestry it meant even more for the wall was a false border, a chasm that cruelly divided friends and families. Through high-risk escape attempts thousands managed to reach freedom in the West. About 200 lost their lives in the attempt.

For 28 years the wall stood, abhorred and mute testimony of the oppression of eastern Europe. For this reason, the whole world celebrated the destruction of the wall but nowhere more so than in Berlin.

Thousands of Germans, including my parents in the '50s, emigrated to Alberta. They sought freedom, peace, and freedom from fear and found it here. Many Albertans of German heritage have made significant contributions to our province: Horst Schmid, Reinhard Mühlenfeld, and former Premiers William Aberhart and Ralph Klein. Widely known as people who promote a love of life and friendliness, we celebrate festivals like Carnival and Oktoberfest, and we are especially proud and prominent when we cheer on the German team during their frequent successes at the World Cup of soccer.

Mr. Speaker, the fall of the Berlin Wall was a genuine triumph not just for Germans but for the collective world humanity. It is a great honour for me to deliver this statement fully in German. To you and to my colleagues for their forbearance, I say a heartfelt thank you. [As submitted]

The Speaker: [Remarks in German] Thank you sincerely, and welcome, everyone. [As submitted]

Thank you for providing the English translation, which will appear in *Hansard* so that everyone can grasp the full gravity of that comment.

We'll move on to the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, followed by Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recognized at least six of those words.

Value-added Energy Industries

Mr. Quest: It's an honour to rise and recognize today Alberta's Industrial Heartland. Alberta has been blessed with an abundance of natural resources, attracting global investors.

In 2013 the energy sector accounted for 74 per cent of Alberta's exports, producing nearly a quarter of the province's GDP. This translates into over \$82 billion for Alberta. The royalties we earn from the energy sector, of course, support the many programs and services that we enjoy here in Alberta and contribute greatly to the overall high quality of life that we enjoy.

The petrochemical and refining sector is a major component of Alberta's economy and our second-largest export product.

Exporting products that are further up the value chain offers Albertans improved resource royalties, a larger tax base, increased skilled jobs, and a better proportion of higher value product exports.

Despite this, crude oil currently makes up 62 per cent of our province's energy exports. In order to maximize the value from our natural resources, it's essential that we produce value-added exports, and this is best achieved through the use of integrated hydrocarbon processing clusters. Comprised of interconnected businesses, suppliers, and institutions, a processing cluster provides improved synergies, reduced capital and operation costs, and a stable labour force over the long term.

Alberta has been a real model for implementing successful value-added policies that make sense, from Peter Lougheed's original programs to the recent incremental ethane extraction program, that has resulted in over \$3.5 billion in new investment in our province. These developments fuel a strong and diversified economy. Developments like the North West upgrader will help maximize the value of Alberta's bitumen resources by a range of cleaner, high-value products such as ultra-low-sulphur diesel and diluents.

We do face stiff competition in a very competitive market from all over the globe. Mr. Speaker, we just need to be aware and make sure that we continue to support in our policies value-added industry in Alberta.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First main set of questions. The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I began the Premier's first question period by asking him the first question I asked Premier Redford. Unfortunately for Albertans, the new management is no better on fiscal matters than the old management. Let's see if the Premier has a clearer answer now that he's had a night to think about it. To the Premier: how will his government get out of the budget hole caused by oil heading down to \$70 a barrel? Will we see more debt, more taxes, or both?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member's statement applauding the fiscal and competitive position of Alberta and the incredible achievements in terms of our tax advantages and competitive advantages, and I agree with her entirely. So I certainly assure her that in the week ahead she will see a fiscal update from the Minister of Finance which maintains that tradition, and I hope that she will be equally enthusiastic in supporting the ongoing work of this government.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier also made the point that Albertans have overall low taxes, but the implication seems to be that he has room to increase them. That's troubling. Since he's giving Albertans all sorts of mixed signals on this, I think some clarity is in order. Does the Premier believe his government has a spending problem that requires more discipline or a revenue problem that requires more taxes?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, the only confusion on this matter, I think, is from the side opposite. Albertans are already the lowest-taxed citizens in this country. As the hon. member said herself in her opening statement, this is a subject of enormous pride to all of us as Albertans. Our low taxes put us at an incredible competitive advantage. We'll continue to invest, as we

have promised, in the priorities of Albertans – that includes health, it includes taking care of senior citizens, and it includes the construction of new schools – but we will maintain our low tax advantage and no sales tax in this province.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, clarity does not seem to be the Premier's strong suit. Albertans are proud of the tax structure we have in Alberta. Here in Alberta a dollar is a dollar and is taxed like a dollar and at a reasonable 10 per cent single rate of tax. It is one of the ways in which Alberta leads. It is, in fact, what has resulted in allowing us to have more per capita revenue from personal income tax than any other province. Here is an easy question for the Premier. Will he commit right here, right now that his government will keep the 10 per cent single rate for personal income tax?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government's fiscal update will be delivered next week. The government's commitment relative to this fiscal year is very clear, and the government is on target in terms of achieving the fiscal expectations that have been put forward to Albertans. Albertans, as I say, expect prudence. They expect discipline. They expect spending discipline from their government. Every single Albertan understands that we are in a low-price environment for oil, \$75 per barrel or thereabouts. They expect discipline from their government in these circumstances, and they will see that.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions. Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition leader.

Ms Smith: I guess we'll try to get a clearer answer tomorrow, Mr. Speaker.

School Modular Construction in Calgary-Elbow

Ms Smith: Yesterday I asked the Premier about progress as well. You see, he declared that Albertans should judge his government on the progress it made. He also declared that Albertans should judge his government on integrity. Last month the Education minister used his position to fast-track modular schools in the constituency that he was seeking a seat in. Even his campaign manager admitted it was done to win the seat. Does the Premier think that this is an act worthy of his high standards of integrity?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is simply wrong in her assertions. The minister has been responding to the needs of Albertans in the clearest of terms. He has been listening to Albertans. He was listening to individuals in a number of constituencies relative to the need for modular schools and other school construction in communities that need them. The hon. member should simply look to the response from stakeholders across this province about the progress that has been made in terms of listening by this minister.

Ms Smith: Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the Education minister was hardly forthcoming on how that decision was made. He dutifully stuck to his talking points, no doubt provided to him by the Premier's office, when he was asked tough questions. But Albertans deserve more than canned answers. They deserve the truth. To the Education minister: how did he decide that modulars for a school in the constituency where he was seeking a seat was a higher priority than the six other projects ahead of it on the priority list?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, we are responding to the interests and the concerns of parents. One of the member's colleagues sitting

behind her wrote me a letter in the middle of the election campaign asking for support for modulars to be approved in his particular riding for the particular school that he was concerned about. It was for the same reason that modulars were approved for that school. When parents had a desperate need, they were approved for the school that the member opposite mentioned and every other school that we've approved modulars for.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. leader, final supplemental.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I was asking about the constituency of Calgary-Elbow, and I don't think I got an answer to that question.

In the throne speech we were told that the role of government is to serve Albertans honourably, respectfully, and ethically. I think Albertans will be hard-pressed to view the Education minister's actions with regard to these particular modulars as honourable, respectful, and ethical. The Premier said that Albertans should judge his government by the integrity it has shown. To the Premier: is this the kind of government he's going to run, where projects only get built when there are elections to be won?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is simply wrong. We are responding to what parents are saying are priorities for their children. The member opposite's colleague wrote this particular letter and in the letter said, "I am writing to request information and action to address the . . . badly needed portables in this province." That's exactly what the parents in Calgary were asking for, the members of Rocky View were asking for, the parents across the province have been asking for, and that's exactly what we have been responding to.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition for her third and final set of questions.

Ms Smith: That's another question we'll have to go back to again tomorrow, Mr. Speaker.

Landowner Property Rights Legislation

Ms Smith: Yesterday we saw that Bill 1, which was supposed to be a landmark bill, is really just a half-hearted attempt to placate landowners that doesn't get to the real issues of legal recourse and compensation. Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, is a bad law. It should go. But I'm a little perplexed because the Premier has claimed that nobody understands this issue better than he does, having spoken with so many Albertans during the summer about it. My question is a simple one: Did Albertans really tell the Premier that getting rid of just one bad law was enough to protect property rights in this province?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, firstly, speaking of listening to Albertans, I think that letter should be tabled in front of the Legislature.

But let's deal with property rights, Mr. Speaker. I certainly do not want the hon. member opposite to be perplexed, so I certainly hope that they will find their way clear to support Bill 1. If they do so, it will be the end of the land assembly act, which in their own assertions has been an overreaching piece of legislation that is tantamount to de facto expropriation. It's for that reason that Bill 1 has been brought forward, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Smith: The Premier said yesterday that Albertans need not worry about full, fair, and timely compensation when the government takes their property because such matters are regulated by

the Alberta Expropriation Act and the Surface Rights Act. Is the Premier aware that his government has passed several laws such as the Land Stewardship Act that override the compensation provisions of these two laws and that that is precisely why property rights need more protection in this province?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, the most extreme circumstances in which a landowner can be deprived of their property rights is, in fact, the land assembly act, which is a resuscitation of provisions which were taken out of the Department of the Environment Act many years ago, quite properly so, that amounted to constructive expropriation or de facto expropriation. It's for that reason that the land assembly act is being removed.

In terms of the Land Stewardship Act it actually confers rights upon a landowner which are supplementary to the rights that a landowner has under the Expropriation Act, and I would not have repealed it on that basis.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's certainly not how landowners see it, and I'm sure they'll be telling the Premier so.

I asked the Premier to demonstrate his sincerity on this issue by supporting the motion of the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka which would entrench property rights in the Constitution and guarantee full, fair, and timely compensation. As I pointed out yesterday, this motion is on the Order Paper. Surely by now the Premier has had time to read it. Will he support it?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll certainly speak to that motion when it is put forward in the House and we have an opportunity to examine it and examine all of the specific recommendations that have been made relative to the Expropriation Act and to the Constitution.

2:00

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

Menthol Cigarettes

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Medical Association now supports including menthol in the ban on flavoured tobacco. The Health minister says that they're entitled to their opinion. Well, their opinion is also shared by the World Health Organization, the Canadian Medical Association, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the Canadian Cancer Society, Action on Smoking and Health, and even this Assembly, which approved Bill 206 in the first place. To the Premier: whom do you agree with, these expert organizations or your novice Minister of Health, who refuses to include menthol in the ban?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have two priorities when it comes to tobacco: first of all, protecting children – and we've done that by eliminating a variety of smoking in cars, sizes of packages, various flavoured tobaccos – as well as making sure that we align ourselves with the rest of the country.

Thank you.

Dr. Sherman: I guess they want to lead by following again, Mr. Speaker.

If the opinion of experts wasn't enough, I question why this supposedly new management team is also ignoring the advice of its own Health ministry, Alberta Health Services, chief medical officer of health as well as the former Health minister and the associate minister of wellness, all of whom recommended a

complete ban on all flavoured tobacco, including menthol cigarettes. The minister is still looking for a second opinion, apparently. To the Health minister: the facts are in. Who else do you need to consult?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, when we reviewed these particular regulations, we looked at the possibility of banning a variety of other products. The fact of the matter is that tobacco is a legal product, people do have the right to use menthol, and we believe public rights do prevail on this issue.

Dr. Sherman: And the majority of the old management team actually voted to ban it.

Mr. Speaker, they say that birds of a feather flock together. The Health minister's former campaign manager and his former chief of staff, who's now the Premier's principal secretary, both have close ties to tobacco lobbyists, yet the minister claims that he's never met them. Clearly, health policy is being set by lobbyists and not health experts. To the Minister of Health: whom is the Minister of Health working for, our children or big tobacco?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we're working for children.

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

School Modular Construction in Calgary-Elbow (continued)

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we rose last spring, this government over there had a problem with integrity, so much so that we have a bill coming forward to deal with it. But that bill will not address a problem that arises from the spectre of an Education minister who queue-jumps for political reasons on a decisions around modularity. My question is to the Premier. Does the Premier understand that by his failure to deal with his Education minister's conduct during the by-elections, his caucus's integrity problem is now his integrity problem?

Mr. Dirks: I fundamentally disagree with the member opposite. The concern of Albertans is that we respond to the needs of parents in our fast-growing communities and in particular in areas of our cities. Whether it's Calgary, whether it's Westgate school, whether it's William Reid school, whether it's in Rocky View at East Lake school, all of these communities need additional modularity to respond to growing enrolment pressures. That's exactly what parents want the Education minister to respond to, and that's exactly what we've done, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, Manitoba and Saskatchewan both have election laws that would prohibit the kind of government spending that went on during the by-elections, that was done by your Education minister. My question to the Premier is: to regain integrity and trust with Alberta voters, will he commit to amending our elections law so that this can't ever happen again, and if he won't commit to it, why won't he?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can certainly understand why with the member opposite the by-elections are a sore topic.

Moving forward, Mr. Speaker, we've been very clear in terms of ethics and ethical accountability. I've indicated that we will be bringing forward ethics legislation in this House that will deal with accountability, entitlements, and will make very specific provisions relative to the matters that people have been concerned about in this province.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Education. He talks about receiving letters from families around the province. Well, the fact of the matter is that families around the province have been writing to this government over and over and over about how they don't have modulars and portables where they need them, yet only Calgary-Elbow received the by-election bonus. So why will you not explain to this Assembly how you made that decision? Alberta voters deserve to hear the explanation.

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, for the second time I have to say that the member opposite is entirely wrong. Portables have been approved for a number of schools in Calgary – William Reid, Westgate – and Rocky View. Across the province we have been responding to the growing enrolment pressures and the capital needs that parents expect us to respond to. Ensuring that we have a quality education system is on the top of the marquee of our priorities for this government, and we're going to continue to respond as Albertans would wish us to.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Those are the first five main questions. I'd appreciate your cooperation to please curtail any preambles to supplementals from here on in so we can get more members up with their important questions.

Let's start with Calgary-Shaw, followed by Calgary-North West.

Municipal Charter Framework Agreement

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has taken cities on a roller coaster ride over the past few years. They've had four – four – ministers of Municipal Affairs in the past year alone, and they've signed not one but two MOUs promising to deliver a big-city charter. Now, the second MOU does offer a bit more clarity, specifically around revenue sources, stating, "A key element going forward will be consideration of the adequacy and form of current revenue streams." To the Premier: everyone knows a revenue stream is simply a code for a tax, so what new revenue streams are being considered?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise on this. We're very happy to have very early, within 21 days, in our mandate with our new Premier and under new management signed a charter framework with both Edmonton and Calgary that, I have to say, they are very happy about. This brings us to be able to move forward with the charter and into three different phases. I'm sure we'll have another question, and I'll be able to explain those phases for the hon. member.

Mr. Wilson: And I look forward to hearing the talking points that the Premier's office provided her.

The most recent MOU also states that this relationship will ensure that the cities are provided with new and/or enhanced economic tools: more code for taxes. Can the Premier clarify what this means if it isn't referring to more taxes for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The two big-city mayors have really been very happy to see us signing this city framework. Phase 1 will address matters specific to the two cities and Municipal Affairs by the spring of 2015. In phase 2 we will address matters between the two cities, Municipal Affairs,

and any other GOA ministry that we want to chat about with them. Then and only then phase 3 will address the development of a new fiscal framework for the two cities by 2016.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're all adults here. Mr. Premier, can you just stand up and tell this House one way or the other: will the new city charter framework, that you proudly claim to have signed with our cities, involve new taxation powers for Calgary and Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we have three different phases. You won't know what that will look like until we've actually gone through the consultation, the respectful consultation we'll have with our two big-city mayors on the phases that they've talked about, phases 1 and 2, making sure that they have the chance to talk crossministerially, and then, finally, as they brought forward these phases in order, which those two big cities did, we'll look at revenue or fiscal framework, but not until then.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

School Construction

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, I was so excited to hear about news of a middle school that was going to be built in the community of Royal Oak in Calgary-North West. I often actually drive by that site and say: I can't wait. But I do wait and wait. I'm wondering if I can pose this question to the Minister of Infrastructure. How much longer am I and the people who live in Calgary-North West going to have to wait for that middle school?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Upon becoming the Minister of Infrastructure, I was actually quite surprised to learn that the first year to year and a half of the time that it takes to construct a school is actually doing things like design work and permitting. Those are things that I choose to change. We want to close the time frame. We want to get that work done sooner, but we need work and consultation with our school board partners, with our municipalities. I don't think it's acceptable to have five-, six-, eight-month delays for building permits, and we're going to work to address this issue.

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, I'm just wondering if the minister can help me a little bit with the math. First of all, how many schools were promised, and how many bums are in seats right now?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, of the 35 schools that were promised in 2011, 31 of those students occupy today. Of the four remaining schools one of them had issues with respect to the Calgary flood, two of them had site problems and environmental challenges that had to be rectified, and the last one is a school being used by two jurisdictions and one college, and therefore they required more time to work on . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister.

Ms Jansen: Finally, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. I'm just wondering, and I think that the people of Calgary-North West

would like to know this: at what stage are we in the development of the schools? Considering the schools like mine, we still have empty plots of land. Have the designs been done? Are the bulldozers ready? Where are we?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that at present, of our 230 school projects, as I said, 31 of them are complete. Of phase 2 we have 11 schools that are under construction today, 78 in the planning stage, 52 undergoing the design work, and 56 that have gone out to tender. So we still expect that these schools in phase 2 will be complete by 2016. For some of the high schools it takes six to eight months longer to construct, so in 2017 they will be done.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

Small-business Regulations

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The most common request we receive in our constituency offices is for help navigating the halls of bureaucracy, whether it's AHS, with its eight layers of management, or finding someone willing and able to provide clear, honest answers to a request about the prioritized status of a promised project. The government completed a study on reducing regulations and red tape, but we've seen little positive action. Will the minister please advise us when we may expect this to improve?

The Speaker: The hon. minister – which minister are you going toward, please?

Mr. Bikman: Whoever is supposed to be doing this. Probably nobody.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. The province is very dynamic in delivering its services. As a result of that, buildings are built, they're renovated, they're changed, and it takes time to put programs in place. As a result of that, I can't give the hon. member any specifics about what's happening in his particular area, but we are trying as of now to reduce the red tape in Alberta Health Services so that we can deal with the people of his constituency and all the other ones in this province.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The absence of someone responsible for doing this is an answer itself, isn't it?

Given that it's been nearly three years since the report came out, can someone advise us on just how many fewer regulations we now have, remembering to include all the ones that have been added since the report was written?

The Speaker: Hon. member, it is customary to direct your question to a specific person although any front-bencher can answer.

Mr. Bikman: Well, it would be nice to know who.

The Speaker: Is there someone who wishes to answer? The Premier, please.

Mr. Prentice: Certainly. The hon. member may have missed this, but in fact there was a very important announcement made about five weeks, six weeks ago relative to the small-business strategy

by the minister of innovation and myself that dealt quite specifically with red tape, the reduction of red tape, introducing a new portal that would allow small businesses in this province to deal with exactly the problem that the hon. member is raising, which is accessing readily government information, avoiding red tape, and getting quickly to the bottom line, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bikman: I read and received that, Mr. Speaker, and thought it was good news, but I have some questions about it. Given that if just half of the unnecessary and redundant rules were torched, I suspect we'd have a three-alarm fire, does anyone over there have a goal and a timeline for meaningful, substantive reductions in regulations and red tape, and if so, where can we find the list of the rules and regulations that are headed for the shredder?

Mr. Scott: Thank you for the question. I think you need to get your facts right. We are in fact working with Albertans to make sure that they have the best access to information. The small-business strategy was a perfect example of that. Any Albertan can go and within three clicks get the information they need. That's why Alberta is such a great place to run a small business. That's the kind of work that we on this side of the House are doing, and we are going to continue to do it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Calgary Area Flood Mitigation

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three flood mitigation projects are currently under consideration by our government to protect the city of Calgary from flooding in the future. The status of these projects is of particular importance to the residents of Banff-Cochrane, particularly Bragg Creek, who suffered the devastating effects of the 2013 flooding of the Elbow River. To the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development: is it your department's intention to proceed with the Springbank room for the river project on a priority basis, and if so, what was the rationale?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for that question. We are moving on the Springbank room for the river project after 17 months of consideration of different projects. We are moving under the leadership of this Premier on this project because at this point in time it is the most actionable project that we have looked at over the last 17 months to provide the necessary and sufficient protection for Calgary communities from flooding.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why was the McLean Creek project not given priority as it would have mitigated the flood risk of Bragg Creek and Redwood Meadows as well as the city of Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. While we continue to do a more in-depth review of the environmental implications of that project, preliminary indications have shown us that there are significant environmental

challenges with that project, which would really increase the timeline it would take to actually implement that project. Our Premier was very clear. He wanted us to move to protect the communities of Calgary, and that's what we're doing.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: if McLean Creek does not proceed, then what is the long-term plan to protect Bragg Creek and Redwood Meadows?

Mr. Fawcett: Well, Mr. Speaker, again a very good question. Our flood mitigation strategy has multiple layers of protection for communities, one of which is that we're working with Rocky View county to follow up on recommendations made by AMEC, who was the consultant that worked on that watershed, to build about \$6 million worth of dykes and berms in that community. We've provided them a grant of \$880,000 to do that, and we will be providing the money for those projects, when that study is complete, through the Alberta community resiliency program.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The government has for years given the excuse that they can't do anything more to reduce greenhouse gas emissions because it would make Alberta less competitive with the U.S., and putting out a media release today reannouncing a program that's been in place since 2009 is a perfect example. Well, now both U.S. and China have signed a joint agreement to curb and reduce carbon emissions, so the ball is in our court. To the environment minister: has this joint agreement made any difference in the specifics or timelines for Alberta reducing greenhouse gas emissions, anything at all?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, the matter of greenhouse gas emissions reduction is important to all of us. It's certainly important to a province such as ours which is in the energy business and which produced in excess of 2.6 million barrels of oil per day over the course of this year. So we need to be careful that we balance protecting the environment, on the one hand, with our economy, on the other. Certainly, the government is very focused on environmental action, on being a leader with respect to these issues. We are reviewing the agreement that's been reached between the Americans and the Chinese with interest, and at this point the timelines and the goals and objectives are clear but not the specifics.

2:20

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Well, back to either the Premier or the environment minister. I mean, given that this government loves to talk about instituting the first carbon levy, but first isn't best anymore, and given that talk about a 40 per cent or \$40 plan went the way of the sky palace and given that the government has already said that there will be no movement on intensity of emissions or the levy, is there anything new for climate change under this new management, under this new Premier?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would certainly encourage the hon. member opposite to take more pride in the policies that we have in Alberta. She refers to the first carbon levy. In fact, the architecture of the industrial emitters policy that we have in the

province of Alberta has been emulated in the province of British Columbia with respect to their carbon policies for their new LNG projects. It's also being followed in Saskatchewan. In fact, if you talk to Americans, they are looking at the specific architecture that we have in our province as a model.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, but BC's is actually a carbon tax, and everyone pays it. We're not looking very good on that side.

So back to the Premier or the environment minister: I mean, really, does this government, this minister not understand that Alberta's lack of success in finding access to markets for our oil is a direct result of their inaction on climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions? It has an effect.

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite correct. I'm not talking about a consumer carbon tax; that's the province of that particular party. I'll let them deal with that. From my perspective I am speaking about industrial carbon levies. The carbon levy that we assess in Alberta has become the model for the LNG policy that's being followed by the government of British Columbia and also the government of Saskatchewan. So in terms of large industrial emitters Alberta has been leading the way for many years. The policies that we've put in place are being adhered to and followed across North America.

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, this week is National Bullying Awareness Week, and there's much talk about creating safe spaces. It's time for action. Gay-straight alliances, or GSAs, are student-driven, school-based groups that promote welcoming, caring, respectful, safe, and inclusive learning environments for sexual and gender minority students and their allies. To the Minister of Education: will you commit to ensuring that students who wish to form a GSA in their school will not be prevented by schools or their administrators?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, we are deeply committed to, certainly, the safe, respectable learning environments in our schooling system. There is no room for intolerance in our education system. The hon. member is obviously referring to the private member's bill that will be brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. We look forward to seeing that bill. I fully support gay-straight alliances in our schools. We are also respectful and mindful of the particular constitutional jurisdiction of school boards in this province.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, given that generic antibullying clubs don't go far enough to protect LGBTQ students and ensure that schools are safe spaces and given that there are schools in Alberta that have codes of conduct which discriminate against students based on their sexual orientation and which do not allow students to form GSAs, will the minister stop school boards from having a no-GSA policy?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, we certainly look forward to reviewing the bill that has been put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. I understand it's on the Order Paper. Clearly, there is no room for intolerance in our education system. The Minister of Education himself has been extremely clear about this. We advocate, we support, and we will fight for at every corner respectful, safe learning environments in our schools.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that students in schools without GSAs are more likely to report low grades, drink alcohol or use drugs, become victims of violence, or seriously consider suicide and given that the evidence proves that GSAs increase self-esteem, school attendance, mental health, and literally save lives, will the minister commit to supporting GSAs in every school where students want them? Yes or no?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, in the clearest of terms, we will commit to safe, dignified, and respectful educational institutions, and that is to ensure that we have no room for intolerance in our school systems, including bullying towards gay and lesbian children. We are fully supportive of gay-straight alliances in our schools, we are mindful of the complexities of this, and we look forward to seeing the specific bill that is put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Feeder Association Loan Guarantee Program

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 28 the Premier released his rural economic development action plan changes to the feeder association loan guarantee program, which will double the maximum individual loan limit to \$1 million per feeder. With the increased operating costs this will help with greater capital, but the government has failed to increase the total amount of the guarantee program. Can the minister of agriculture please explain why they have not increased the total loan amount guaranteed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. This feeder association program has a great and grand history in Alberta. It's over 77 years old. It was born in the depths of the Depression, when people needed some help to buy cattle. It has lasted for a long time and has been very successful and very effective in helping our beef producers. It has adapted from time to time, and that's something that we were trying to do when we made the announcement regarding the rural economic development action plan to double up on the individual loan limits.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that over 77 years the ratio has been only .01 per cent for loss versus loan and given that these are not handouts or guarantees, why did the government not increase the total amount of the loan guarantee to help out? Otherwise, we're just cutting into half the people that can get it.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would challenge the hon. member. It is, in fact, a guarantee. I spent 30 years as a lawyer counselling people about guarantees. A guarantee is not something that's just symbolic and without legal effect. The person who gives the guarantee, in this case the government of Alberta, is on the hook even though it's not writing the cheque at that time. Being fiscally conservative, we're being very careful about taking on additional obligations like that. This program has been very successful, and it has adapted as it's gone along. We're not at this time ready to increase the guarantee.

Mr. Donovan: Mr. Speaker, given that the throne speech talked about putting money back in rural Alberta and helping agriculture, I'd really hoped that through some process the President of Treasury Board could increase the guarantee through an order in council. We've seen it happen before. I don't see where the problem would be. Will the Minister of Finance commit to at least an urgent review of this as the end of the year is coming up and this is when most of the cattle sales are?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, we are constantly reviewing this. As a matter of fact, the changes that were announced just several weeks ago are the result of consultations with the feeder association. They told us that they wanted more flexibility in their program, and that's what we've provided them. I would also mention that financial institutions who would actually provide the loans to the feeder association have it within their power to also increase their flexibility. We've taken a step in that direction, and we'd certainly like to see financial institutions consider it, but we are continuing in our discussions and our review of this program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

Maternal Health Services

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we're all aware, Alberta's population is growing significantly. My constituency of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo has certainly experienced that growth at an amplified rate. On average we are now seeing approximately 150 to 160 babies born every month in our single hospital. Recently the MaternityCare Consumers of Alberta Network released a report which outlined several major concerns based on the experiences of more than 1,200 individuals that were surveyed. Given these concerns my question is to the Minister of Health. Given the significant population growth has your ministry measured that impact on the births in our province?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the population of Alberta is growing in an incredibly rapid way, and for babies it's no different. In 2013 we had 53,000 births in the province of Alberta versus 10 years before when we had just barely 40,000. Birth rates in Fort McMurray and Northern Lights have doubled over the last year, and it's making a big difference in the community up there. We need as a province to develop province-wide programs that deal with maternal-infant health plans that are focusing on ensuring that our mothers and their infants are taken care of in an effective way. We will be doing that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Allen: To the same minister: what is the government doing to accommodate that growth in terms of recruiting doctors and hospital capacity?

2:30

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we are doing that. We're improving the number with a 33 per cent increase in midwives through the rural physician action plan. We're encouraging doctors to get out in the rural areas and encouraging them to participate in programs in northern Alberta. We even had last May midwives start off in La Crête and High Level, so they have their own services now for midwifery. We're trying everything we can.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Allen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That leads to my final supplemental. To the same minister: can we actually make more use of midwives; for example, by using community-based birthing centres?

Mr. Mandel: Yes, we can, and I think we need to do everything possible in all areas of the province to make sure that we use all the birthing opportunities we can have with midwives and other opportunities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Calgary-Currie.

Hospital Occupancy Rates

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The CEO of AHS is on record saying that the best that Albertans can expect are hospitals that are 98 per cent full. The Health Quality Council says that it should never be more than 85 per cent to protect patient safety. To the Minister of Health. This is a serious discrepancy. Continually running hospitals so dangerously close to capacity puts patients, staff, and the entire health care system at risk. What further actions are you going to take to reduce hospital occupancy to levels deemed safe by the Health Quality Council?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, several weeks ago the province of Alberta put in place a program to free up 750 acute-care beds in co-operation with the Minister of Seniors by beginning to build 1,500 new long-term care and continuing care beds. We've also found 446 beds within the system that we can move our acute-care people into. This will open up opportunities within our system to have a greater degree of opportunity for beds for our acute-care needs.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Speaker. Minister, given that ambulances are regularly being told to stay away from the Rockyview hospital in Calgary due to lack of beds even after your so-called emergency measures were implemented, will the minister acknowledge that his plan is not working, and when will you do something to immediately alleviate the severe overcrowding of hospitals across this province?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, the program we are putting in place with freeing up the 750 beds will begin to do that. We're looking right now at the acute-care beds and the way we can move patients from emergency rooms into the hospitals. We're looking at a variety of different options. I think that as time progresses, we'll begin to put in place transition beds, which are one way to free up some of the emergency space so that people can get into the hospitals.

Mrs. Forsyth: Minister, we're weeks away from the peak of a flu season and the pressure it brings, and already the Rockyview is full. The eight beds opened last month are already full. It's at 110 per cent capacity. Patients are being placed in the hallways, patients are being placed in patient lounges, and they're being placed wherever you can stack them. Soon we'll be bringing bunk beds in. Minister, do you understand that overcapacity puts huge pressure on our dedicated health care professionals? What are you going to do to fix it now?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would encourage everybody to get a flu shot. Second of all, we're looking at a variety of ways to invest in hospitals. This is a problem that's been in

existence for quite a while. It will not be fixed overnight. We need to work with hospitals like Rockyview and all over the province to increase the number of acute-care beds. We'll be doing that with our plan as we move forward.

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

Westgate School Modular Construction

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently this government has responded to overcrowding issues that impact Calgary-Currie. Westgate elementary is to receive eight modulars as students await an alternate site for its Spanish bilingual program. While this is reassuring to know, that this government has committed to investing in new schools and modernizations, some Westgate parents are also concerned that rather than mitigate a current problem, modulars are destined to become a long-term solution. To the Minister of Education: what can you tell the parents of Westgate about the rationale for these eight portables when their worry is that this is simply a Band-Aid solution to a rapidly . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Dirks: I thank the member behind me for the question. Westgate is really a great success story in Calgary. Wonderful programs, bilingual programs there. Growing enrolments, unprecedented growth in that school and across Alberta, ballooning school enrolments. We have had no option but to respond to those, and in consultation with the school board we did provide them with facilities through portables that would respond to those particular needs. We leave it up to the school board to determine best how to use those.

Ms Cusanelli: Again to the same minister: given the transitional nature of modulars as solutions to enrolment pressures, what is the expectation of Westgate modulars once the new site for the Spanish bilingual program is available? Will they remain at Westgate, thereby not alleviating the principal issue of schools in my constituency being over capacity?

Mr. Dirks: I thank the member for the supplemental question. As I indicated, at the Calgary board of education's request we provided these eight modulars for students at Westgate. It's important for students not to be relocated multiple times over a four-year period, and that's why the portables were provided. That being said, it's up to the school board to decide the makeup and the programming at Westgate school. Just how many modular classrooms will remain there at some point in the future remains for the school board to decide. We trust them to make the decision that's in the best interests of those children.

Ms Cusanelli: Lastly, to the Minister of Education: would you be open to decreasing the utilization rate to a lower figure in order to indicate high areas of enrolment sooner?

Mr. Dirks: I thank the member for the question. I'm pleased to say, Mr. Speaker, that work is actively under way to implement a new approach to determining the utilization rate in our schools. This is an important matter for parents and school boards. The new formula focuses on usable space, takes into account nontraditional and emerging school designs. The formula was approved late last year, and since then school jurisdictions' education staff have been working together to examine the smaller scale plans of every school and recalculate their capacities. Work

should be completed by January. We'll have more accurate, reliable data that we can use for capital planning then.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Water for Life Program in Central Alberta

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are telling us that this government is failing to meet the water needs of our growing municipalities. For example, the water for life program was established to manage our province's water resources to benefit all Albertans, but due to this government's inability to prioritize the waste-water portion of this program, it has fallen behind in central Alberta. To the Minister of Transportation: what is this government going to do to ensure that the water for life program in central Alberta is brought back on schedule?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to ensuring that all Albertans have access to clean water and reliable drinking water. Budget 2014 allocates a total of \$75 million contributing to water for life projects in Alberta, but that budget is way oversubscribed. There are always more requests than there is money.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans are telling us that the government has failed to advance many of these turnkey regional transmission and treatment projects, when will this government start to take seriously the immense growth pressures in central Alberta and work to advance the water for life projects like the central Alberta regional waste-water commission north leg?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, as I said, there are many valuable projects across this province for water and waste-water projects. Right now an AAMD and C convention is going on and meeting with some 20 municipalities. Lots of those municipalities have requests for water, sewer systems. We've granted a couple of new water lines here in the last few weeks, and we'll continue to look at the priorities and balance the requests with the number of dollars we have in our budget.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans in the constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka want to know what other solutions the province can offer now because they are facing issues now. Noting that in most of these areas the preliminary upgrades have already been completed based on your government's promise, when is the government going to fulfill its commitment to this waste-water project?

2:40

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have met several times with the leaders in the municipalities from Lacombe-Ponoka, and I very much support their efforts in getting that done, but, as I've said, we have limited dollars. There's a balance between the number of dollars and the projects we have. That's a very important project. I'm very hopeful that we'll be able to divert some of the building Canada fund money to the waste-water and

the water for life projects, and if we're successful in doing that, we'll be able to complete some of these projects.

Statement by the Speaker

Supplementary Questions

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. That concludes Oral Question Period.

We'll move on with Members' Statements in a moment, but just two advisories. One, could you please ensure that your supplemental questions are in fact properly phrased questions from the standpoint of being sequitur questions. Yesterday some members wrote to me asking about whether or not some of the sups offered during question period were non sequitur. I ask you all to just bear that in mind. I know you all know that. Also, please curtail the preambles to supplementals. We left several people who had questions today on the altar. They didn't get a chance to get up. That would speed things up as well.

Thank you very much.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Let's go on to Lethbridge-West, followed by Drumheller-Stettler, for private members' statements.

University of Lethbridge Achievements Medicine Hat Regional Hospital Anniversary

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I was studying at the University of Lethbridge some 40 years ago, I honestly could never have imagined that this brand new school would someday be ranked amongst the top three institutions of its size in all of Canada, let alone three years in a row.

I rise today to recognize the passion and effort of the faculty and staff at the U of L who work so hard to create one of the top university experiences in this country. This has been proven time and again, most recently by *Maclean's* magazine, where the U of L achieved a first-place ranking in terms of average size and number of peer-adjudicated research grants. Basically, this means students have unprecedented access to leading faculty members and their research programs. The U of L is also ranked fourth of 19 primarily undergraduate universities in all of Canada. Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we recognize and honour the achievements of everyone involved in these milestone achievements by the University of Lethbridge.

Another milestone in southern Alberta recently is the 125th anniversary of the Medicine Hat regional hospital, and it's my honour to thank the dedicated staff and health professionals who have provided exceptional care and comfort to Albertans from Medicine Hat and surrounding areas throughout the decades. Today a new chapter is being written as the hospital undergoes a major \$220 million redevelopment and expansion project. This redevelopment will provide people in Medicine Hat with improved access to specialized care; emergency, surgical, outpatient, maternal/newborn services; and a six-storey addition to the hospital that will add 23,000 square metres. Mr. Speaker, this is the size of three CFL football fields. This expansion of Medicine Hat regional hospital is one of the many major health capital projects under way in our province as the Alberta government continues to invest wisely in health infrastructure to meet the needs of Albertans today and in the future.

On behalf of all Albertans and in the Alberta spirit congratulations to the staff and health professionals at the Medicine Hat regional hospital and everyone in the community who has played a part in the hospital's past and bright future.

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we go to Drumheller-Stettler, we have a request for unanimous consent to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (continued)

The Speaker: Hon. President of Treasury Board, would you proceed, please.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House members of Advocis, the Financial Advisors Association of Canada. For more than 100 years Advocis members have delivered financial security and peace of mind through high ethical and professional standards. Small-business professional financial advisers are critical to Alberta's economy as this industry represents \$2.4 billion in annual GDP and supports 22,000 jobs. Advocis is hosting a reception for members this evening at the Royal Glenora Club, and I hope you will be able to attend. On behalf of all members of the Legislative Assembly I would ask the members of Advocis to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: Thank you, Drumheller-Stettler, for co-operating with that brief intro. Now let's hear your private member's statement.

Canadian Election Observation Mission to Ukraine

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about democracy and the promotion of Alberta's democratic values abroad. This past October my legislative assistant volunteered and was chosen as a long-term elections observer with the Canadian election observation mission in Ukraine for the early parliamentary elections in that country. He spent five weeks there to observe Ukraine's move towards a true democracy after years of corrupt governance by a thug, who fled to Russia when his people decided that they had had enough.

Former Wildrose candidate Paul Nemetchek and Drumheller mayor Terry Yemen also joined the observation mission. With our large Ukrainian-Canadian population here in Alberta, including you, Mr. Speaker, we should all be grateful to the government of Canada for funding a Canadian observation mission to Ukraine. Our brave Canadian observers were the only observation mission to deploy to the Ukrainian oblasts, close to the conflict area, where the Russian military has invaded parts of eastern Ukraine with the aid of separatist terrorist extremists.

Unlike the stolen election Canadians observed in 2012, the Canadian election observation mission's main conclusions found that the democratic will of the people was reflected in these 2014

results in accordance with the laws of Ukraine and international laws and standards.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the people of Ukraine and the new people's rada for a free, open, and transparent election. May Ukraine continue down its path to freedom. Slava Ukraini.

The Speaker: The response would be Herojam Slava. Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the required number of copies of the government's response to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future report on the feasibility of high-speed rail in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have 10 tablings today in relation to menthol and tobacco. This government has said that they want to serve children, but 39,000 children between the ages of grade 6 and grade 12 are already hooked on tobacco.

The first tabling is Flavoured Tobacco Use among Canadian Youth, evidence from the 2012-13 youth survey. It denotes that 35 per cent of grades 9 to 12 kids that smoke use menthol. But that's just one opinion, Mr. Speaker.

The second tabling has to do with a strategic brief, A Comprehensive Tobacco Flavour Additive Ban Is Needed to Prevent and Reduce Youth Tobacco Use, produced by Alberta Health Services. You may have heard of them. It was dated November 15, 2012, and recommends a comprehensive tobacco flavour additive ban. But that's just another opinion, Mr. Speaker.

Third is the President's Letter from the Alberta Medical Association dated November 18, 2014. Dr. Johnston expresses his disappointment since the AMA strongly supports the inclusion of menthol as a banned substance and it was not included. Another opinion, Mr. Speaker.

Next, the Canadian Medical Association policy on tobacco control, updated 2008. The policy says that the government "should exercise its legislative power to regulate the content of tobacco products," including banning flavouring such as menthol. Again, just another opinion, Mr. Speaker.

Number 5, Partial Guidelines for Implementation of Articles 9 and 10 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, stating that from the perspective of public health there's no justification for permitting such ingredients as flavouring agents, including menthol. Again, just another opinion, Mr. Speaker.

Number 6 is an editorial here in the *Edmonton Journal* dated November 15, 2014. Ms Simons calls the minister's decision "illogical and hypocritical." She continues to say that we need to educate youth on "how Big Tobacco specifically uses menthol to entrap teens and minorities." One more opinion, Mr. Speaker.

The seventh has to do with copies of an article from the *Edmonton Sun* where "Alberta touts legislation to ban flavoured smokes" but the minister states that "the legislation is about public health, not money." Just another opinion on what this act is all about.

Number 8, copies of Smoke-Free Alberta's web page on tobacco flavourings. This is a coalition including the Canadian Cancer Society, the Alberta public coalition on cancer prevention, the Lung Association, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the Alberta

Public Health Association, and Action on Smoking and Health. They recommend a ban on all flavourings, including menthol. Another opinion, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

Number 9, copies of a news release from the Campaign for a Smoke-Free Alberta dated October 20, 2014. In it Angeline Webb with the Canadian Cancer Society states that exempting menthol from the ban will leave thousands of children without protection. Another opinion, Mr. Speaker.

Number 10 is copies of Alberta Registered Lobbyists – Tobacco/Smoking, dated March 2014. Here is a list of 26 individuals, including Hal Danchilla, a friend of the minister, lobbying to keep the status quo on tobacco regulations. Finally, an opinion the minister agrees with.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? Hon. Minister of Education, you have something quickly? Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, earlier today in question period I mentioned a letter that I had received during the month of October from a member of the Assembly referencing the need for urgent action by the government on portables in our schools. I'd like to table five copies of that letter.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in question period I mentioned 11,605 signatures that were gained online and in person in about a month in Cypress-Medicine Hat over concern that a medical laboratory that has been servicing us very, very well for approximately 50 years is being closed by the government with no business plan and no proper testing procedures in place that will actually serve the citizens of Medicine Hat better. Eleven thousand signatures in about a month.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of the manifest that I referenced yesterday during my point of order. All the other references are already part of the public record.

The second tabling is a copy of an e-mail from one of my constituents to the then Minister of Health raising the point that vaccinations for hepatitis A and hepatitis B are not covered if you are on a barriers to employment program. He makes the point that the most vulnerable and the most likely to be on those programs are people that are incarcerated or recently released from incarceration and that they would be making the choice between paying for a vaccination or paying for food, and he asked the government to work together to try and relieve that problem.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there others?

If not, I have one tabling myself. If you'll permit me, I'd like to table five copies of the Child and Youth Advocate annual report 2013-14 in accordance with section 21(2) of the Child and Youth Advocate Act.

Thank you.

We have no points of order today, and we're still reviewing the point of privilege, so we will move on.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Debate adjourned November 18: Mr. Bikman speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, you have six minutes left in your speaking time.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was speaking, when the time expired, about reasonable restrictions on property and mentioned some examples. For example, I mentioned that you can't build your house too close to your neighbour's or the sidewalk or have view-obstructing fences or trees on a corner lot and so on. Maybe the style is restricted by the community or neighbourhood association, but these rules are in place. If changes are contemplated, you have a right to a say or to the courts for redress or appeal.

But what if the government said that you could no longer access water or sewer lines in your home? Would that affect your use and enjoyment? No showers or hot tubs, no toilets: what would happen to the value of what for most of us is our largest investment? Do you think you could find a buyer if he knew he could never use the bathroom? You'd hope that you could get the courts to straighten this out, wouldn't you?

Imagine how you'd feel if you found out that your provincial government, the one that had been looking after you for over 40 years, unbelievably passed a law that said that you no longer had the right to go to court. Would you be upset? Would you hire a lawyer to look into this for you? Would you be calling your MLA, like my friend Sharon Unger did, to ask: what's up? Would you be calling the media to say, "Hey, this isn't fair or ethical or honourable; you need to make this a headline event"?

Well, urban dwellers, there are laws like this that have been passed in recent years. That they haven't affected you yet and may not any time soon does not mean that you should ignore them. Property right laws aren't just relevant to farmers and ranchers. Mrs. Unger isn't a farmer. She just happened to live outside of a town. These laws are affecting the folks who raise the beef you eat as steaks, roasts, and hamburgers or grow the grains and vegetables used to make your salads, your breads and rolls, and even some of the beverages you drink. These people and some who work in the city and live in the country risk having the value of their property decline and in some cases become unsalable. When they've gone to the courts for redress, they've been told: "You don't have a right to legal correction of this problem. Your provincial government has written clauses into legislation that prevent you from getting any relief." You thought you lived in a free country, where rule of law protected you. Well, it used to throughout history until bills like 19, 24, 36, 50, and 2 were passed by the government you voted for or didn't vote for.

To his credit, our new Premier has promised action to correct this unjust, unconscionable action. With fanfare the Premier

introduced Bill 1 to an eager, informed group of thousands of Albertans, but all it does is repeal Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act. It's a bill that hadn't even ever been proclaimed. This isn't enough. It's a start, and we appreciate it, but there's lots of work left to do. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Premier for this important first step.

We want to help the Premier. We believe he's serious and self-aware enough to realize help and good solutions are available from other sources like the Wildrose Official Opposition. When we spoke Monday, he told me that he knew his party didn't have a monopoly on good ideas. That's humility, and that's encouraging. Bill 1 is a beginning. Passing and implementing Motion 501 is the next step in entrenching Alberta property rights into the Constitution through section 43 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

We have one or two more ideas we'd like to share with the new Premier. They'll help him be the man of honour and integrity all Albertans want him to be, a pleasant change in that position, and that we're sure he intends being. Motion 501 will put flesh on the skeleton of Bill 1 and make it a living, enduring correction and protection. It will make this and all future governments respect private property, and when that property is needed for the greater good, the Albertans affected will have to be fairly and justly compensated for any action that impacts their use and enjoyment or reduces its value and their ability to sell it.

Welcome to Wild Rose Country, Mr. Premier. We're all MLAs, and we really are here to help you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Seeing none, let's move on to the hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne. You know, Monday's Speech from the Throne was the first throne speech of a new Premier, a Premier who has been put in place by his political party, not by the people of this province. The Premier is in his position as a result of an internal leadership process and as a result of the selection of the people of Calgary-Foothills, and for that I congratulate him. However, that in and of itself does not create the authority to completely abandon a very clear change in direction that had been committed to Albertans by this PC government.

In the last election Albertans voted for a platform that focused on increased funding for education, increased access to postsecondary education, a commitment to eliminating child poverty, and improved access to public health care through 140 family care clinics. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, what they voted for was a government that promised to invest in public services, to build schools, and not to be the things that they scared Albertans with about the Wildrose Party. But thus far it's clear that this Premier is pursuing a direction that is an absolute repudiation of the vision put forward by his own party in the last election. In fact, it appears to me so far that he's kind of trying to be the Wildrose – you know, more power to him – but that's not what they ran on.

3:00

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, this was and is the Premier's first throne speech, and one might have expected the Premier to have put forward a more clear and innovative vision. What we got instead was legalese with a less than compelling dose of bureaucratese sprinkled with lots of verbiage that clearly lacked definitions and timelines and a plan. There was no vision. There was no true plan to implement the promises that the PCs have put

forward in the past. Rather, we've been given an agenda that, in my mind, is mostly about trying to undo the many, many, many mistakes that this government made over the course of the last two and a half years.

Really, in my view, Alberta is not actually looking for new management; I think that Alberta is looking for new leadership, completely new leadership. New leadership would answer the questions that I heard repeatedly throughout my leadership campaign this summer. We travelled the province from Fort McMurray to Red Deer to southern Alberta to the Peace Country and everywhere in between. Albertans told me that they're frustrated with being told by their government to expect less. Albertans are hard working and optimistic. They understand that they live in a province that has been blessed with natural resource wealth and a beautiful natural environment, but they don't understand why their government can't convert that to a stable, equitable, successful way of life for all citizens. They don't understand why more and more of them have less, why they struggle so much to pay their bills, why this province is falling behind in our health care, our education, and our care for vulnerable Albertans.

Albertans are young, Mr. Speaker, they're diverse, and they have incredible hope and potential. But by failing to deliver affordable and accessible postsecondary education, by letting the size of our kids' classrooms balloon, by allowing too many kids to go to school hungry, by standing by and watching as they commute for far too long to and from their schools, by underfunding schools to the point where school fees start to look like school tuition, this government is letting Albertans down. In the last election they promised a 2 per cent increase every year for education as a bare minimum, which would have gone a long way to solving some of the problems I've just outlined. However, they didn't come through with that. Albertans just don't understand why we would not want to invest more in our schools to improve the educational opportunities for young Albertans.

The other thing that's going on, of course, is that Alberta families are concerned about what happens as they age. Their parents are aging, and they're also planning for their own retirement, and they're also worried about their future and their ability to secure affordable long-term care for themselves and their loved ones. Now, in the last election the PCs promised 5,000 more spaces in continuing care. We don't argue with the need for more spaces for seniors; we do think that they should be publicly funded, publicly delivered. They should be affordable. But we also believe that continuing care is not the right answer, that, in fact, we need to be talking about long-term care or nursing care or nursing homes because long-term care is the difference between being asked to pay for health care out of your pocket, as you would with continuing care, versus enjoying the benefits of our much-treasured system of medicare.

Not too long ago, Mr. Speaker, I spoke with a paramedic who told me about attending a resident in a continuing care facility. He assured the staffperson that there was no immediate need to take the patient to the ER but said that every few hours the patient's vitals should be monitored. He was shocked to be told about how that would require roughly \$40 per assessment of the monitoring. That's the difference between long-term care and continuing care, my friends, and as more and more Albertans learn about that difference, they become increasingly suspicious of a government that intentionally maintains a strategy of misleading Albertans about what their plan is for seniors care going forward. But now not only is this government failing to deliver on public long-term care; they're only delivering on half of the spaces that they promised in the last election.

The long-term care that we do have is also in crisis, and the government is failing to fund that properly. A couple of months ago I met with constituents who were worried about the care that her mother and his wife received. They described being called to a publicly administered long-term care facility repeatedly in the middle of the night because there weren't enough staff there to keep their mother safe. They talked about the staff telling them how there's a tremendous increase in the number of fall injuries in long-term care after a certain time of day because the number of staff on shift goes down.

They said that the only way they could be sure that their mother or their wife would be safe would be if they hired somebody themselves to come in and watch over them during the night. A very helpful caregiver pointed them to several other families and said: "See that person there? That person isn't paid by us; that person is paid by the family. See that person over there? That person is not paid by us; they're paid by the family." They're paid privately to come into publicly run long-term care because we no longer fund that to provide the service that is necessary to keep aging Albertans safe and secure and healthy in the way we all expect. This is what our Conservative government is doing to our health care system.

While Alberta's economy has continued to thrive, Albertans themselves are falling behind. There is a rapidly growing level of inequality in our province. We've heard just recently about a troubling increase in the number of Alberta families who are relying on food banks, and indeed the rate of food bank usage is growing faster in Alberta than in any other part of the country. On top of that, we hear about a shortage of affordable housing, and we hear about how in homeless shelters in Calgary almost half the people are actually working full time but can't find a place to live. Then again, we also know statistically that almost half a million Albertans are paid a wage that prevents them from earning a living wage as defined by people who look at the bare minimum that people require to put a roof over their heads, to raise their kids, and to feed them healthy food.

This is what's happening in our province, and this is not a vision that Albertans are telling me that they understand given the prosperity that we have in this province. Rather, this is a picture of a government that is failing, failing in a repeated number of areas.

We have a government, of course, that got elected by talking about a plan to eliminate child poverty in five years. Yesterday the Premier kind of acknowledged that his throne speech failed to deal with that issue at all and said: well, we're talking about indigenous Albertans, so we're kind of dealing with poverty. Well, that's kind of true, but it's really not. The fact of the matter is that a comprehensive antipoverty program, one on which this government engaged many Albertans across the province over the last two or three years, has many elements to it, many components, and none of those components will be addressed through the paltry reference to the issue that was included in the throne speech by our new Premier. So what it says to me is that they have abandoned that fundamental and very symbolic promise and commitment that they made to Albertans and their families in the last election.

These broken promises on health care and on education and on equality are not the kind of future and don't provide for the kind of opportunity that Albertans anticipate and expect in a province as wealthy as ours. Instead, what we saw in the throne speech was warnings about how what we needed to do was to be ready to sacrifice some more and to compromise some more and to pull back our expectations some more because, heaven forbid, you know, we're not actually a province that has the greatest nonrenewable resource wealth of pretty much any jurisdiction in

the world. We're not, apparently. Instead, we are a province that needs to tamp down our expectations and ensure that we don't have any great hopes for the ability of our kids or our kids' kids to enjoy true equality of opportunity in the future.

And why is that? Why is it that we have a new Premier who is quietly warning us that we should temper our expectations and that we shouldn't expect all Albertans to take part in our prosperity? Well, the reason for that is that we are sacrificing these ideas of ensuring that everybody shares in our prosperity. We are sacrificing these things for the value of pursuing low taxes for the very wealthy and for multinational oil companies in our province. That's what it comes down to. It is a choice. Every day this government makes a choice. Do they ask Albertans to pay their fair share based on the level of wealth they enjoy, or do we cut back on education, cut back on health care, reduce people's expectations so that we can be sure that the very, very wealthy pay the lowest, lowest taxes? That's a choice, and this government is clearly making the latter choice. But I would argue that most Albertans don't agree with that choice anymore. They have a much more innovative, hopeful view of the way our province can go forward.

3:10

What do Albertans want, and what should we be seeing? Well, Albertans deserve better than more broken promises because, at the end of the day, it's not just about the, quote, unquote, province doing well. It's about kids, about seniors, about families, and about communities, about them doing well. Albertans believe in opportunity, innovation, diversity, and optimism, and that's what they want their government to focus on, too. They want their children to grow up in a province where they're given a chance to attend university or pursue a trade regardless of who their parents are and how much they earn. Albertans want opportunities for good, permanent, well-paid jobs, and they know that the government has a role to play in both of those objectives.

An NDP government would pursue a value-added strategy to ensure that our resources are upgraded more here in the province because we know that that's how you build long-term, sustainable employment opportunities for Albertans going forward. We want to work towards increasing the amount of upgrading that happens in this province because we know that that would go a long way to ensuring the future prosperity of this province.

Albertans are also innovative and hard-working people, and they believe in tackling challenges head-on with new strategies and new ways of thinking. We're forward looking. We're hopeful about the future. That's who we are, and that's why an NDP government in Alberta would embrace innovative technologies and new ways of doing things, because we know that there is a huge untapped potential for clean jobs and renewable energy in this province. But we know that we also need a government that prioritizes it.

We're not that far, Mr. Speaker, from being able to move away from the dirty, outdated fuels of the past, and we know that we need to do it. An Alberta NDP government would stop lagging behind the rest of the country, and instead we would genuinely lead the country in those kinds of strategies by taking real action as opposed to simply putting out press releases with descriptions of vague action or, in more cases than not, inaction.

The other thing we know, Mr. Speaker, about our province is that the values of many Albertans are moving well beyond the values that are held and reflected in this House by many of the conservative members of this Assembly. In particular, Albertans support diversity and inclusion, and Albertans are frustrated and losing patience with a government and an Official Opposition

which appear unwilling to take the steps that are necessary to truly embrace people from all communities and all minority groups, including and especially Albertans who are members of sexual minority groups. It is time for us to move into, dare I say it, the 21st century. Well, let's try the 20th because, really, many of us were there in the 20th.

But even if we go with the 21st, it's time for the rest of the folks here to join us and to take real action to ensure that we genuinely protect the rights of these Albertans in every public institution that we can, which includes every school in the province which receives public dollars from this Assembly. No school should be allowed to prevent those initiatives.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under 29(2)(a)? There have been no take-ups.

We'll go to Calgary-Buffalo next and then to Medicine Hat. Carry on, please, Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to respond to the throne speech, and I'd like to start by congratulating the hon. Premier and the new members – the Minister of Health, the Minister of Education, and the Member for Calgary-West – on their by-election victories. I will note that I was particularly moved by the Member for Calgary-West's maiden speech, shall we say, which noted public service and commitment to a sense of community and a sense of building Alberta. It was an excellent job and one that I was very moved by.

But if we look at the throne speech, there's no doubt that we are, I guess, being told that we are under new management, yet the same problems exist here in Alberta for this government and, actually, for a population that existed under the old management. These problems have not magically gone away or disappeared or been made less important than they were under the leadership of our former Premier and the like.

If we look at the throne speech, it seems to concentrate on five different areas: focused commitment to sound, conservative fiscal principles; ending entitlements and restoring public trust; maximizing the value of our natural resources; respecting property rights; establishing our province as an environmental leader; and increasing Albertans' quality of life by being a leader in the areas of health, education, seniors' care, and skills training.

That and, I guess, \$1.86 gets you a cup of coffee at Tim Hortons, because throne speeches, although nice and long on rhetoric, don't appear to be offering many solutions, and I can't seem to find any contained in this document or any solutions that have been presented on the Order Paper to date that actually address the fundamental concerns that face everyday Albertans, from children going to our school system and young adults going to postsecondary to seniors needing long-term care in this province. None of these things have been addressed in any real, substantial manner that we will make people's lives better today or into the future.

But let's just talk about this, a focused commitment to sound, conservative fiscal principles. To be honest, from this side of the House, I am befuddled by what this actually means. At one time in my life in this Legislature it was that the party across the aisle believed that we will never go in debt again. In fact, I believe they passed a law on this, and that was supposed to be sound conservative principles. Now we get to a place in 2012 where sound conservative principles are taking on a large amount of debt to build Alberta going forward and dividing things out in that way.

To be honest with you, I guess "fiscally responsible" should be the word that we actually go forward with. In my view, being

fiscally responsible is paying for what you use in taxes. I think that is a generally accepted definition by political parties and economists as a reasonable way to go forward. Now, we use debt instruments from time to time to build things that matter to Albertans and to other people, but that doesn't get away from the basic principle of fiscal responsibility, paying for what you use in taxes.

We in Alberta here have taken the easy way out. We don't tax anybody, and we spend all the oil wealth in one generation, which I think – so would anyone if they spend two minutes thinking about that as a public policy position to base this province on – is simply lunacy. I'll repeat that. The principles that we're currently governing under on our fiscal management are lunacy. Not taxing anyone and spending all of the oil wealth in one generation is not a plan for success. We can see that. A reasonable position would be whether you want small government or large government, to have your citizens pay for what you use in taxes, and save the oil wealth for future generations.

Well, that principle has not been followed through on. In fact, if we haven't learned that by now, that what we have done here in this province is simply silly, I do not know when we will learn that lesson. No one sitting in this Legislature can look at what has transpired over the last 25 years and say that this has been a reasonable, prudent fiscal plan going forward.

I'll remind everyone where we are and what this society needs, and I think it was laid out very well in the Progressive Conservative election platform, one that I was, frankly, quite hopeful about, one that I hope your government would be still trying to fulfill, which doesn't seem to be the case, looking at this throne speech. The needs addressed in that platform were the needs that needed covering. You know, we can go forward and look at it.

3:20

We needed 50 new schools. In fact, we probably needed 87 just to keep up with population growth. Where are we on that promise? Well, not very far, Mr. Speaker. From what I've seen here since we've been back in the Legislature under new management, it is no further along. We will not see these schools until long after 2016. By the way, people are still moving to this province in droves, and the problem doesn't get better. It only exacerbates. The longer we wait, the longer kids are going to have to be jammed into classrooms that are full, bused for hours across the way, and the like. We're not moving forward on this; we're treading water.

I know this government sees a magical payday happening in 2018, when oil sands projects reach payout and the like, but remember what you've done here since '08. You have essentially sacrificed the opportunity of little kids to get the education they need going forward, in light of some magical payday that may be coming in 2018, because that's the only way your numbers work and that you can build anything. I think we all know that. The fiscal structure is broken. Simply put, you haven't addressed that, and maybe we haven't addressed it for a long time in this province. But those problems are still there that were outlined in the platform in 2012.

Look, there were some other good things in that platform, and the hon. leader of the New Democrats brought them up. Eliminating child poverty in five years: well, that was a pretty good start. Right now in this province we have over 90,000 children who are living in poverty. We have not made one iota of progress on that file since it was promised in the last election, and we heard very little of what we're going to do for those families in this throne speech.

You know, to exacerbate where our fiscal structure has gotten us, we look at how to support families that are truly in need. We have the lowest welfare payments in Canada, okay? How is it that a single mom with two kids can make a go of it when we have the lowest rates in Canada? Is this fair to those children? Is it fair to providing them some opportunity for success in the future? I don't know. It doesn't seem like a good way to go. For me, it's actually empowering people to try to succeed, allowing their kids some decency and some semblance of being able to go forward. It doesn't appear that that is a way forward, to me.

If we look to further issues that are going on in this province, not only in education but in postsecondary, we have the lowest university participation rate in the nation. That, to me, does not seem like a good long-term trend to be going on. In fact, only 17 per cent of Alberta's youth go to our postsecondary system right now, compared to Ontario, that has roughly 25 per cent of their population engaged in some sort of postsecondary education. Is that a good long-term trend, Mr. Speaker? I don't think so.

The clearest path to economic success for individuals and students and, in fact, for our society is a knowledge-based economy. For those students who get postsecondary degrees, the statistics bear out that they receive higher incomes, contribute more to the public good, and lead more successful lives. Why do we have the lowest university participation rate in the nation? It's because we don't have the university spaces for them to go to. It is the direct responsibility of this government for not fixing a fiscal structure that has long been broken. These are the facts.

If we look further down where we are going and we look at our long-term care spaces, there is a tremendous need, and it has been built up over the course of some time now. We have not invested in public spaces for people to go to get the care they need. Instead, we have gone down the path of a complicated system of four different levels of privatized care, that either you can afford or you can't afford, which simply goes against the principle that we have followed in this country since 1967, that health care would be made available to you on a timely basis based on your need, not on the amount of money you have in your bank account.

We have many seniors now who have reached that age that simply can't afford \$1,800 a month at a continuing care space or something to that effect. We need to go back and revisit whether this policy we have followed truly enables Albertans to age in a reasonable, legitimate fashion and what actually makes sense for our society going forward. In fact, if you look at other provinces that have not gone down the path of Alberta, their outcomes on seniors' care are less costly and actually enable seniors to, I guess, age in a more reasonable fashion. We have to look at these systems we've put in in Alberta and assess whether we're truly doing what's in our best interests for the long run.

Hey, you guys might have the politics right, you know. You guys may have the politics right with being the lowest taxed jurisdiction by a country mile and not building schools, not building long-term care spaces, not moving on things like full-day kindergarten, which are necessary in this province, not moving on to an early childhood care system that actually embraces and frees up families to do what they need to do to succeed, and the like. I think we need some of that thinking here in Alberta as to what can actually move more people to the middle-class lifestyle.

We also look at what's happening out there in Alberta. I think we've reached a crisis point with where we are in our affordable housing situation. Yes, we did institute a 10-year plan to end homelessness, but it's simply not moving the ball forward as much as we can. I think it's time for us to revisit what many MLAs in this Legislature did in 2006 and 2007, when they came up with a good framework of 72 recommendations, that went to the then

Premier, on how to really have an affordable housing strategy. I would encourage people to look into that. It was a whole comprehensive list of various things that would have actually moved the meter and alleviated many of the problems we have now.

Instead, we chose the low-hanging fruit from that list of 72 and instituted things that I think supported the existing framework of the building community and served their needs but didn't address the fundamental root causes of where we need to go on an affordable housing strategy. If we would have done the politically difficult thing at that time and instituted those 72 things, my goodness, we would not be where we are now.

Oftentimes the solutions are not necessarily innovative; you just have to look at what actually works. Sometimes bringing in revenue to pay for the services that Albertans use, need, and, in fact, want would be a reasonable place to succeed. Right now if we can't figure out that our fiscal structure is broken when we can't build schools, when we can't get long-term care spaces, if we spend all the oil wealth in one generation, my goodness, when are we going to act? When are we going to put this province's future first instead of our political bacon?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see no one wishing to take it up.

Let's move on to Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Edmonton-Calder, followed by Calgary-McCall, followed by Medicine Hat, and there will be others after that.

3:30

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to add my congratulations to the Premier and the Members for Edmonton-Whitemud, Calgary-West, and Calgary-Elbow on their recent by-election victories.

The Premier's first throne speech is somewhere around the 44th throne speech of this PC government. Who knows how many. I guess I just want to say that my overwhelming feeling is disappointed, very, very disappointed that in a province of 4 million hard-working people, in a province so rich in commodities, so rich in natural beauty, with so many things going for it, on the edge of being such a leader in Canada that our new Premier and our 44-year government didn't have a stronger vision, a stronger idea that would encompass some new ideas, some individualism, some chances to work together, some chances to grow together.

There were three things I did like about it, though. First of all, somewhere on the last or the second-last page it mentioned a new volunteerism strategy. My goodness, is this overdue. Alberta and Cypress-Medicine Hat are absolutely full of capable, hard-working, caring Albertans who do so much for their neighbours, for their communities, their friends.

The Wildrose in the full campaign two and a half years ago had an idea to increase the tax credit for volunteerism. Totally optional. If somebody wanted to do it out of the goodness of their heart or if somebody didn't feel it was necessary, totally optional. But what a great way to expand the opportunity for people who needed to do more that needed a little bit of help. What a great opportunity to take care of a family member or take care of a neighbour, to do some work in the community, make our community stronger on a very efficient, caring basis. I hope this government will actually do something with that in the next year or so.

Hey, I found the words "no sales tax" in there. Very nice to see that. Medicine Hat and Cypress-Medicine Hat, we're very conscious of the fact that we pay our share through royalties on natural gas, Albertans having the highest average income tax, but

we're also very, very conscious of the fact that on Saturdays and Sundays our mall parking lots, our downtown parking lots are full of cars with green-and-white licence plates. It's partly because of the sales tax. Glad to see it in writing, but in two and a half years I've seen the PC Party across the floor break several promises, right back to two and a half years ago: campaigned on the left and then, possibly because of good ideas of the Wildrose opposition, decided to govern more on the right, breaking all their promises, leading to six months off in here, anyway, as a new Premier was selected. So I'm a little concerned about the no-sales-tax promise.

I've recently heard about the new Premier talking about looking into a progressive tax. Again, we pay the highest average income tax. Albertans already pay the most tax. And, of course, a month or so ago the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations openly mused about how members opposite were looking at all taxes. Couple this with the broken promises I've seen, and we'll see where we go. I hope Albertans will hold you accountable for it.

The third part I liked, again a Wildrose idea, a Wildrose platform, in education: a return to the education basics of literacy and numeracy. We've seen this gallery full of people with the same ideas. We've all had several phone calls, e-mails, and letters from constituents, parents, grandparents, concerned Albertans about what new education policies did to cause a decline in our kids' scores and ability. The saving grace was how good our professionals were, how caring Albertans were to immediately step in and make sure something was done.

Like the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I too thought there were five themes. The first two I clearly remember from two Premiers ago, the throne speech a year ago: reducing interprovincial trade barriers. I bet if we dug that one up, it might be on all 44 of them, so it makes me wonder how seriously our government means this or if it is just politics. As we've heard time and time again, Alberta's bureaucracy is onerous. It slows business down. It slows the movement of money and the creation of wealth and the creation of jobs. I was reminded on the weekend about a guy who has a ranch in the Rocky Mountain House area who needed to get hay into B.C., and the easiest way to do it was to take it down to Montana and up around that way. I'm thinking: "My goodness, this is progress? This is how a country with this commodity base, with its hard-working people base works?" I hope the government really means that, and I hope they do something about it.

Number two, again in the throne speech two Premiers ago, a year or so ago, access to markets for oil and gas. As a matter of fact, I think this Premier said that 16 months from now we could hold him accountable on access to markets for oil and gas because of his past experience and past background. I hope he makes it. I hope he makes it. It's good for Alberta to get this access that we need to have more markets for our valuable commodities, to have more wealth and more markets for the hard work that Albertans do. I hope this new hire that he was bragging about yesterday after the vote didn't work out can explain what happened, be held accountable, do a better job in the future.

The Premier today mentioned that we had the balance right between the environment's rules and regulations and the tremendous value of Alberta's commodities while, once again, the lack of progress on Keystone, the zero progress on Gateway. Line 9 and Energy East don't seem to be moving too quickly either. I would hope that real, legitimate work be done on this. Let's remind Canadians, let's remind the world how important, how valuable cheap energy for the whole world is and the tremendous wealth and opportunities for all Albertans and all Canadians that our commodities in this province can provide. Let's all do what we can to tell the world the great work that these companies do and to increase the wealth opportunities.

The third theme I saw in the throne speech was schools: build schools, build schools, build schools. A year and a half ago we had 19 schools that were going to be built. It looked like Alberta Infrastructure did nothing but plan 19 schools for a year. My goodness, I don't know what it would cost to have Alberta Infrastructure just do that for a year. Even though the government was told at the outset that it couldn't happen, that the industry didn't have the capacity, that it wouldn't happen, that all went ahead, and not a single one of those schools was built. I think it was the last two Premiers, certainly was the last two Infrastructure ministers, as they flip-flopped and flip-flopped and everybody got moved around, that stood up and said: "We'll make it. We'll make it. We'll have them done." Well, that turned quick to none of them done.

My understanding is that 50 schools are supposed to be due by September 2016, which means that they have to be done by June 2016 for teachers and maintenance people and the final touches to be put on through the summer of 2016. Guys, I'm hearing loud and clear from the industry: "You can't make it. You can't do the design. You can't build it. You won't have the 50 schools." I hope you don't stand up and insult Albertans' intelligence in the next year and a half telling us they're going to be done when it's clear that the answer is there that they can't be. Let's build schools when and where we need them, let's build them in an efficient manner, and let's try to have the Alberta government return to be a preferred client in the eyes of Alberta Infrastructure and construction companies so the taxpayer can get the most value, so the taxpayer can get the most schools.

Sorry that I have to bring it up: \$375 million on the federal building. How much on the suite that was there, isn't there, still is there? It's just furnished with office furniture instead of bedroom furniture and household furniture. I'm sorry I brought it up, but, guys, that's 20 schools.

3:40

Another thing in the throne speech that caught my eye that I liked: the government is going to hold the rate of increase on spending for government operations. It will be kept below population growth and the rate of inflation. Marvellous. I hope you do it. It makes total sense. And partly it makes total sense – I want to reference an excellent report that Mark Milke from the Fraser Institute put out called Alberta's \$22-billion Lost Opportunity.

I'll just quickly give you a summary. Since 2005-2006 the PC Alberta government has spent 54 per cent more – 54 per cent more – on operating and programs than inflation and population growth warranted or would have suggested or whatever the right word is. So from 2005-2006 that's \$22 billion that has been spent on operating and programs from the baseline in '05, adding inflation and adding population growth, \$22 billion dollars that could have gone to infrastructure, could have gone to the heritage trust fund, could have prevented the \$10 billion in debt that your government has added to our next generation's tax problem, or could have gone to reduce our current tax, a \$22 billion lost opportunity. Even though the new Premier in this government's sentence seems to refer only to government operations and not program spending, it is very, very much a step in the right direction.

The fourth theme I want to talk about is property rights. The new Premier said: it is so important that it'll be the first bill; I understand the importance of property rights; I understand that the earlier PC government crossed the line and things have to be changed. There are 28 words in the throne speech that talk about what your government is going to do for property rights. Bill 1, the one we were all waiting for since the PC leadership, is seven words.

Repealing Bill 19, which was never proclaimed and leaves a big, big rural base – and I think maybe someday the urban base will understand how infringement on property rights will affect them, whether it's the right to work, the right to earn, intellectual property rights, all of these things that are so comprised in the individuality that I cherish and that many people in Cypress-Medicine Hat cherish in life. It wasn't touched at all. It's going to a committee, I think, even though it's been four or five years in the making.

Statutory consents that make up the value of property, statutory consents that include water licences, feedlot operations, the right to grazing leases, can still be removed by cabinet, can still be removed without access to courts, can still be removed without fair, timely compensation. Incredible. I recall from some of the meetings before the last election that no other western democracy anywhere has this.

If our new Premier, our new reset on the government's first look at changing property rights, is eliminating a bill that was never proclaimed and two Premiers ago had some significant changes done to it – guys, I think you're going to have to keep going. You're going to have to keep going to win back the hearts and the votes of rural voters, never mind the regulatory takings that I want to talk about next.

I want to take a second to talk about Cypress-Medicine Hat. I am so fortunate to represent Cypress-Medicine Hat.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Let's go to Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so curious as to why this member is so proud to represent Cypress-Medicine Hat.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you very much. People are wonderful; quality of life is great. The scenery is beautiful: the Cypress Hills, the wide-open spaces, ranches that are a township or bigger. The great, great stewardship that these ranchers and landowners have. They don't overgraze. Environmentally they take care of things for the next generation. I think that this Assembly needs to know, though, that our city is not growing. Our economy is not good. Unfortunately, our community foundation just put out a vital statistics report that showed we have the highest percentage of minimum wage and people working beneath the poverty line in all of Alberta.

We love our individualism. We love our economy; at times we rode very high. But I just want to remind everybody about two things that this government has done that have drastically hurt us. The 2008 royalty review drove countless service companies out of our area, drove countless jobs out of our area. Yeah, then the price of natural gas corrected, and maybe it wasn't totally the PC government's fault, but it certainly was a factor. Be careful what you do with rules and regulations.

Speaking of that, the federal government through the Species at Risk Act slapped a sage grouse protection order on the area in February. The federal government right now is doing a review of the horned lizard in the same area. The sage grouse protection order could have totally been prevented if the government of Alberta would have put in a provincial protection order. Ten out of 11 states that have the sage grouse have done this because they know it's better to protect the sage grouse, they know it's better to protect ranching, and they know it's better to protect the economy. We could have done the same and still can. Please work on it for us.

I was also surprised how little the throne speech talked about health care. My goodness, no specific promises, just that additional work is under way to address patient access, waiting times, the need to speed up, stuff we've heard for years and years; \$19 billion, 44 per cent of our budget, and hardly mentioned. As a matter of fact, in my constituency office the two calls I get the most are from people who have gone to Kalispell or Great Falls and paid \$23,000 to \$29,000 for a knee or a hip because they got tired of waiting three years in Alberta for a similar procedure. It doesn't seem right. We are a lot richer jurisdiction, lots of room for improvement.

A Medicine Hat emergency doctor, a very strong advocate for public health, Dr. Paul Parks, has talked time and time again that this government had dropped the ball on long-term beds, how each long-term bed saves \$1,000 to \$1,200 instead of having them in acute-care beds. It seems like such a no-brainer to build the proper number of long-term beds and save that \$1,000 to \$1,200 per patient per day in an acute bed and free up those beds for those that really need them.

The last thing I'd say is democratic accountability. If you really want to walk the walk or talk the talk, whatever the saying is, make the election laws that we just saw – make it so that during a by-election, like in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, you can't make spending promises. One of your ministers has now started off on the wrong foot. He has started off where people are concerned about things that were number seven on their priority list being done and done first. Four million Albertans deserve better.

Thank you.

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

Seeing no one to take that up, let's move on to Edmonton-Calder, followed by Calgary-McCall.

3:50

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some interest to speak on the throne speech that we had here on Monday. Certainly, it's a great opportunity for Albertans to begin to re-engage in the political process. We haven't been using this Chamber for many months, so I think Albertans are very anxious to see action on so many different issues that concern them and concern their families.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I would like to just offer my congratulations, before I begin my reply to the throne speech, to the four by-election winners. Certainly, it is a difficult thing to win any seat. Just a friendly reminder that it is a provisional issue when we do by-elections. Certainly, we as Alberta New Democrats engaged and found a lot of very interesting things to learn as well, particularly in Edmonton-Whitemud. We only had four weeks to organize and to come through, and we managed to increase our results by 13 percentage points, so we like to think that maybe we didn't lose the seat, really, but just ran out of time. Certainly, we'd look forward to doing that again soon. Dr. Turner was a very, very good candidate, and I think he engaged the political process very, very well.

As I said before, the Speech from the Throne was being awaited with bated breath by so many thousands of Albertans who were looking for direction on urgent issues that concern them and their families. While I certainly found some reason to be optimistic or to look for some points of interest in the speech, I really look at it more from the things that are absent in the throne speech rather than what is being said.

Certainly, we know from going through many elections and through polling and from what Albertans tell us anecdotally time and time again that they're most concerned about their economic well-being, their capacity to look after themselves and their families, the security that comes with being able to look after their families. They're concerned about the things that we own together, those things that are entrusted to us here in the Legislature to ensure that there's a public health system there when we need it for ourselves and our families and that that is a publicly delivered health system that is available to us. We look to education to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to get the very best education for themselves and for their children, both from K to 12 and through postsecondary. Finally, we look to build the infrastructure that's necessary to meet the needs of a very quickly growing economy and a very quickly growing population as well.

When I was listening to the throne speech here on Monday, I think a key sentence really jumped out at me, and that is that the government makes a commitment to keep government expenditures below the rate of population and below the rate of inflation. I realize that we have some philosophical differences about this, but certainly we cannot deny the fact that this commitment to keeping spending below the growth of population and the economy essentially means cuts to essential government services. You simply cannot pay for the needs of more than 4 million people – their public health concerns, their education concerns, and their infrastructure concerns – if you are in fact cutting or not meeting the needs of population growth.

Mr. Speaker, that's the reason, really, that this Legislature and this level of government exists in the first place. It's to look after those essential public needs and interests. If we choose to cut those, then, in fact, not only are we just not meeting those responsibilities, but we're not looking at reality squarely in the face. The fact is that the population is growing. We have more Alberta citizens, and the economy is still growing, too.

With that in mind, certainly I've seen not just a number of throne speeches in my tenure here in the Legislature but a number of budgets that come from this sort of attitude. While people say, "Oh, well, it'll be perhaps a flat budget," if you don't meet the needs of the growth of the economy and the population, then it effectively becomes a cut.

I find it interesting as well that built into this throne speech there seems to be some latent anxiety or a sort of paranoia, I think, that comes with this government. I know that they like to have this shingle, under new management, somehow tentatively nailed somewhere on the new government, but it seems as though they are still looking over their shoulder with this throne speech more than looking forward. I must say that this throne speech and the legislative agenda that I see before us, Mr. Speaker, could very easily have been brought forward by the Official Opposition, the Wildrose. I think that they would have buttressed, perhaps, Bill 1 in terms of property rights. They might have done some few minor adjustments, but really this throne speech and this legislative agenda before us is fully interchangeable, in my mind, to what we might have seen from the Official Opposition Wildrose if they'd had an opportunity to present both a throne speech and a budget.

You know, I don't see that as new management, really. I see that as politics and watching over one's shoulder with the idea that they can hear footsteps coming to get them. When you do choose to make a new direction, Mr. Speaker, I would think that you would go more to a wider vision of governance that looks to expand and strengthen public health care, looks to expand and strengthen our postsecondary education, and so forth. Rather, I see quite the opposite, and ultimately I feel disappointed and a little

bit hurt as well, I must say. You know, when people make promises, you know that it's probably not true, but you get all sort of teased by the possibility, and then, sure enough, inevitability – right, Member for Calgary-Mountain View? – we do in fact ultimately get disappointed.

Now, I mean, I realize that a throne speech is sort of setting broader strokes, but then we can only judge a government by its actions. What I'm looking at through the legislative agenda, which is the action that we would actually see on specific issues: again, very large gaps that make me really wonder exactly where we're going with the future of this province. I'm concerned about the inherent cuts that that might imply.

The absence in the throne speech and the legislative agenda of real, meaningful commitment to strengthening health care I think is one of the biggest concerns that I have. Certainly, in my own constituency of Edmonton-Calder I've been receiving a lot of specific information about individuals that are having a hard time accessing compassionate care. I've had several complaints from my constituents in Edmonton-Calder about not getting the adequate support, looking for compassionate care for family members – this is palliative care, where people are gravely ill – and not getting the care that they need. People want to stay in their homes, but they need another level of support in order to do so. On a number of occasions I see that compassionate palliative care simply fails people at the very most crucial, vulnerable moments of their lives, really.

Another issue which is very interesting is that people, again in my constituency, are always concerned about security and the capacity for police to provide that security. I know that's a direct municipal responsibility, but we see these things filter down very easily. I think that the current Minister of Health knows this very well. The municipal level of government has its hands tied to meet some of these needs because the provincial government collects so much more revenue and has so much more indirect influence on how things such as crime and policing can be actually delivered in this province.

I find it very interesting on a very, very local level that we used to have a community neighbourhood empowerment team that had very specific interrelationships with community-based police officers, yet the municipality has cut this program. The municipality tells me, my councilors tell me that that's because of inadequate provincial funding globally for large municipalities. Each thing has a cause and effect, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, my own constituency and I think that many urban constituencies around the province are feeling less secure because of the lack of adequate provincial funding that goes to things such as community police officers and, like I said, such innovative programs as the community neighbourhood empowerment team that we had but don't have anymore in Edmonton-Calder.

4:00

Another issue that is very close, I think, to many people's hearts around the province is just the high cost of monthly expenses here in the province of Alberta, that our rents, mortgage rates are inordinately high for regular working people to afford. They're paying much more of their monthly income for accommodation. Again, an absence in the throne speech and in substantive legislation to what might protect individuals from inordinate rental increases and so forth I think is a very obvious gap in this throne speech and in this legislative session as well.

Another issue that really, I think, is coming home to hit very hard in these winter months is the cost of utilities. Again, my constituency office in Edmonton-Calder has many, many, many anecdotal complaints about the high cost of utilities and the lack

of regulation and transparency around the billing of those utilities, too. We know that we can, in fact, in this legislative body enact regulation and laws that could make, at the very least, utility bills more transparent so that people can see where their money is going and how much they're spending per month.

Also, I would venture to say, Mr. Speaker, we have a responsibility in this Legislature to look for ways to make essential home heating and electricity bills more affordable for Albertans on a month-to-month basis. Certainly, by deregulating the electricity market, we've blown open and exposed individuals to inordinately high monthly power costs. So, too, I would say that we should consider the converse, which is to bring those prices back to something that people can more afford. If you don't even have your electricity on, people still have a substantial bill from line charges and other sorts of miscellaneous things that are neither clear nor fair, I would suggest, as monthly expenses put onto each family that requires electricity. And everybody does. It's not as though we have a choice to heat our homes or to have some power in our homes.

Education. Again, this is a very interesting issue for K to 12 infrastructure. My constituency, Edmonton-Caldwell, is like a cross-section of the history of the city of Edmonton. We have neighbourhoods close to the airport and so forth that are a hundred years old, and we are moving outwards to the very edge of the ring road, the Henday, where literally the houses are just being built today. All through that cross-section of concentric circles of the building of the city of Edmonton you see schools either not being utilized properly or utilized in the widest way possible or the absence of schools entirely as you move out towards the ring road to the Henday. Again, I reflect my constituents' frustration in not seeing the schools that should've been built and could've been built and will be built in a reasonable time for new neighbourhoods and the creative utilization of established schools as we move closer to the centre of the city.

You know, talk is cheap, right? We see this throne speech talking vaguely about schools, this government making, I think, unrealistic promises around schools. Let's not just build it into the vagaries of politics and the price of a barrel of oil; let's have a long-term, sustained plan to ensure that public schools are built where we need them, when we need them, on a timely basis, not just over the next couple of years but over the coming decades as well.

Again, Mr. Speaker, just in summary, then, I choose to define an individual and a government by their actions, and I certainly see vague intentions in this throne speech.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As with any Speech from the Throne it is indeed an honour and privilege to speak on behalf of my constituents of Calgary-McCall. Let me begin first by thanking all of my constituents in Calgary-McCall, who have continued to place their trust, confidence, and respect in me as their MLA. As their voice in this Assembly I am forever proud to represent them each and every day.

Alberta truly is a wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family, Mr. Speaker. I love to tell about when I came to Calgary in 1970. I was waiting at the bus stop – I've told this story before – and an older gentleman approached me and said, "Where are you from?" I said, "I'm from India." And he said, "Are you a student?" I said, "No, I'm not a student." He said, "Are you a doctor?" I said, "No, I'm not a doctor." He said, "Are you a teacher?" I said: "No,

I'm not a teacher. I just got here." And he said: "Welcome to Canada, God's country. Welcome to Alberta, the land of milk and honey." The gentleman was indeed correct. At the time I didn't know what he meant, but as time went along, I realized what he meant.

However, Mr. Speaker, having listened to the Speech from the Throne, I couldn't help but ask myself the question: how have things changed? I represent a fast-growing, dynamic, multicultural, and multilingual riding. My staff works tirelessly for my constituents, always delivering the best services and helping when required. But it is getting tougher. There are so many new Canadians, new Albertans, and most certainly new Calgarians. We need more from this government.

Mr. Speaker, I have had countless visitors to my office experiencing challenges with AINP, or the Alberta immigrant nominee program. This program is vital to our future. We are a country of immigrants. Canada was built by immigrants seeking the best and the brightest the world has to offer, yet we can't even help those who want to stay here legally and willingly. Thousands of temporary foreign workers have lost their chance to stay here permanently. Thousands. I can tell you how badly change is needed both in government policy and in programs such as AINP. Where was this mentioned in the Speech from the Throne? I didn't see it anywhere.

Our economy, Mr. Speaker, is only as strong as our workforce is. This, I feel, drastically needs improvement. Another big issue is temporary foreign workers. Lots of those temporary foreign workers' work visas are expiring, and employers cannot renew their work visas because they cannot get the LMOs. Lots of small businesses in Calgary have approached my office: "How are we going to survive? How are we going to grow? How are we going to run our businesses if these temporary foreign workers go back to their respective countries?"

Whether it is those applying under the AINP program or students trying hard to make ends meet, especially while dealing with ridiculous postsecondary tuition rates and graduating with enormous amounts of debt, Mr. Speaker, how are we helping our postsecondary education and those students who are graduating? We need a government that will work for all Albertans, not just the rich, the elite, or a favoured few. We need to support our students, not raise tuition, invest in postsecondary education, and give our next generation all the tools, skills, and resources to literally kick butt in life and in our economy. These young men and women are our future. Why not invest in them now, not tomorrow but today?

Mr. Speaker, I know the Speech from the Throne also mentioned infrastructure. For our growing province I cannot agree more. In Calgary-McCall I was the only MLA to fight for the airport tunnel. No other hon. member fought for this vital piece of infrastructure. With a newly expanded airport and a booming economy, businesses, visitors, and residents need the infrastructure to get the job done. The benefits of the airport tunnel are already being realized, which leads me to another point. The vast majority of Albertans live in urban areas. Whether they live in Calgary or Edmonton or in a suburban community nearby, they need the ability to get to and from work, school, and family activities. Albertans demand and, I would argue, deserve high-quality, modern infrastructure. Whether we are the province that invests in urban transit, ring roads, or one day even high-speed rail, we need the infrastructure in place to set up for the needs of the future. But this is not occurring.

4:10

Take, for example, the fast-growing community of Cochrane. The province and by extension this government has been promising

residents and businesses alike for over 16 years that important improvements to highway 22X and highway 1A are needed, but all that residents and businesses have heard about is delay after delay. The fastest growing communities such as Airdrie, Cochrane, Chestermere – you name it – SkyView, Redstone in Calgary need investments by this government in critical infrastructure, not Building Alberta signs, Mr. Speaker.

Actions speak louder than words, but in the end, for a government that claims to be under new management, we see the same members, the same party in power. All we see is a new Premier. As history will show us, keeping the PC brand alive is, first and foremost, their top priority.

Mr. Speaker, democracy is fragile. Every day as elected members of this Assembly we are here to represent our constituents and lead our great province of Alberta, but most importantly, we need leadership, new ideas, new direction. Sadly, despite having a new Premier and some new ministers changing portfolios, I remain unconvinced. Unconvinced.

Alberta is an amazing province, but we need a government that demonstrates leadership and starts treating all Albertans equally. We can't have second-class citizens. We need to invest today in education, social services, key infrastructure, health care, transportation needs. Mr. Speaker, programs facing massive backlogs such as AINP need proper funding and staffing. Communities like Cochrane desperately need highway improvements. Most importantly, we need a government that respects taxpayers and hard-working Albertans.

With the price of oil in decline, what is this government's plan to table a balanced budget? We heard before that the operational budget will be balanced, and I don't think that is a balanced budget. A balanced budget is money coming in, money going out, and if you have anything left over, that's surplus. If you're in deficit, that's a deficit. That is the budget. It is not a balanced budget if you have an operational budget imbalance. Then the other budget is not balanced.

The Premier, Mr. Speaker, has already ruled out a sales tax, but he has remained quiet on other means of taxation. Will this government hike user fees? Will it return to the pre-Klein days of progressive income tax? That remains to be seen. Most importantly, will this government be open, transparent, and honest with their citizens? Albertans are a tough lot. We work hard, play hard, and enjoy giving back to our community, but we need a government that is focused on diversifying our economy and saving for our future.

You can forgive me, Mr. Speaker, for raising doubts about the plan moving forward from this government. Although the PCs have elected a new leader and the constituents of Calgary-Foothills voted for the hon. member, have things really changed? It remains to be seen.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I wish to leave but one final thought for our new Premier and his recycled government. The city of Calgary is growing by over 40,000 residents a year. Our municipal government needs support and assistance from this government, but they can't do it alone. They need stable, predictable funding from the province. Our next generation is counting on the actions of this government. Do not let them down. Together let us show all Albertans that great things are possible, but we need real, committed, accountable leadership to accomplish all of this.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my constituents of Calgary-McCall and to all my colleagues in this Assembly, thank you very much. I remain steadfast in my love for, admiration of, and dedication to this wonderful province. Together I still believe we can accomplish many great things.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker. The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne. First, though, I'd like to welcome the four new members, the Premier and the other three members that are new to the Legislature. Welcome, and good luck with your new duties.

Typically the government uses a throne speech as a reset or as a tool to set a new direction or course and to announce new ideas, new plans, and new programs that are going to help move Alberta forward. I feel I'm pretty similar to most Albertans. I was never involved in politics before the last election, and I never want to be a career politician. We are a proud and hopeful society, hard working and caring, always looking for the best in ourselves, our friends, and our neighbours. We want our government to do the same.

Instead, we see an old and tired PC government that never ceases to amaze me with how much verbiage can be used, how many pages of paper can be consumed, and how much opportunity can be wasted all in the effort of saying nothing at all. No substance. No vision. No specific plans or ideas. It's just more of the same from this old and tired PC government.

This 43-year-old government likes to say that the province is under new management. Well, everyone, meet the new boss. He's just like the old boss. I guess we can add "new management" to the other PC phrases made infamous through their unending use. New management can be placed on the shelf right beside such beauties as the bitumen bubble and the gold standard. Don't forget the sky palace either. Saying "new management" over and over won't make it true, but actions can be the gauge of whether this reincarnation of the PC government can achieve their very important stated goals.

Mr. McAllister: I like the "bitumen bubble."

Mr. Pedersen: Yeah. It's pretty good.

While there are promises to follow a number of similar Wildrose policies like fiscal responsibility, ending entitlements, maximizing value of natural resources while strengthening environmental protections, protecting property rights, and addressing problems in health care, education, seniors' care, and skills and training, there are still no clear plans. If the new management wants some help with how to implement these Wildrose ideas, just let us know. We won't even ask for a bonus or a private plane. We'll do it for free.

What is obvious when one reads this throne speech is the incredible amount of backtracking the new Premier has done on previous PC policy and actions that were taken and supported wholeheartedly by almost every current PC MLA. It's the same crew with the same old ideas. How uncomfortable it must be to be sitting in the Legislature at this moment.

During the by-elections promises were made to all Albertans for what could easily be viewed as buying votes. Even our new Education minister used his appointed, unelected position to reward his own constituents with modulars for a school in the riding that he was running in. To be fair, these modulars were a need in Calgary-Elbow, but they were only seventh on the list for all of Calgary.

For a new Premier touting a new government under new management, with an emphasis on accountability and transparency, this is a huge fail for him personally as well as his now-elected Education minister. The trust has already been broken,

even before either sat a single day in the Legislature, trust that the Premier vowed the PC party was determined to earn back.

With actions like this early in the new management mandate, why should any other promise mentioned in the throne speech be taken seriously? The job of the government has now been made harder with Albertans' trust broken. Take the statement around operational budget spending being held below the rate of population growth and inflation. This will be the classic robbing of Peter to pay Paul, except Peter is almost broke. This expense and probable debt will be downloaded into the infrastructure portion of the budget, and the current savings plans will again be drained to cover this spending.

4:20

These debts will be borne and carried by generations to come, and since the need for infrastructure will not end, this government policy of borrowing has no plan of ending, leaving Albertans facing an increasing debt load. This debt, growing on a daily basis, will take away increasing amounts of operational spending just in order to service the debt, operational money that could fund programs across the spectrum from health to culture, funding that will never meet the growing needs of Albertans but will instead be allocated for projects already built. Better yet, maybe we could stop spending so much money and pay off the debt.

We in the Wildrose are always challenged on what we wouldn't build if we were in government, but with skyrocketing debt and so many promises we really have to wonder: what is it that the PCs are not going to build? Are they not going to pay off debt, are they not going to balance the budget, are they not going to build every school they're promising, or are they going to take the easy way out and raise taxes?

Property rights are raised. Bill 1 addresses the PC version of correction of bad legislation but does not go far enough to correct past indiscretions to those affected. Wildrose Motion 501 takes the appropriate steps to entrench property rights for the benefit of all owners in Alberta. I know the Premier says that he's committed to protecting property rights, and if that's the case, then I do look forward to him voting in favour of the motion brought forward by my colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka.

I appreciate the identification that there are educational challenges in K to 12, which do roll over into postsecondary, and I do look forward to working with the new Innovation and Advanced Education minister in bringing forward positive changes for students, whether young or older adults; parents; educators; institutions; and Alberta taxpayers.

The environment is of utmost importance to all Albertans, and it ties directly not only to their quality of life but to those across Canada and around the world. Our environment is theirs and theirs is ours in a global economy, and we need to be the best stewards possible. I hope Alberta gets there sooner rather than later. We have brought forward concrete ideas to protect the environment, and I hope this government follows suit.

Identifying First Nations, the Métis, and Inuit is another great step forward, but this can't be another olive branch held out without a true desire to right past wrongs, to be left unaddressed for the next Premier and cabinet to deal with. It's not enough for the Premier to just mention them in a speech, and it's not enough for him to meet with them and then fly back home. The Premier needs to fix the issues that are facing our First Nations communities, and he needs to work with our Métis neighbours and friends as equal partners.

There are still many issues from the floods of 2013. The way the DRP and LandLink were allowed to function through this as well as the 2010 floods was and is an embarrassment to this

government, and everything should be done to resolve all open files and appeals for the individuals affected. This is still an issue in Medicine Hat, and I know it's an issue elsewhere.

There are concerns around the Premier's announcement of flood mitigation projects that have not been soundly studied and evaluated for efficiency, environmentalism, and financially, and these types of decisions almost never work out the way they were intended. I do hope that the Premier and his government review this decision so that a full assessment is done before moving forward without guidance, direction, or sound advice.

I do take great pride as a member of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition as it is and has been our job to hold the government to account. If what we have contributed to the process of opposing, exposing, and proposing has been in any way an improvement to the way Alberta is governed, then we have all done our jobs as elected officials in being accountable to the people who have sent us here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the throne speech of 2014. My congratulations also to the new members of the Legislature and the new Premier.

You'll have to forgive me that after four Premiers in 10 years and eight throne speeches I'm left a little jaded hearing much the same messages rewarmed for this particular event – good ideas, high-sounding principles, and statements of intent – while I've seen in the last 10 years in the Legislature a government that plays catch-up and crisis management in one of the most challenging times of our history, with the recognition that we are a boom-bust economy.

And we still don't seem to have learned the lessons of what a boom-bust economy must do to plan better and provide for stable, dependable funding so that we're not hiring nurses one year and firing them the next, hiring teachers one year and firing them the next, establishing new programs for monitoring the oil sands one year and disbanding them the next, and, most recently, this climate change strategy of setting up a new program to support municipalities in their climate change attempts when we just disbanded Climate Change Central last year, a sterling organization that was doing good work both for communities and municipalities, also for individuals, to help them to reduce their carbon impacts. I look forward to the time when this government will stop creating change for change's sake and honour some of the commitments to the long-term well-being of the province.

[The Speaker in the chair]

It was a typical throne speech, I guess I would say, and nothing could be said about the good sentiments that were expressed. It would have been a little more believable if it was truly a new government, but in truth it is the same old government that happens to have a new Premier and a few new cabinet ministers and that new backbench individual all elected in the by-elections. But we spell by-elections "buy-elections." These elections in some ways were bought, as has been talked about repeatedly in this House, by announcements that were timed and, clearly, in a very cynical way meant to influence voters and that succeeded as they often do in our society.

This, of course, is contrary to other provinces' election rulings where there is a law, in fact, that there can be no new spending announcements. There can be no budgetary announcements during a writ period. Unfortunately, this is another deficit in our democracy where you can announce all you want in a writ period because we have no law to limit that. That along with very high donations from corporations and unions enables a very wealthy governing party to sustain its very strong campaign spending. Unfortunately, we see the result of that with a 43-year-old government that has been in power, with lots of resources to deal with, as a result of this continuing cycle of advantage and monies, giving us the best democracy money can buy, Mr. Speaker.

The vast majority of the government caucus are people elected under the previous Premier, and they made many of the mistakes and scandals that we continue to deal with and will continue over this next year to address. I would have hoped not so much for a government under new management as for new leadership, real leadership, leadership that reflects on doing the right things as opposed to management, which is focused on doing things right. Leadership has to deal with doing both, doing the right things and doing them in the most cost-effective and efficient way.

People in my constituency of Calgary-Mountain View, including those from the corporate boardrooms of Calgary, have raised a number of issues calling for a larger vision for Alberta, a more diverse economy, and a stronger commitment to renewables, to alternate energy and clean technology, to energy conservation, to policies that incent both retrofits in our commercial and residential buildings but also encourage the development of entrepreneurial investments in renewable energy that in many other countries are actually returning on the investment and providing profits to the producers of renewable energy.

We continue to see a government that's struggling with a revenue stream that is inadequate to the demands of our current population. The level of commitment to improving the care of especially our most vulnerable people in this province is lacking.

Alberta could bring in \$10 billion more in revenue a year and still be the lowest taxing province in the country. It could provide for those independent and strong monitoring systems that the world is watching for in our environment. It could provide for our disabled populations, that are still getting marginal care at best, our seniors who are struggling with inadequate care both in terms of quality and affordability. It could help with hungry kids going to school. It could help with many of the demands that, obviously, a four-million-population province is going to need with the kind of growth that we've had over the past decade.

4:30

The fear of taxes, the fear of the Wildrose continue to stymie this government and hold it in a decade-old stalemate, trying to say: we can do more with less. Well, we've done a lot more with too little, and many people are suffering in this province as a result: single parents; some of our most vulnerable kids, who need learning and behavioural and emotional help; or mental health challenges that we hear about frequently not only from the health professions but from the criminal justice system.

Some of us spent the morning hearing from some in the safe and caring schools, that they're dealing with a tremendous number of young people who are feeling discriminated against, bullied, and needing help with some of their emotional and social needs. All of these could be prevented with early intervention, appropriate professional supports, family supports, actually getting at root causes of social and poverty issues. It's ironic that this government continues to talk about its social policy framework but has failed to deliver even a definition of poverty that we can

actually work with and then hold ourselves accountable for making progress on.

There's a lot to be expected from this government, especially a government that calls itself under new management. Well, new isn't good enough, and change for change's sake isn't good enough. Where is the vision? Where is the real commitment to the long-term public interest as opposed to short-term crisis management, and where is the funding to provide for the kind of province we deserve and that we want for our children?

In that respect it's still not clear how much commitment this government does have to future generations when we are going to be passing on not only financial debt in terms of very high tuitions and financial debt in relation to the many infrastructure projects that are needed, but we are also talking about significant environmental debt with a potential for stranded assets and a failure or inability of some companies to clean up their particular developments, especially the tailings ponds, should they go under financially.

We have not taken in nearly the protective bond that's needed to ensure that we can reclaim and restore much of the northern community to any kind of viable state, and it's unconscionable that we should be leaving that to future generations instead of requiring of industry a substantial amount that would guarantee that we can clean up, not at the public expense but at the corporate expense, the impacts that they've had up there.

Alberta Liberals believe in both a strong economy and a strong society, with an environment that supports both. The government once again pitches the economy as the trade-off with the environment instead of seeing strong standards and enforcement as the cost of doing business, essential to our responsibility for habitat and species protection as well as honouring our future generations. That's not to mention our international reputation, which is now impacting our ability to sell our product internationally. How is that leadership? How is that showing Albertans that we care about the long-term well-being of this province?

Our rich agricultural heritage continues to be threatened as well by the failure of this government to enact a land-use framework, conserve rich farmland, including the chernozem soil that surrounds Edmonton and continues to be gobbled up through industrial and residential activity. Clear-cut forestry continues to threaten our eastern slopes notwithstanding Peter Lougheed's commitment to an eastern slopes policy that would ensure that our watersheds and our headwaters get the best of protection, because the true lifeblood of this province surely is our water. We're not protecting those eastern slopes, whether it be from industrial development or deforesting, and this is only going to add risk in terms of future flooding.

We need that kind of leadership that speaks not to short-term economic gains from such things as oil and gas development and clear-cut forestry on our eastern slopes but to the longer term well-being of our watershed and our sustainable surface water. How can we continue in good conscience to allow companies to inject our fresh water deep underground, never to come again, especially in southeastern Alberta, where we have no new water to provide licences for? We have maxed out our demands on our surface water in southeastern Alberta, including Calgary, yet we allow oil companies to use surface water and inject it out of the reach of our hydrological cycle. This is not leadership.

My constituents want to hear more from this government on a stronger commitment to the 3,400 homeless people in the city and the 35,000 individuals, including First Nations and seniors, who are at risk of losing their homes, that they're living in, or are unable to sustain the current levels of monthly rent fees, creating tremendous insecurity and stress that end up either on the streets

or in the health care system or in the criminal justice system. Again, it doesn't speak of a government that sees the future and invests in early intervention, prevention, supports for people that actually would allow them to reach their potential and contribute back to society as they wish to do.

Child poverty was not even an afterthought in this throne speech. Again, many of us are looking to this government for more than words but actions with hungry kids – affordable child care, full-day kindergarten – as being a tremendous investment in our people, in the long-term well-being of not only them as citizens but in their ability to enhance the community and contribute back in the future with good jobs and their own tax commitment.

Seniors' care continues to be mediocre due to the lack of real standards, the real commitment to monitoring those standards, and the lack of any kind of enforcement of standards in our seniors' care.

I was very pleased to hear the Premier commit to a stronger agenda for First Nations. I thought that was one of the most unique and important commitments this government has made. I look forward to seeing what's going to happen in our education system with respect to the curriculum on some of the First Nations experience with residential schools and the profound need in this province for honoring and reconciling with our First Nations people on the basis of knowledge, not just on the basis of rhetoric or sympathy, and providing the kind of resources that are going to be needed to help many of our First Nations people make the shift out of their inadequate housing and living standards and educational processes to those that will really work for them and allow them to succeed and be active and proud contributors to our culture and to their own, in some cases, on reserve.

When you drill down to some of the details within the throne speech, there are some warning flags. The speech indicates that spending "will be kept below the rate of population growth and inflation." This clearly can be code for two things. One is cutting government services, and the other is that we will continue the kinds of emergency funding and crisis management that will not serve the long-term interests of Albertans. There is also a mention of low taxes and no sales tax, which again reminds me that this government has not made a commitment to stable, dependable funding.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, but the time has run by.

Now we have to go to 29(2)(a). Is there anyone who wishes to take advantage of 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Eggen: Certainly, I've always admired and am interested in listening to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View carry on with his analysis.

4:40

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member.

There is, again, a commitment to low taxes and no sales tax, which again raises questions about whether we're going to be cutting services or continuing crisis management in this province and limping along with half measures for seniors, those in poverty, the disabled, and some of our First Nations priorities, which again I applaud but need to see some ability to address. Without new funding, without new staffing, without a new circle of commitment including First Nations, I don't see the deliverables. I think we need to hold ourselves accountable for those kinds of commitments made in the glory of a throne speech but, as I've said over the last 10 years, few of them delivered.

Another important statement, that Alberta will be an environmental leader, again begs the question: how? With no new

funding, with a very weak environment department that is responding to complaints, and without the real commitment to independent monitoring, it's very difficult to imagine that our environmental monitoring and our environmental reputation are not only going to serve us and our children with a better environmental condition in the future but that our international markets will respect and really enthusiastically embrace our products. We need to do better. And that, Mr. Speaker, is what I think Albertans call leadership, not management. Again, management is doing things right. Leadership is doing the right things right.

There is a vague mention in the speech about a new tailings management framework, that was talked about two years ago, new commitments made on how we're going to manage our tailings and what was going to be the consequence if companies did not manage their tailings ponds in a more progressive way. No clear accountability there.

Many interesting and important statements, vague commitments with no details and no timelines, and that is part of the problem that we as legislators have. If we fail to put in definitions, timelines, deliverables, we cannot be held accountable. I would like to encourage the government to actually put themselves out and ensure that both in the social and environmental and even the economic fields we set some timelines, some accountabilities, some deliverables and hold ourselves accountable if you want to build credibility and rebuild any sense of confidence in our democratic process, which I would argue is at an all-time low in Alberta.

The kind of turnout at the by-elections and the measures of engagement in our culture suggest that people are pretty cynical about the democratic process. I would argue that there are many things this government could do to help restore some confidence, some trust, and some legitimacy to our democratic process, including, for example, a review of the kind of first past the post voting system. I would challenge the government to think about what we used to have in Alberta, which was a proportional representation voting system, which was removed back in the late '50s and would encourage many people to realize the true impact of their vote by seeing proportions of voters resulting in proportions of legislators. At the current time it's one more thing that discourages people from participating either in the voting process or in the political and party system specifically.

We'll have to wait and see how much of this throne speech is a mirage and how much of it is actually going to be delivered upon. We must try to keep cynicism at bay. We must at the same time be skeptical of everything this government continues to say that they're committed to, and we must try to hold ourselves in a respectful dialogue around what needs to be done in this very critical time of our history to provide the kind of leadership, foresight, planning, and investments for the long-term well-being of Alberta.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Five seconds remain should anyone wish to take them. No?

Let's move on, then. We're going to Lacombe-Ponoka next, please.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and share my thoughts on the recent Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor. His Honour is truly a figure all Albertans are proud of. I certainly share in the sentiment.

Firstly, I'd like to thank the citizens of Lacombe-Ponoka for the honour and privilege of continuing to represent them in this Assembly. I will now give my response to the throne speech.

Albertans wanted the government to make a strong stance on addressing property rights here in Alberta, but sadly Bill 1 missed the point. I have heard from Albertans that the legislation should have been committed to addressing the issues in the Alberta Land Stewardship Act and other controversial pieces of legislation that impact their property rights, but it doesn't. Albertans have asked the government to show their commitment to recognizing and protecting property rights in Alberta, and this can be done.

It can be done through Motion 501. Albertans don't want the half measures of Bill 1, but I've heard loud and clear that what Albertans do want is to support the entrenchment of property rights in the federal Constitution and Charter. Motion 501 will do more for property rights protection in Alberta than any other amendment or bill. That is because it will entrench landowner rights, Albertans' rights, in Canada's highest law, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and will help this government fulfill the promise that it made to property owners in the throne speech.

Unlike Bill 1, Albertans know that Motion 501, if passed, would constitute Alberta's request that the Constitution be amended so that Albertans would have their property rights protected against any actions and laws passed by any future Alberta governments. The result of this motion would see property rights in Alberta enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Constitution. Consequently, this government would no longer have to bring forward legislation piece by piece to try and amend the mistakes that have been made in the past. As I said before, Albertans want to help this government. They want to help, and I want to help you keep this commitment that you made to Albertans on property rights in your throne speech.

Albertans know that strengthened property rights are a realistic possibility here in the province. Section 43 of the Constitution will allow this to happen. If this motion, Motion 501, goes forward and a similar motion in Ottawa passes in both the Alberta Legislature and the Houses of Parliament, we will have entrenched property rights here in the province of Alberta.

Some people might try to convince you that the section 43 formula only works for language; however, this is not the case. For example, in 1993 there was a constitutional amendment to allow a bridge to replace a ferry system in Prince Edward Island. In 2011 section 43 was used to modify the formula for apportioning seats in the House of Commons, apportioning the seats of the representatives who represent all Canadians. This is a powerful portion of our Constitution. It allows each province to put forward what they need for their province.

In one swift move if Motion 501 is adopted, we can have property rights in the province of Alberta. In one swift move we can tailor the legislative framework that has for a number of years now heavily impinged on landowner rights in Alberta. I urge you all to vote in favour of Motion 501 and see enshrined the protection of property rights for all Albertans. That's a legacy that we can all share in this Legislature. I want to share that with you; Albertans want to share that with you.

As the MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka I'm most excited to hold this government's feet to the fire on behalf of all Albertans and make sure that this government will keep their promise of building schools for Albertans. On September 23, 2014, I issued a press release on the problem of classrooms that were bursting at the seams in central Alberta. In 2012 the government promised a badly needed K to 6 school in Blackfalds, but at the time of the press release there still wasn't a shovel in the ground, and today there still isn't a shovel in the ground. During the by-election campaign many new schools were promised, one of these in my riding. I thank the government for doing this. Thank you. Thank you for recognizing that Blackfalds needs schools.

This province is in desperate need of new schools, not just in Lacombe-Ponoka but throughout the province. I thank the government for saying that these schools will be built; however, saying is not doing. Albertans need to see a real plan that shows just how the government plans to achieve this. I'd like to say that I will put my hand up and say to the government that I am going to work with you on behalf of Lacombe-Ponoka and all Albertans to achieve this. I will do this in my role in the opposition to make sure that that critical infrastructure is built. There's no room for political maneuvering in the building-of-schools business. Students need these, Albertans need these, teachers need these. Canada needs this. It's not just the province of Alberta. We are the economic engine of Canada. Canada needs us to build our schools.

4:50

For two and a half years all Albertans have been waiting to see shovels in the ground on these new schools, and so far the only shovels in the ground that we've seen are the sod turnings. This isn't acceptable. We need to get to work on these schools. What is most important is the future generation of leaders and outstanding citizens that Alberta schools produce. The youth of today are those who will lead tomorrow. Albertans demand that the government make sure that we have these schools to educate, train, nurture, and equip our children with the skills to prepare them for the life ahead, and it begins with building schools.

Wildrose and I stand alongside Albertans on this mission to get construction happening. We have to speed up the tendering and design phases. You may have read about this in my colleague Drew Barnes' infrastructure policy paper that was published last week, titled *On Time and On Budget: Addressing Alberta's Infrastructure Needs*. Because at this moment only one – one – out of 50 schools that have been promised under this government by the previous Premier has begun its construction phase, that's a hard number to swallow: two and a half years, one school.

We have ideas given to us by Albertans, and we over here are willing to share our ideas with you. We will lend these to the government to make sure these schools are built as soon as possible. You know, it really is encouraging to watch our entire policy document be adopted by the government on the other side of the aisle. It means that the people on this side of the Legislature have been doing their jobs. They've been doing the work that Albertans have requested of them. I can stand here, and I can smile and say thank you to all of my colleagues and to all of you for adopting what Albertans have asked you for.

Lacombe-Ponoka is facing rapid growth challenges. The services that will provide the community with the necessities of water and waste management must be met with appropriate funding. You heard me ask this question earlier. The town of Blackfalds and the city of Lacombe are feeling this, and it is crucial – it is crucial – that the government fulfill its promise that it made to these communities. The north leg project of the central Alberta regional waste-water commission is crucial to seeing the needs met in these very rapidly growing communities. Albertans need the Water for Life project to be more responsive to the needs of extremely fast-growing communities here in the province of Alberta, and nowhere is that identified more than in the town of Blackfalds and the city of Lacombe.

Albertans want to see a government that is concerned about these issues not just within the riding of Lacombe-Ponoka but in all areas of this province. Albertans are relying on this government to include them in their big picture, in your big picture, the one that was put out in the throne speech and not to get lost in politics, in this government's policy.

Albertans hope this government is fully committed to ending waste and to prioritizing projects that affect all Albertans. I've spoken of two of these in my comments so far, the north wastewater leg for Lacombe and Blackfalds and the schools. I realize that it's not just my constituency that faces these challenges, but we need to make sure that the government is working on behalf of all Albertans and that those needs are being addressed.

This government has promised to build what the people need and to start planning for the long term, in fact, 25 years out. Albertans hope to see this government stick to the promises that they have made in this most recent throne speech because it is clearly spelled out that there is a lot of work to be done. Unfortunately, all of that infrastructure work over the last two and a half years that should have been done on schools – well, that time has been wasted.

Now, I really hope – I really hope – that we start to see shovels in the ground. It's unfortunate that we've missed another building season because I can tell you that it does add costs. It adds costs when we start trying to put shovels in the ground in January. The ground is frozen. You know, you've got to clear away the snow. It's hard to put utilities in at that point in time. So it pushes these back even further. We need these projects. Albertans need these projects today, not tomorrow but today. It's unfortunate that we've waited two and a half years for these schools to even begin construction.

The bright side is that we've got time ahead yet. If we start today and we work together today and you take the ideas that Albertans are giving to you through us, though the Official Opposition, we will start to move forward on some of these issues. I see the promises in your throne speech. I love that you've taken them from our policy documents. I just hope that you implement them in the way that we would have implemented them, and if you don't, I will be here along with my colleagues to make sure that those promises are implemented in the way that Albertans conveyed them to us.

Thank you very much for this time. Thank you again to the constituents in Lacombe-Ponoka for my ability to represent them and present this speech to you in this hallowed Chamber.

The Speaker: Hon. members, section 29(2)(a) is available at this time.

If not – I see no one wanting to take it up – let's move on to the next speaker. Are there any other speakers? The hon. House leader for the opposition.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to stand and say a few words about the Speech from the Throne. I thought it was a very interesting document. I think there were a lot of good things in there, a lot of good words, good ideas. There were some things that I thought were a little bit vague, but hopefully we can put some meat on the bones a little bit as we go forward.

With regard to fiscal management I was happy to see that a large portion of the throne speech dealt with fiscal management and clearly was written in a way that used a lot of the language that the Wildrose over here has been using for a very long time with regard to budgets, with regard to debt, with regard to controlling our spending. I'm very optimistic about that. I think that that's good to see.

I think that we need to do more in this House to work together, especially right now, Mr. Speaker, because we do have a situation where, quite frankly, we do have a bit of a fiscal crisis developing. If oil bumps up tomorrow to \$100 or \$95, we can avoid it. But the fact of the matter is that if oil remains at \$70 to \$75, in that range, below or slightly above, we have a real problem on our hands.

We're going to have to learn to work together to do what's right for this province because there's too much at stake. It's one thing to carry, you know, \$10 billion, \$15 billion, or \$20 billion in debt, which is probably what we'll be taking on by 2016, but it's quite another if those numbers start popping up into the \$30 billion, \$40 billion, or \$50 billion range. If we do not get our fiscal house in order, that is what we will be looking at in the long term should oil prices remain where they are or near where they are right now.

So this is a very serious situation, and we need to treat it seriously and, hopefully, use this as a time to recalibrate the way we deal with finances in this province so that in future years when oil falls to these levels, we aren't left scrambling. That is, I think, a key development in our province's future. We need to make sure that we get this right and that we don't fall into this trap again of overspending so much that we put ourselves and our kids in this kind of predicament. Hopefully, we can work together in that regard.

I think that as the throne speech stated, keeping spending in line with inflation plus population growth is a good first step. It's very important not just operationally to do that but also with regard to capital. You've got to remember that capital is not just a one-time expense in most cases. Schools, roads, infrastructure, health facilities: they all have to be staffed. That's operational. They all have to be maintained. That's operational. These are real costs, so it's not just a one-off.

5:00

We have to make sure that as we move forward and we build, when we build infrastructure projects, we keep an eye out for what that's going to cost operationally going forward so that we can maintain spending increases to inflation plus population growth. I was very happy to see that in there, and I hope that we can work together to make that happen.

With regard to debt, you know, I didn't see enough in there. I would have liked to see more specifics with regard to controlling our debt. We are going to be in the \$20 billion range by the end of the 2016 budget cycle according to the government's documents, \$21 billion, actually. We need to rein that in. We need to at least have a repayment plan, a specific plan that's going to put a specific timeline in place that will show a way forward to repaying this debt and getting to the point where we don't have to take out more debt for capital. Is this going to happen overnight? No, not at \$75 oil. It's not. But we need to start thinking a little bit more long term and think about: what is the end goal here? What is the plan going to be to stop going into debt, as a first step, and then, after that, to get out of debt in a way that, of course, makes sense. Obviously, we don't want to be paying penalty charges and things like that. To put a plan in place to stop the debt and then eventually pay it off I think is very important. I didn't see too much in there about that, and I would like to see more going forward on that.

With regard to savings, again, I have been happy with some of the developments recently with regard to that. It seems like we're refocusing the purpose of our heritage trust fund more into savings. Now, of course, we don't have much money to save right now because of our predicament with the price of oil as well as our spending issues, but that is something I am happy to see. There is at least an indication that we're going to get back to the original purpose of the heritage fund, which was that we would put enough away in these times of plenty so that eventually, down the road, when oil and gas revenues decline, we would be in a situation where we could use interest from the heritage fund to replace those revenues and replace our reliance on oil and natural gas so that we didn't have to grossly increase taxes and make ourselves uncompetitive, which, of course, would lead to fewer

jobs, to people leaving the province, to becoming a have-not province. We want to avoid that, obviously, in the future.

Economic diversification is a part of that, but we have to realize that economic diversification completely away from oil and gas is not a realistic goal in the short term or even the medium term. We can work towards it, we can try to diversify as much as possible – that's important – but to say that we're going to completely replace the oil and gas economy and the revenues stemming therefrom with new industries, and so forth, that are completely unrelated to oil and gas: again, a great goal, a great initiative. Let's push that way, but it's not going to be possible in the short or medium term to do that. We need to therefore prepare to replace those revenues from oil and natural gas, and the best way to do that is through the heritage fund and through a very careful and consistent savings program. I'm happy to see that that is still a goal. It's obviously going to be slowed down somewhat because of our financial situation at this time, but long term I am very excited to see that.

I'm very curious to see Bill 2. Obviously, there are some things in Bill 2, the Alberta Accountability Act, that sound promising. I'm prepared to look at these bills – the same with Bill 1 – as first steps. I mean, I'm going to support Bill 1. I'm probably going to support Bill 2. I haven't seen it yet, obviously. But there will be proposals and amendments made to both of those bills, particularly Bill 2, regarding ways that we can cut down on the size of government, frankly, and that culture of entitlement. I'm not convinced that it's been taken care of in the last month. I think that there's still work to do there.

One of those things that I really would like to see in Bill 2 or an amendment to Bill 2 would be a cap on severance and bonuses for all government employees. I put forward a bill last session that would cap severance at \$100,000 for under five years of service and \$200,000 for over five years of service. I think that's reasonable. I still think that's very generous, actually. We have to put that in place so that on a go-forward these ridiculous severance allowances that have happened in the past – yes, it has been in the past. We've got to make sure that we don't repeat the mistakes of the past and the issues we've had with million dollar severances, massive payouts, and people collecting severance and then moving into another department, leaving and collecting another severance, as we saw in the case of Mrs. Weatherill. These things are just complete wastes of money, so we need to put this policy in place, and it needs to expand to the entire government, not just political staffers. I hope that we can do that.

With AHS, in particular, the Health minister I think is going to find that there's a lot of stuff to clean up over there, and I wish him well in doing that. There is a culture that's permeated over there for far too long, and I sure hope that the Health minister will work towards cleaning that up. He has a fresh slate, a blank slate, so I'm going to support him in his efforts to do that.

With regard to other things that we can do to get our budget and spending under control without affecting front-line services, I do think we need to look at – I understand from the throne speech there's a review being undertaken of our agencies, and so forth. I think that's a great idea. I hope it's a review with teeth and that we're not afraid to combine, amalgamate, and even in some cases get rid of certain boards and agencies in our province that, frankly, we could either do without or certainly where we could have one board have responsibility for more than what they're doing now. These costs add up, and our government has just simply gotten too fat and bloated. We need to shrink the size of the administration to one that at least is somewhat resembling the rest of Canada on the average instead of by far, as it is today, being the largest

bureaucracy in the entire country, including the federal government, on a per capita basis. I hope that that review will go well.

The results-based budgeting process: I have not seen results from that process yet that have led to any kind of real, substantial savings. I'm hopeful that it will at some point do that, but I'm still waiting, and hopefully we'll see that soon.

Those were the things I wanted to talk about, mostly, with regard to the throne speech. Basically, those are mostly fiscal issues given that that's my critic portfolio, but, you know, there are other issues, obviously. I look forward to seeing more decentralization of health care. That means a ton to me as the representative from Airdrie, but I truly feel that our local people, our local health professionals and locally elected leaders, are the ones that should be making the most decisions with regard to patient care and the allocation of our health dollars. You know, I think it's a great deal for AHS and the Health minister as well. It's less to do if they decentralize. It's fewer decisions that they have to make about situations that they probably have no idea about or very little idea about because they're not on the ground. It's not their fault; it's just a matter of location. Decentralizing that decision-making to the local level I think is absolutely critical, and again I like the language around that.

Obviously, I would like to see more meat on the bones here, but it's a good start. We've heard a lot of good words before in this Assembly. You know, jeppers, I've only been here six years, and this is the fourth Premier we've had. I believe this is the seventh Finance minister I've had as Finance critic.

An Hon. Member: Really?

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. I don't know if that's a compliment or a real indictment. Regardless, it is what it is.

5:10

An Hon. Member: You're bad luck.

Mr. Anderson: I must be bad luck. That's right.

I hope that we're moving forward with this Premier, and I hope we're moving forward with this Health minister and Finance minister and Education minister, and so forth. We need to put our thinking caps on, reach out across the aisle, and work together because we are in a situation that is quite critical. We have too many people depending on us to do the right thing and get our house in order.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

If not, I'd be pleased to recognize any other speakers or perhaps a motion to adjourn debate at this time.

Mr. Oberle: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move that we adjourn consideration of the motion before the House at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In consideration of progress that we've made today and in consideration of the opposition's wishes to participate in debate, I move that we now call it 6 o'clock and adjourn till 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:12 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, November 20, 2014

Issue 4

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 20, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father and Great Creator, as we conclude our work for this week in this Assembly, guide us that we may all return safely to our constituencies, where we will continue our work for the Albertans whom we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with some school groups, starting with Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a former teacher there's always a class that holds a very special place in your heart. Today I'd like to introduce to you a class from Mundare school, who will soon be moving into their new school. These students were part of the School at the Legislature. They are accompanied here today by their teacher, Mrs. Adrienne Mills, and two parent volunteers, Mrs. Joanne McNiven and Mrs. Arlette Budinski. They are seated in the members' gallery and the public gallery as well. We are looking forward to having the Premier come out and visit when we cut the ribbon on that new school soon. Please stand.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three classes of students from the Wye school in my constituency of Strathcona-Sherwood Park. They are accompanied by teachers Amy Israelson, Tanya Jorden, Danielle Kent, and Miss Powley and a very lengthy list of parent helpers. There's a lot of parent help at the Wye school: Debbie Buxton, Leigh-Ann Ball, Karen Jones, Jackie Mill, Kirsty Woodman, Joan Kaminskas, Norm Cameron, Erin Stephen, Cathy Jones, Christine Martens, Greg Abercrombie, Marlene Crippin, and Amy Butterfield. They are seated, understandably, in both galleries, and I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood-Park.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so pleased today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 26 bright and enthusiastic grade 9 students from Archbishop Jordan Catholic high school from my constituency of Sherwood Park. They are accompanied today by their teacher Mr. Tim Murawsky. I'd ask that the group from Archbishop Jordan high please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups here yet?

Let us continue then. Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of

the Assembly three notable guests from the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, which I'll be doing a member's statement on later today. Firstly, James Cumming, the president and CEO of the chamber, is a long-time Edmontonian and businessman as well as the federal Conservative candidate for Edmonton-Centre. Max Frank is the vice-president, member experience, at the Edmonton chamber and a lifelong Edmontonian and entrepreneur. Bobbi Menard is the manager of communications for the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce. She moved to Alberta two years ago, like so many others in search of the Alberta opportunity. All three of these individuals with the Chamber of Commerce have had an integral part in stewarding the continued growth of Edmonton into the amazing city we have today. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask that they rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions; if I can, I'll do them both together. Today it's an honour for me to rise in the House to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly one of my four children. Melissa McQueen is joining me here today. She's taking her bachelor of arts in Red Deer. She wants to be a high school social teacher. She's very interested in politics and has been involved in all of my campaigns when I was mayor and when I was running here provincially. It's a real honour to ask Melissa to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Also, joining Melissa today is my outstanding staff from my office, Mr. Speaker. I have six people joining us here today, and I'd ask them to rise as they're being introduced. With us today are Laura Lupul; Duncan Webster; Matthew Grant; my press secretary, Brittney Timperley; my chief of staff, Amy Prins; and my outstanding scheduler, Kim Kennard, without whom I could not manage my job. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Stacey Buga, Sarah Hall, and Leah Elzinga, seated in the public gallery. Sarah Hall is the chair of the Morinville Public School Council. Stacey and Leah are members of the Morinville school parent delegation. They're here today because there is currently no public junior or senior high school in the town of Morinville, and these ambitious ladies are fighting to have one there.

My second introduction. It's a great pleasure to have Mr. Doug Dickson right up here from the constituency of Calgary-Buffalo. Doug is often in the constituency at the local coffee shops, at both grocery stores, and all over the place, and he's quick to point out the errors of my ways as he is a long-time Conservative in this province. Nevertheless, we do have a great time discussing things, and we get in our shots both ways. It's a great honour to have him here.

Would they all please rise so we can give them a warm welcome from everyone in this Assembly.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour and a privilege for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three very proud guests here in recognition of the 40th anniversary of Dickinsfield Amity House, a not-for-profit organization located in the wonderful community neighbourhood of Evansdale, which is in the constituency of Edmonton-Decore. My guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and remain standing as I mention their names.

Mrs. Carrie Thuesen, chairman of the board, Dickinsfield Amity House; Ms Tracy Patience, executive director, Dickinsfield Amity House; Mr. Ian St. Dennis, avid volunteer who assists with low-income tax filings at Dickinsfield Amity House. I would now ask the Assembly to provide the traditional warm welcome to my guests this afternoon. Thank you.

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

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a long-time friend and a constituent from Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, Mr. Sheldon Murphy. Mr. Murphy is the president of the Fort McMurray Fish and Game Association and a hard-working Albertan who makes his living as a heavy-equipment technician with Syncrude. I understand from Mr. Murphy's own words that it's always been a strong dream to visit what he considers the most prestigious building in Alberta. This week, while in the capital city with his daughter to go to the Mötley Crüe concert, he has a chance to make that true. Mr. Murphy is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that he rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a young man by the name of Andrew Tidswell. Andrew is a recent graduate from Dalhousie University, majoring in political science. Born and raised in Calgary, a good Alberta boy, Andrew is really interested in politics and is happy to be present today. Perhaps one day Andrew will be an MLA in the Legislature right here. I'd ask Andrew to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

1:40

Members' Statements

Dickinsfield Amity House 40th Anniversary

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour and privilege to rise today to help commemorate the 40th anniversary of Dickinsfield Amity House. The Edmonton-Decore constituency is truly blessed to have in the heart of the Evansdale community Dickinsfield Amity House.

In 1972 Dickinsfield was a new subdivision in Edmonton, and to improve the quality of life of the residents in the area, a number of professionals established the Professionals for Progress group. In 1973 this ambitious group successfully garnered support from the Edmonton Housing Authority to open the We Care Centre, which provided co-op babysitting and after school programming. In 1974 We Care registered as a society, received funding from the city of Edmonton preventive social services, now known as Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta, and in 1977 changed its name to Dickinsfield Amity House. The moniker "Amity," a Cree word for friendship, especially between nations, exemplifies the esprit de corps of this not-for-profit organization. Dickinsfield Amity House is a welcoming, strong, and vibrant family and community resource centre where allied professionals and volunteers build relationships and provide a wide range of support services and programs in direct response to community needs.

Mr. Speaker, special thanks to the enormous leadership of this fine organization. Also, my heartfelt gratitude to the many volunteers whose relentless commitment, dedication, energy, and efforts have transformed so many lives at Dickinsfield Amity House. Together their steadfast effort and support ensure that generations of children, youth, families, and people in the community are offered vital programs and services for all age groups. This is a living example of the Alberta spirit. Thank you for adding immeasurably to our great city and province.

Once again, congratulations and best wishes to Dickinsfield Amity House as you celebrate your 40th anniversary.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

LGBTQ Student Supports

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I will move first reading of Bill 202, the Safe and Inclusive Schools Statutes Amendment Act 2014. I came into politics to change the world, and I have in some big ways. Today I'm trying to change it in small ways, but it will be a big deal to those who will now be included. I have been really struck by how, as we move forward as a province and as a nation, we open up institutions, we include. But the new Education Act didn't include sexual minority gay and lesbian students in section 33(2), the safe and caring policy to reduce bullying.

As we well know, bullying can have terrible effects, and the group with the highest suicide rate is sexual minority youth. So I go looking and find that gay-straight peer support groups have been proven to reduce suicide in our gay youth. Well, hot damn, I can support those students by adding to the Education Act policy to allow gay-straight alliances without taking away from anyone else. And no euphemisms; if students want to call them gay-straight alliances, they can.

And while I'm at it, we can include references to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Human Rights Act in the Education Act – perfect – including our commitment to rights and freedoms and responsibilities and obligations. And, hey, I'm on a roll. Section 11.1 of the Human Rights Act should be gone. Done. In section 58 of the Education Act the parental opt-out clause can be expanded beyond religious and patriotic instruction to have sexual health education added in. So parents can in advance opt their kids out of instruction on religion, patriotic duty, and sexual health education.

It sounds like big changes, but really it's just opening up to include some kids that weren't included before. Not so hard. I hope you can support Bill 202.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Edmonton-McClung Constituency Priorities

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is under new management, and with a new management comes updated priorities. The five priorities laid out in the throne speech are exactly what this province needs. I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the two priorities that relate most to what I have heard from my constituents in Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Speaker, having a focused commitment to sound conservative fiscal principles is the vital priority to ensuring that Alberta

remains the economic leader of this country. Albertans elected their government to use taxpayer dollars sensibly and efficiently. I would like to thank my colleagues for their teamwork and dedication to this commitment. Together we are making these promises realities, and we are on our way to a better Alberta. Alberta is growing at a very fast pace, and we need to be prepared, and preparation is exactly what this new government offers.

The other issue I care deeply about, Mr. Speaker, which was addressed in the government's priorities, is seniors' care. This government worked very quickly to manage the needs of seniors. It gives me great pleasure to recognize the seniors in my community of Edmonton-McClung, who remind us of the important contributions that Alberta's seniors continue to make to our society and our families. About 8 per cent of my constituency of Edmonton-McClung is comprised of seniors, and they have made their priorities clear. I would like to assure my constituents and all citizens of Alberta that our government will work diligently on your behalf to preserve the priorities we were elected to uphold.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Livingstone-Macleod.

Edmonton Long-term Development

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since its inception in 1889 this organization that I rise to speak about today has consistently presented a long-term visionary strategy to create important commercially sustainable opportunities in the capital region, including my own constituency of Edmonton-Riverview. Today, over 125 years later, the Chamber of Commerce boasts nearly 3,000 corporate business members.

Within Edmonton and the capital region there is an excitement, a buzz, if you will, which is being spearheaded by a number of commercial leaders in our city, both new and long-standing members of the chamber. Our city's plan to vitalize Edmonton's downtown core has been received with optimism and enthusiasm. These are now characterized by activities of community, commerce, sport, and entertainment. Mr. Speaker, one would be hard-pressed to find a spot on the calendar without a festival or major event in this city.

This isn't just growth; it is quality of life in a dynamic city. This will without doubt create greater opportunities for business development and community development. The two initiatives that have helped propel this success are the CRL and the municipal sustainability initiative as well as partnerships in all levels of government.

I would also like to highlight the tremendous impact our postsecondary institutions have had in helping our city's cosmopolitan vision for the future through leading-edge, world-class research and the cornerstone of the knowledge-based economy.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, the feeling of excitement currently being felt in Edmonton and the capital region is one that is bursting with anticipation, and it is only the beginning. I commend the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce for being able to set a clear path for our city's long-term development. Without their forward-thinking priorities our city would definitely be at a loss and not what it is today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Calgary-East.

Rural Health Services

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every member of this House wants to see our health care system fixed. This desire crosses party lines and brings co-operation where it's not often seen. Our broken health care system affects each and every one of us, our friends, and our families. Under our former Health minister's watch the issues in rural ambulance dispatch have gone from bad to worse to a full-on crisis, with emergency wait times edging as high as an hour in some parts of the province. For our friends and families in rural and remote communities this can mean the difference between life and death.

EMS personnel, health care experts, and the opposition sounded the alarm over scarce emergency resources being flexed on nonemergency interfacility transfers on numerous occasions. Finally, last year, after immense pressure, the minister finally admitted there was a problem and launched a review, but according to southern Alberta EMS responders absolutely nothing has changed. As it stands, ambulances still flex from region to region on nonemergency calls, leaving entire corridors of the province dark.

The former minister and his associate had all year to fix this, but instead they spent time campaigning this summer with the Premier. It's time to turn the page. Today we have a different Health minister, a self-described expert. The minister said that he wants to focus on this issue, and that's great. The people he needs to talk to aren't hard to find. Some of them are sitting in this room. We in the opposition have been ready, willing, and able to work on this file for over a year. Now the question is: is the minister ready to work, too?

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, you're reminded that you have a 35-second limit to ask your question and a 35-second limit to answer it.

Let us begin with the first main set of questions. The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Premier if he believed his government has a spending problem that requires more discipline or a revenue problem that requires more taxes. He avoided the question. I gave him an opportunity to commit to keeping the 10 per cent single rate of tax, that Albertans are so proud of. He didn't. Afterwards he admitted to the media that tax increases are on his agenda. Can the Premier explain to Albertans, who already pay the most per capita income tax in the entire country, why he wants to raise their taxes?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't agree with the premise of the question or some of the statistics that were cited. My responsibility as Premier of this province is to operate the government of Alberta and its public finances in a manner which is prudent, which is cautious, which is balanced, and, specifically, to balance the budget in this fiscal year, which we are currently in, the 2014-2015 budget. We are into the second half of the year, dealing with circumstances beyond anyone's control relative to low energy prices. We are very focused on balancing the budget and stand by that commitment to Albertans.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, our low tax rates and our simple tax structure are Alberta's single greatest competitive edge. It has led to a strong economy and plentiful, well-paying jobs. It's resulted

in Albertans paying the most income taxes on a per capita basis. I can provide the reports on Monday, when we table it. Our government doesn't work. It couldn't balance the budget at \$100 oil. We have a real spending problem there. Why is the Premier telling Albertans that the answer for his government's spending problem is to increase taxes on everyone?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. Albertans are already the lowest taxed people in Canada by a very, very wide margin. I look forward to the statistics that the hon. member puts forward. We have the lowest effective personal income tax rates in the country. We have the highest personal exemptions. We have the lowest combined federal-provincial income tax in the country. We have no sales tax. We have the lowest gasoline tax. This government is committed to ensuring that we maintain that competitive advantage, and I will look forward to the hon. member opposite supporting us.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we pay the lowest rates, and that's why it generates the most tax revenue.

I can see that the absence of clarity is quickly becoming this Premier's hallmark. The Premier needs to come clean with Albertans. All week I've been asking him if higher debt and higher taxes are in the future for Albertans. In this place he avoids answering. But now we know, just as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar blurted out this fall, that every kind of tax increase is on the table. Why won't this Premier simply tell Albertans the truth, that he plans to raise their taxes?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, the responsibility that I have as Premier is to ensure that this province is operated in the black ink, in a fiscally responsible way. We are in the second half of the current year, dealing with \$75 oil prices. We'll continue to manage our way through that. The Minister of Finance and I and our entire government are very focused on spending: on containing spending, on prudence, on discipline, on managing our way through these circumstances. That is what Albertans expect of us, and I certainly hope that the Leader of the Opposition and her party will be supportive of that fiscal responsibility.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can say it very clearly: Wildrose does not support new taxes.

Ethics and Privacy Issues

Ms Smith: Yesterday I asked the Premier about integrity, specifically the lack of integrity of the Education minister's decision to queue-jump a request for modulars for a school in the riding he was running in. The Premier and the minister say that they were just listening to parents when they approved modulars for William Reid ahead of six other schools with higher needs. "Just listening to parents," they said. Why did the government ignore the pleas of the parents from Cranston, Evergreen, Louis Riel, Coventry Hills, Radisson Park, and MidSun schools, which were ranked higher on the priority list?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I just need to remind you of something. I've been advised that a matter like this, I believe, may have been referred to the Ethics Commissioner by yourself. I wonder if you could please just confirm whether or not that is the case, because if it is the case, then, of course, subject to the Conflicts of Interest Act, section 24(6), we're on dangerously thin

ground. So, Opposition Leader, may I ask you to please comment on whether or not that is the case.

Ms Smith: It is the case.

The Speaker: That is the case. If you could just, going forward . . . Please have a seat, Airdrie.

Hon. Leader of the Opposition, if, going forward, you could just recraft your question to be a matter of policy or a matter of service or a matter of government program, then the question would be in order.

I'll ask the hon. Education minister if he wishes to make a comment. If not, we'll move to the first sup, recrafted.

The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will switch gears, then, and ask another question.

Sticking with the topic of integrity, this summer Albertans witnessed the spectacle of ministerial expense documents being leaked by someone in this government. The media was sent the cellphone bills of cabinet ministers. In the process an innocent person's identity was stolen, and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act was broken. A police investigation began. Premier Hancock also ordered an internal investigation. Can the Premier update us on the status of either of those investigations?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the best of my knowledge, that matter is under investigation by law enforcement, and I would decline to comment further.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we've been told that the new Premier cancelled the internal investigation. We also understand that the Calgary police have ended their investigation before even interviewing the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, whose information was illegally leaked. They also didn't interview any of the civil servants who were supposed to protect this information. It seems to me that the Premier might have an integrity problem in his government. Will the Premier call in the Privacy Commissioner to independently investigate this serious matter?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I'm going to ask the Minister of Justice to clarify whether this matter is under investigation by a source other than the Ethics Commissioner, is it sub judice, or neither of the two?

Mr. Denis: My understanding, Mr. Speaker, is that the Calgary Police Service have an active investigation in this matter. I have not checked in the last couple of weeks, but that remains my understanding.

The Speaker: So the question stands, and the clarification has been accepted.

Do you wish to comment further on the question?

If not, let us move on to the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition for your third and final main set of questions.

Misericordia Community Hospital

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the third time in just over a year the Misericordia hospital in Edmonton is flooded. This time it's really bad. The emergency room is closed, and patients are being turned away. This government has known for some time

that the Mis is in bad shape and needs immediate action, but the government's refusal to act has once again caused patients to suffer. To the Minister of Health: how can he explain his government's failure to ensure that patients at the Misericordia are safe?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, the government of the province of Alberta has invested \$25 million in trying to ensure that the Misericordia hospital continues to deliver the services to the citizens of the west end of the city of Edmonton. This particular issue was very concerning to all of us. They're working very diligently right now to ensure that all patients are kept safe.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has well over half a billion dollars in deferred maintenance in health care facilities. Today is a sobering reminder of what that means for patients. The Misericordia hospital is literally falling apart. It has flooded now three times over the last year. To the Minister of Health. He has two choices: fix the hospital or build a new one. What's it going to be?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we've taken a direction to invest \$25 million over a period of time to try to ensure that this hospital continues to operate in an effective way. We're also looking at: how do we build new acute-care facilities across the province? We're doing that throughout the province now, with new facilities in Grande Prairie and other places. We'll continue to do that.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, the roof may literally cave in at this hospital.

Now, I'll cut the minister a little bit of slack because he's pretty new on this job, but I won't be forgiving of all of those who are sitting around him. This is on them. They've ignored these issues for too long. To the Premier. This has been a priority for Alberta Health Services for years. We cannot wait for more delays or more reviews. What is he going to do about it right now?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta is doing all we can at this point in time by ensuring that the current situation is taken care of. The people at the location are ensuring that all steps are being taken to make sure that patients are taken care of and that the conditions will be reinstated as soon as possible.

2:00 Education Rights in Morinville

Mr. Hehr: The Premier pontificated that the Alberta constitution may somehow tie his hands when it comes to allowing Alberta kids to establish gay-straight alliances. Now, he may be playing fast and loose with that interpretation, but one thing that is clear is that under the Alberta Act of 1905 all communities are entitled to a public school. Morinville, a community of 10,000 people, a vast majority of whom are non-Catholic, has no access to a public option past grade 7. Why isn't the Premier fulfilling this government's obligation to provide a public school for these parents and kids?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. It's a very important one. The local MLAs in that area, working with our government, of course, recognize the growing enrolment pressures that we have on some of our schools. Recently government organized a value scoping exercise along with officials from the Sturgeon school division, the parents, and community members to explore public school options for Morinville. We're

working closely with the community to determine the best approach to providing public education in Morinville. We look forward to a proposal coming forward to us.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I'd ask the Minister of Education this. It is a constitutional obligation of your government to provide public schools for children in the Morinville community. Why is it not following through on these constitutional obligations mandated by the foundation of this province?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, we take very seriously our responsibility to provide quality education for all students in our province. The value scoping exercise I mentioned has provided an opportunity to ensure the community has the information and transparency needed to come forward with an informed decision on the best approach. Community members participated in preparing options. Those will go to the school board, and the board will then submit its proposal to the government. We look forward to receiving that proposal.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I'd ask the minister how any of that answer provides any restitution for the people in Morinville on having their constitutional mandate fulfilled of having a public school option for their children in that community.

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, as a province we've embarked on the most expansive school infrastructure project in Canadian history to address school shortages. We're going to continue to invest in schools right across the province. Sturgeon school division's requirements, once they're confirmed by the board, will be considered seriously as we move forward investing in school infrastructure for the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, leader of the ND opposition.

Misericordia Community Hospital (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP has been demanding action to repair and replace the Misericordia hospital for several years now. The government has dismissed our concerns along with the concerns of front-line health care providers, patients, and their families. Well, today we understand that the cafeteria roof in the Misericordia, which has been leaking for years, has collapsed. To the Premier: why has his government, through their incompetence and their grossly negligent behaviour, been allowed to put the health and safety of Albertans at risk?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we have tried to make sure that the Misericordia hospital is operating as well as possible by supplying \$25 million to it to ensure that it will continue to operate in an effective way.

Ms Notley: I am quite concerned by the failure of either the Premier or the Health minister to take this issue seriously. Twenty-five million dollars is not relevant. What's relevant is that a roof collapsed, west Edmonton has no ER, and there are no diagnostic services right now. Meanwhile we have a minister who thinks this issue requires more study. To the Premier: do you really think your minister's judgment that this requires still more study really warrants the faith and trust of Albertans for him in his role?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we take very seriously the issues at Misericordia hospital as well as any hospital throughout the province of Alberta. We will make sure we do all things to ensure

these hospitals are managed properly and they're taken care of properly.

Thank you.

Ms Notley: Wow. Well, Mr. Speaker, years of Tory neglect both here in the House and generally in doing their job have come home to roost. West Edmonton has no emergency room, no diagnostics, and a collapsed roof in its cafeteria. To the Premier: what are you going to do to ensure that members of your government are held accountable for this profoundly irresponsible level of neglect?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, as I've already said, we're doing all we can at this time. We also know there's a need for acute-care improvements across the province of Alberta. We continue to look at that, and we'll continue to do that.

Landowner Property Rights Legislation

Mr. Barnes: Yesterday, the environment minister said that property rights are, and I quote, well protected under current legislation, suggesting he doesn't understand either property rights or his government's legislation. For instance, Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, prevents any person with a cause of action from bringing an application before the court, when access to the judicial system is a basic hallmark of western democracy. To the Premier: your promised first bill was to re-establish property rights for Albertans, not kick the can down the road. Does your government really believe landowners shouldn't have an opportunity. . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm sorry. The 35 seconds has expired.

Let's go to the minister of environment.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government introduced a few years ago the Alberta Land Stewardship Act to bring sense and planning to a very rapidly growing province. Subsequent to that, there were a number of amendments made based on consultation with landowners that dealt with some issues within that original legislation to improve the rights of landowners in respect to that legislation.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Barnes: No compensation, no court.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the sweeping draconian nature of Bill 36 suppresses a landowner's right to fair compensation and access to the courts and states that the act will prevail in all matters of dispute over the landowners you're pretending to protect, does your government have plans to do the right thing by all Albertans, stop this charade, and repeal Bill 36?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, no, we will not repeal Bill 36. This is a piece of legislation that is very, very important to our integrated resource management system, that will allow us to develop our resources and our economy in a very responsible manner. What the Premier has introduced is a bill that addresses some of the concerns of landowners, Bill 1, as well as to ask the all-party committee to look at the recommendations brought forward by the Property Rights Advocate, and we will undertake that work.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the government's decision to repeal Bill 19 is welcome, it's a moot point because it

doesn't change the fact that it was never enacted. And Bill 36, which is significantly more unfair in matters of compensation and appeal, trumps it anyway. Given this, do you stand by your comments that Bill 36 sufficiently protects the rights of landowners to access the courts and compensation when this bill can be used as a big stick in negotiations and binds landowners to this government's incompetency, or would you like to take this opportunity to clarify?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, any time under Bill 36 and any time with respect to any legislation in this province that landowners are asked to give up their property rights for the overall good of the province and the public, they will have access to appropriate mechanisms such as access to compensation and access to the courts. It's something that this government takes very seriously. We will stand behind that, and we will let the all-party committee do its work and see what we come up with.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Rural Issues

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today at the AAMD and C fall conference we heard loud and clear from our rural counterparts on the need and the growth that we're having in rural Alberta. The question that I have here today is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Given that we've heard so loud and clear from our rural libraries, what is the minister going to be doing to help fund the growth that we're seeing in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for his question. First, I'd like to say that I've had a great three days at AAMD and C. I want to thank Bob Barss, our president of AAMD and C, for his work and congratulate the incoming president, Al, as well.

Mr. Speaker, I spent a number of years on the board of the Yellowhead regional library. I'm a very strong supporter, as is our government, with regard to our libraries. We currently are providing \$26 million this year and an additional \$4 million to support IT in advancement. We are proud of the over 300 libraries we have in our province, and this government will continue to support them.

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second item that we heard loud and clear today was on high-speed Internet. High-speed Internet is very prevalent in the major urban areas, but rural Alberta still suffers on high-speed Internet, especially in our business communities that are out working in the oil fields. To the same minister: could you give us some clarification on when you're going to invest in rural Alberta?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky for this important question. As he identifies, not only is high-speed Internet a crucial business tool for rural development; high-speed Internet has become a crucial component just for quality of life for all Albertans, including those in rural Alberta. That's why the Premier has made access to and expanding of high-speed Internet the number one issue on my mandate letter. That's why I've been busy working with the

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, and I continue to work with our stakeholders in the corporate and municipal sectors to deliver high-speed Internet to Alberta.

The Speaker: The final supplemental.

Mr. McDonald: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This one is for my colleague the Transportation minister. It's something that I think he heard quite clearly today, but I'd just like to reaffirm his commitment to the roads and bridges files in rural Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we did hear very loud and clear this morning from our AAMD and C partners. You know, I met with several of them over the last couple of days and had the same message that roads and bridges are one of their top priorities. I agree a hundred per cent with that. This year we've invested more than \$735 million in road rehabilitation for our existing infrastructure. Much of this is going to rural Alberta. We'll continue to work with our municipalities as well as industry to find innovative partnerships that will bridge that funding gap.

The Speaker: Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Wheatland County Roads

Mr. Hale: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Transportation minister is going to hear it again. Residents in the Wheatland and Newell counties are driving on highways with growing potholes and shrinking embankments. It's dangerous and is sparking outrage. I know the Transportation minister recently met with these folks, but without a clear priority list for maintenance projects or a firm commitment from the government we have no timeline when these highways will get fixed. With the safety of Albertans at risk can the minister give commuters a firm timeline when these troubling highways will be fixed?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, as I said, I met with lots of municipalities, and every member in this House in their constituencies have road priorities. Every Albertan probably has road priorities. Safety is number one. When we look at all the priorities from across the province, we evaluate them, and safety is number one. We have a good technical evaluation process that measures the roughness and the condition of the road. Also, budget has a lot to do with which roads get built and the priority.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hale: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it took over two years for the government to fix highway 841 after half the highway slid down the bank and given that highway 569 has still not received any care, will the minister meet the requests of Wheatland county and devolve the responsibilities to the local experts so Albertans can use these highways safely?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I met specifically with Wheatland county, and I know their concerns. But every municipality has concerns with roads, and we have a responsibility to balance the budget of this province with the priorities. I'd like to rebuild every road in the province of Alberta, but we know that isn't possible given the fiscal situation. I can't understand the members across. One minute they're saying that we should cut spending; the next minute they're wanting us to spend more.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, we're worried about saving the lives of our constituents that are going to fall off these beaten-up roads.

Given that highway 876 serves as a crucial access point from highway 1 to one of Alberta's most popular provincial parks, Dinosaur provincial park, and given the mix of industrial trucks and family vehicles travelling on highway 876, which is dangerous and barely passable after a rain, when will the minister ensure that this highway is fixed or cost share the project with a very willing county of Newell?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's the same question. We work with all of them. There are priorities. I am working with the county there, and we're working in partnerships, but like I said, we've got to stack all the priorities of everybody in the province up. We do the most we can with the money we're given. Be assured that I take safety very seriously. Safety is number one, and we look after that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Northland School Division

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An inquiry was conducted at Northland school division, and an engagement committee report was completed in January 2011. Included in the report were five priority recommendations to improve education for over 2,700 students. To the Minister of Education: given that it is now 2014 and my peeps are getting more and more restless, when can they expect a detailed position and response from the minister on the recommendations?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. All students in Alberta deserve a quality education, and certainly those in Northland school division are no exception. We're working with the school division and with local communities on improving student learning, ensuring effective governance of schools in the region. A number of the recommendations in the Northland inquiry team report, which I've had the opportunity to read through, have been implemented. We're starting to see some great successes; for example, we've taken steps to address teacher and principal recruitment and retention, and we're now seeing some improvements in those areas.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, I'm so pleased to see that at least this minister is reading the report. The people have been waiting, waiting, waiting. It's a waiting game. To the same minister. My constituents have been waiting for so long. When can we see action, direction, and implementation of all the recommendations?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, a number of the recommendations, I believe 12 of them, have been implemented already, and the others are under consideration. We have started seeing some good successes. Another example over the last few years: the number of students dropping out of high school has decreased. The number of students completing their high school program, transitioning to postsecondary, and writing provincial diploma exams has also increased. A good-news story.

Ms Calahasen: To the same minister: will there finally be an executive school board put back in place so that the people with Northland school division can also exercise the same democratic right that all other school jurisdictions in Alberta enjoy and be able to determine their own educational future?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, a very important issue raised by the member. We're going to continue listening to the local community and work in partnership to ensure that we get the changes that need to be put in place right. In order to address some of the issues around governance, we need to amend the Northland School Division Act, and we'll be engaging in community conversations to develop principles, visions, and values for an amended piece of legislation.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Child Care Supports

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today is Universal Children's Day, and in light of no action on child poverty by this government and in light of the Health minister's recent decision in favour of big tobacco, it's fitting that we question the PC government's commitment to putting children first. The Public Interest Alberta report released today shows more families struggling to find and pay for daycare, with the cost per child at \$900 per month, full-day kindergarten cheaper, at \$750 per month. To the Minister of Human Services: when will this government keep its promise for full-day kindergarten . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, sorry to interrupt, but 35 seconds has gone by.

Let's go to the hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed international day of the child. We know in Human Services that children are our focus. We also know that with the supports we provide, where they're for child care, parents do have the choice. We know that there are 2,300 licensed child daycare programs here in Alberta. In 2013 families received the full subsidy of \$268 per month.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, given the scarcity of safe and affordable child care in Alberta the Liberals have also been calling on the government to ensure that more of these child spaces are available and affordable, subsidized. Will the minister please help release the burden on high-cost child care by supporting the Alberta call for the creation of a universal low-cost child care program in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year we increased the spaces by about 4,700 child care spaces, for a total of over 100,000 spaces across Alberta. We know that many people are coming to Alberta, but we also know that we need to give parents a choice as to where they put their children, whether it's in a day home or a daycare. At the end of the day, for me, it's something that I'm looking at very carefully. Again, top of mind. Children always will come first.

2:20

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the Education minister. Given that in the past five years the renowned early childhood mapping project has assisted government and communities in addressing thousands of children with developmental delays, learning problems, behaviour disorders, and mental health issues, why is the minister cutting this important work?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. I'm new in the role, of course, so I'm still getting up to speed on all of the issues. My colleague might be able to respond to this issue better than I might, but I will certainly take the member's question under advisement.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government was elected by promising to eliminate child poverty and to bring more low-income Albertans into the workforce. Those in the know understand that comprehensive, affordable, high-quality child care is fundamental to meeting those goals. Unfortunately, a new report proves that this government is failing Alberta families on child care. To the Premier: is your government going to be remaining lost in this *Leave It to Beaver* understanding of modern families, or will you finally commit to a meaningful child care plan that our province needs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to address this question again. I think it's important to note that of over 80,000 children that are enrolled in child care programs, 25,000 children receive a full or partial care subsidy, and that's very important to this ministry. Again, helping low-income families with some of the issues that they have, whether it's through the parent link centres or providing supports like that through Human Services, is what we will be doing.

Mr. Eggen: Given that on Tuesday the Ontario Legislature endorsed a federal NDP plan for a \$15 per day child care plan and given that in this province we invest less than all but one other province, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. We have a child care crisis here in the province of Alberta, but the issue does not even warrant a mention in your throne speech. Why?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's really important that we focus on helping low-income families find quality child care. That's the focus we're going to take, and that's what I'll be working on, especially when we look at the early years strategy and look at the issues of child poverty as well.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that there is a crisis-level shortage of child care spaces, especially for infants and special-needs kids, not just low income, Mr. Speaker, and that when you do find a space, the average cost is about a thousand dollars per month per child and that even the safety is not guaranteed for all people, not just low income, to the Premier again. You need to take action on this issue. When will you do so, sir?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's about parents having the choice where they need to put their children. We know that it's very important to support the families on lower incomes, but again, it's having families access some of the other supports that we provide through Human Services, some of the many supports through parent link centres, and some of the other aspects that we do to support families.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Calgary Area Flood Mitigation

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, a short time ago the government made an announcement on flood mitigation, and it probably wasn't coincidental that that came on the eve of a by-election. Of three potential projects they propose a giant dry reservoir in Springbank. Many of us, even the mayor of Calgary, sounded the alarm, saying that we have yet to see any proposals or engineering projects. Now, surely the government wouldn't proceed with a project of this magnitude without those, so I ask the environment minister today: have you completed these, and will you make them public?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There has been substantial work looking at a number of options when it comes to flood mitigation along the Elbow River, and what we've done is that we're taking a look at what the environmental impacts of all of them are, what the impacts to landowners are, what the financial impacts of these projects are. At this point in time, with all of the information that we've been able to gather, we've decided that the best one to move forward on right now is the room for the river concept in Springbank.

Mr. McAllister: If you're keeping track in your programs, the answer is: no, we have not.

Mr. Speaker, upstream of Springbank is the community of Bragg Creek. It suffered tremendous damage. They're still rebuilding from the last flood. The community of Redwood Meadows, through God's grace and a Herculean effort, survived. The McLean Creek project is upstream of these communities. It would make sense to build this project. Given that it is on Crown land, residents and community leaders want to know: why are you steamrolling over the rights of landowners in Springbank when this option exists and it hasn't been explored?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, there's so much wrong with the preamble in that question. What we are doing is working with Rocky View county there to develop a number of flood protection options that they can implement. We provided them with a grant to do the engineering on that. That community will be protected, and we're committed to that.

Mr. McAllister: The only thing wrong is that you shot before aiming.

Given that landowners understandably don't have a lot of trust in this government when it comes to property rights, understanding that community leaders and residents feel that you have completely left them out of the process, Minister, will you table the engineering reports and studies showing why you chose this project, along with the financial estimates, including the estimated cost of land acquisition, or are you clearly telling Albertans that you have not done due diligence?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, it's been about 17, 18 months since the floods of 2013. Our government committed shortly after that to make sure that we improve and implement a number of flood mitigation projects, and we've done substantial work on that. You know, we would be more than happy to sit down with the member and show him all of the work that we've done. We have gotten to a point where we've been able to move forward with the project, that is going to provide significant protection to the big commu-

nities of Calgary from a flood of this nature again in the future, and we must do that right now. We don't have the time to wait like the hon. member suggests.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by Medicine Hat.

Seniors' Housing in Red Deer

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta owns two surplus long-term care sites in Red Deer that are now no longer suitable to be used for long-term care due to their age and condition. As I understand it, these buildings are due to be demolished. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. What is the timeline to have these sites cleared for use by other government departments?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At present we're looking at other potential uses for these sites, and I believe we'll be able to move forward in a very swift manner.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, my supplemental questions are to the Minister of Seniors. Once these sites are cleared, is the minister planning to utilize these sites to provide much-needed affordable housing, lodges, or assisted living for Red Deer residents and seniors?

The Speaker: The Seniors minister.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a good question from the hon. member. I can tell you that one of my very first meetings when I became Seniors minister was set up by him, with the mayor of the city of Red Deer and the Member for Red Deer-South, to look at their housing situation. We're working with the Minister of Infrastructure. I can tell you that my staff will be on-site next week or by the end of the month, having to look at the appropriateness of these sites. These are taxpayer assets. If there is any way that we can put them to work in future plans to help seniors, we have a great appetite to do that.

Mr. Dallas: Well, that's good news, Mr. Speaker, but in the meantime – and it takes some time to develop these – what other options has the minister got for seniors in Red Deer in terms of housing options?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to providing safe, affordable, quality housing that meets the diverse needs of all our seniors, and in Red Deer there are various options. We know that there are challenges because of tighter supplies, but one of the great mandates we have from the Premier is to develop a provincial housing strategy and look at all of our assets. We also had the recent announcements, which you know about. But most seniors in that community and others should work with their regional housing management bodies, that are supported by this province to do affordable housing. I can also give you the good news that there are about 120 supportive living projects, or units, in Red Deer under construction right now or with the sod ready to be turned.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by Calgary-West.

Medical Laboratory Services in Medicine Hat

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AHS has announced their plans to close a Medicine Hat diagnostics lab and centralize all of the testing at the Medicine Hat regional hospital. Not only is this bad news for patients, but it means layoffs for hard-working front-line staff. Even worse, this was done without compassion. The staff had to find out through the media. Now, I know that the minister is new on the job, but he is responsible for AHS, so can he explain this new strategy of announcing dangerous centralization plans, layoffs, and closures through the media?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Yes, Mr. Speaker. This was a step taken in order to reduce the costs of lab work in Medicine Hat and was done to be more fiscally prudent.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister said that moving testing from the diagnostic lab to the regional hospital was planned all along, he's either not telling the truth, or he's completely misinformed. It's never been in the plans. How does he intend to ensure that these services are still accessible, there are no lapses in testing, and the patients of Medicine Hat don't have to see their health put at risk?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, there's no intent to put anybody at risk. The procedures will continue. Tests will be taken and given at a better facility.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, given that AHS has done a cost analysis and stated that there will be \$5 million saved over five years, can the minister please explain how many job losses and reduced services there will be to create these cost savings?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I've been informed that there will be no job losses and that there will be substantial savings. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Calgary Ring Road Completion

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last fall this government signed a historic land transfer agreement with the Tsuu T'ina First Nation that will see 421 hectares of land transferred to the government for the completion of the Stoney Trail ring road in Calgary. This agreement has now been in place for over a year. Can the Minister of Transportation please give this House an update on the construction schedule for this project?

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you to the hon. member for the question. I know he'll do a great job to advocate for the people of Calgary-West. Mr. Speaker, construction can't begin on the final leg of the Calgary ring road until the land transfer agreement with the Tsuu T'ina First Nation is complete. My department continues to work with our partners in the federal government and the Tsuu T'ina nation to complete the agreement. We expect the agreement to be completed by 2015, and in the meantime we continue to move forward with detailed engineering design and an environmental impact assessment.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Calgarians are also concerned about the overall cost of

these final two sections of the ring road and that reports indicate costs in the neighbourhood of \$5 billion, can the minister please explain this unusually high price tag and detail any measures his department is taking to ensure Albertans receive the best value for their tax dollars?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To be frank, it's much too early to begin serious talk about cost estimates. The ballpark estimate that's been circulating is just that, a ballpark. We have yet to determine if the project will be delivered using a P3 model or through a more traditional tendering model. This will affect the overall cost. We will make this decision based on which delivery method will provide the best overall value for Albertans. I'm confident that we can get good value for our money, and I'm committed to delivering this project in a financially responsible manner.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. My final question is to the same minister. Given that my constituents in Calgary-West have expressed concerns that noise from the road will negatively impact their quality of life, are there contingencies in place to ensure that all the communities bordering the ring road will not be affected by traffic noise?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My department has strict noise guidelines that state that we must consider sound barriers for noise levels that exceed 65 decibels on average over a 24-hour period. If once construction is complete and the road is open to traffic the noise levels exceed this threshold at any location along the route, we'll take steps to address the issue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Rural Physician Recruitment

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Screen Award winning film called *The Grand Seduction* described the very real problem of rural Canadian communities like mine which struggle to recruit doctors. Many towns are forced to offer massive incentives and beg on our hands and knees not only to recruit doctors but to have them stay. No matter what part of the province you live in, you should never have to drive hours to receive a checkup or treatment. It's clear that the Alberta rural physician action plan isn't working in my riding and many others. What is the Health minister going to do to fix it?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're very concerned about rural Alberta, ensuring that they do have adequate support from their physician community. This is a challenge, and we have developed a rural action plan. That is helping. Also, we've invested a tremendous amount more money in other programs and will continue to support rural Alberta.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it is very difficult for rural Alberta to compete with larger communities in attracting

doctors to their communities and given that rural residents who are trained in Alberta are more likely to return to rural Alberta to practise medicine, what is this Health minister going to do to ensure that we are training more doctors in our own backyards?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, there are programs out of the University of Calgary medical school that are looking to implement places within rural Alberta to train physicians, and we're encouraging that. We think that the more that can be trained in rural Alberta, the more will stay in rural Alberta, and we think that's a very positive step.

Mr. Rowe: Given the fact that we cannot train enough doctors locally quick enough to meet the needs of today and the limited success of the rural Alberta physician action plan, what will this Health minister do to encourage the college of physicians to reduce barriers for internationally trained doctors to come to rural Alberta?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we hope that through a process of encouraging doctors to come to the province of Alberta from around the world and making sure that that process allows them to move through the system quickly, they will choose rural Alberta but choose in the way of choice rather than of obligation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Forestry Industry

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The forest industry is firing on all cylinders, whether it's in Alberta or many jurisdictions across North America. I'm proud to come from a forest community, you know. The single biggest threat to our healthy forests is the pine beetle. To the Minister of ESRD: are you confirmed and committed to the pine beetle strategy in this province?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, obviously, having a healthy forest is a very important aspect of a healthy forestry industry and in making sure that it's economically viable. This government has committed about \$40 million this year to continue our fight against the mountain pine beetle. We have done a very good job of holding it off and making sure that it doesn't spread. We will continue to be committed to that as the forestry sector is very, very important to many of the communities in our province, as the member said.

Mr. VanderBurg: To the Treasurer. Lumber prices today are exceeding \$375 U.S. per thousand, predicted to be over \$500 per thousand. Is this going to help your shortfall in the budget?

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're always happy to see the forestry industry do well although with oil at \$75 a barrel it won't help us considerably. More importantly, the forestry industry pays some of the highest wages anywhere in the province, and more than 50 communities in rural Alberta depend on forestry to be sustainable. So good forest prices and the fact that we're selling lumber across North America and the rest of the world is good for Alberta.

Mr. VanderBurg: The next question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Building codes prevent the use of more Alberta wood products in our structures, especially those greater than three storeys. This is an opportunity for Alberta. Would you

support the changes in regulations to use more wood products in structures greater than three storeys?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That member has had three excellent questions. Like this hon. member, I am an MLA with forestry in my constituency as well. I have had the opportunity, like this member, to go to other provinces that have built wood structures higher than three storeys. Absolutely, if a piece of legislation came through, we would support this. It's outstanding for the forest industry. Great question.

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

Mr. Saskiw: I'm not sure I can follow that, Mr. Speaker.

Regional Dialysis Service

Mr. Saskiw: Lac La Biche was promised a dialysis bus; then it was delayed. We finally got a dialysis bus, but there was no staff to run it. Then the bus broke down. It might actually be funny if it wasn't a matter of life and death. Now with winter coming, the bus just sits in front of the hospital. This leaves me wondering: why aren't the dialysis units being permanently moved from the bus into the hospital?

Mr. Mandel: That's a very good question, Mr. Speaker. I've had an opportunity to meet with the community of Lac La Biche, and we're looking into that as we speak right now.

2:40

Mr. Saskiw: Given that there are other communities such as Athabasca that could use a dialysis bus, why doesn't the government simply move the dialysis units from the bus into the Lac La Biche hospital to free up the bus so that it could be used elsewhere, in places like Athabasca?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, there are well over 2,000 people in the province of Alberta that have to go through dialysis. We need to find ways in which as many people as possible can have access to dialysis, and the hon. member has given a good suggestion. We'll see what happens.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that northern Albertans who require dialysis must travel up to four hours each way to receive treatment, doesn't the minister care that many people are being forced to move away from their homes, communities, and their loved ones?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we have added dialysis machines to Westlock, Fort McMurray, and other areas around the province. We're very concerned about people and making sure they get dialysis as close as they can to their particular communities.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

The bell has rung, so that means that question period time has expired. However, you should know that as a result of fairly short answers, mostly, and some short questions we had 102 questions and answers offered today. One hundred and two. We haven't reached that mark in a long time. Those of you who were co-operating, with decorum and good order, I thank very much because it allowed a few more questions to get up today.

Statement by the Speaker

Oral Question Period Rules

The Speaker: Secondly, on the issue of preambles I did note yesterday and today that a lot of people went beyond the rule, so to speak, that preambles should not accompany or be in front of the supplementals. However, I always use the words “should not” in conjunction with some temperance, and if the preambles were of a high level, then I tended to let them go because “should not” has a lot of wiggle room, as you know. So if you’re in agreement with that, I’ll try to do the same thing come next week.

The big winner today was a whole week with no points of order. Let us hope that continues.

My final point is to mention that I just do my best to enforce the rules; I don’t set them. So to those of you who sent me notes about the Conflicts of Interest Act, it’s section 24(6), and it reads as follows: “Where a matter has been referred to the Ethics Commissioner under subsection (1), (3) or (4), neither the Legislative Assembly nor a committee of the Assembly shall inquire into the matter.” So I hope that suffices for those of you who wrote to me on that issue.

Members’ Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Let us continue with Calgary-East.

Bullying Awareness and Prevention

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge an important awareness campaign currently going on. November 16 to 22 marks National Bullying Awareness Week, now in its 12th year. Its goal is to increase our awareness and understanding of the horrific impacts of bullying and promote prevention of bullying behaviour.

Each year the government of Alberta is proud to take part in National Bullying Awareness Week. This week, Mr. Speaker, serves as a great opportunity to address this issue with local communities. A recent Ipsos-Reid study in 2014 revealed that 1 in 3 Albertans believe bullying is a normal part of growing up. That belief is most prevalent among 16- to 34-year-old males. Providing more cause for concern is that the number continues to rise, increasing 6 per cent since 2012. Initiatives such as National Bullying Awareness Week are important because they work to counteract upward trends like this.

Bullying is in no way, Mr. Speaker, a normal part of growing up. It takes a tremendous toll on individuals’ confidence and self-esteem, affects their school or workplace performance, and undermines the strength of our communities. We must continue to change the perception that bullying is an acceptable behaviour. One way we can change that is by participating and leading events as part of National Bullying Awareness Week.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to encourage my colleagues to take part in one of the many bullying prevention events happening this week. A list of events around the province of Alberta can be found at humanservices.alberta.ca/bullying.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3) to advise the House that on Monday,

November 24, 2014, written questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 14, 23, and 30 will be dealt with.

Also on Monday, November 24, 2014, motions for returns 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 13, and 14 will be dealt with, sir.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 201

Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully, there won’t be a point of order on this one.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014.

The purpose of the bill is to increase transparency in billing, but more importantly, it proposes to standardize consumer utility bills so that retail consumers can be better informed about market options. Hopefully, the new standardized variable market rate on this utility bill should help expand competition as consumers become better informed and better equipped to compare prices and market options.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

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

Bill 202

Safe and Inclusive Schools Statutes Amendment Act, 2014

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m very pleased to introduce Bill 202, Safe and Inclusive Schools Statutes Amendment Act, 2014.

This bill proposes three small additions to the Education Act and one deletion from the Human Rights Act. It deletes section 11.1 from the Human Rights Act but strengthens and widens section 58 of the Education Act, which is the existing parental opt-out section for religion and patriotic exercise, by adding in sexual health. Parents can still opt their kids out if they don’t want their kids in sex ed.

In the Education Act’s section 33(2) on welcoming, caring, and safe environments to reduce bullying, it adds in that the policy must accommodate students who want to lead organizations that are gay-straight alliances, and they may call them by that name.

Finally, like two previous versions of the Education Act, there will be a clause that references the Charter and the Alberta Human Rights Act as reflective of our values.

So, a parental opt-out on sexual health, accommodation of GSAs, referencing the Charter and human rights, and deleting section 11.1.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

The Speaker: Just before we go on, could we have unanimous consent to briefly revert to introductions? Does anyone object? If you do, please say so now.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank colleagues for their indulgence. I'm pleased to make an introduction on behalf of the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of grade 10 high school students from R.F. Staples secondary school in Westlock. Now, unfortunately, they've come and gone. They're otherwise busy in a neighbouring building right now, but I did want to get their presence on the record. They are accompanied by their teacher, Ms Kelly Lehman, and a parent adviser, Colleen Chapotelle. This group of students, I understand, brought treats. I haven't seen them, but I expect that they may be somewhere around, so colleagues can keep an eye open in case anything shows up in any of our respective rooms. I thank them for their presence and wish them luck and thank colleagues for their indulgence.

The Speaker: Thank you.

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Let us continue. The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of Aboriginal Relations I'm pleased to rise today and table the requisite number of copies of the Northern Alberta Development Council 2013-2014 annual report and note that that's led by the MLA for Lesser Slave Lake and thank her for her service on that committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Fawcett, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, a response to Written Question 23, asked for by Ms Blakeman on April 14, 2014: "In relation to the June 2013 flood, how many hours' notice did the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development give to each of the affected municipalities that flooding was either possible or imminent?"

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Dirks, Minister of Education, pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act and the Fiscal Management Act the Education annual report update 2013-14.

On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Klimchuk, Minister of Human Services, responses to written questions 4, 19, 20, 21, 22, 27, and 28, all asked for by Dr. Swann on April 14, 2014. Written Question 4: "As of January 1, 2014, how many licensed child care program spaces and approved family day home spaces are there in each of Edmonton, Calgary, and the rest of Alberta?" Written Question 19: "What criteria does the Government use to classify children as living in poverty?" Written Question 20: "What is the Government's estimate of how many Alberta children are living in poverty as of January 1, 2014?" Written Question 21: "What criteria does the Government use to determine whether a child has escaped poverty?" Written Question 22: "What is the Government's projection of how much money it will need to invest to eliminate

child poverty in five years, in connection with Together We Raise Tomorrow, Alberta's Poverty Reduction Strategy, announced in June 2013, and to which programs, services, and community resources will this funding be allocated?" Written Question 27: "What is the projected net financial result of dissolving the Child and Family Services Authorities and Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Boards, establishing family and community engagement councils, and transferring responsibility for service delivery to the Ministry of Human Services?" Written Question 28: "How much have caseloads for Alberta Works decreased or increased from April 1, 2008, to April 1, 2013?"

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, as I've already said, we made history today. Never in my time has an entire week of business of the Assembly occurred with not one single point of order in question period, and I just want to thank and congratulate members on both sides of the House for elevating the level of decorum. I did let you burn off a little bit of steam there in the last set of questions because I could sense that things were pent up inside you for the whole week, but it didn't result in a point of order, and for that we're all grateful. There are no other points of order, so we will move on with the question of privilege.

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm prepared to make this ruling on the purported question of privilege that was raised by the Member for Edmonton-Centre on Tuesday, November 18, 2014. The debate on this matter can be found at pages 23 to 28 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day.

With respect to the formalities my office received notice from the Member for Edmonton-Centre on November 12, 2014, at 2:53 p.m. regarding her intention to raise a question of privilege under Standing Order 15 when the House reconvened this session. The member has satisfied the requirement in Standing Order 15(2) for notice to be given to the Speaker at least two hours before the opening of the sitting. The notice to the Speaker also indicated that those persons whose conduct might be called into question would be copied on the notice as is also required, if practicable, under Standing Order 15(2).

As indicated, the Member for Edmonton-Centre raised her purported question of privilege on Tuesday, November 18, in the Assembly, which was the first day of ordinary business for this session. The member indicated that her purported question of privilege is based on matters contained in the Auditor General's report dated August 2014 and titled Special Duty Report on the Expenses of the Office of Premier Redford and Alberta's Air Transportation Services Program. This report was released on August 7, 2014, and was filed at that time as an intersessional deposit, known as Sessional Paper 309/2014, while the Assembly was adjourned. The Assembly did not sit from the time that the report was released until the commencement of the Third Session of the Legislature on Monday, November 17, 2014. Accordingly, I find that the application under Standing Order 15 was raised at the earliest opportunity.

I'll have more to say about a previous purported question on the same subject, decided back in March of this year, in a moment. That was during the Second Session of the Legislature.

Now, before continuing with the substance of my ruling, I would like to draw members' attention to the notice provided by the Member for Edmonton-Centre during Notices of Motions in Tuesday's daily Routine. The notice referenced four members of

this Assembly: the members for Calgary-Acadia, Grande Prairie-Wapiti, Edmonton-Rutherford, and Spruce Grove-St. Albert, but Calgary-Acadia was struck out. I have confirmed with the Member for Edmonton-Centre that she has raised this question of privilege with respect to only three of those four members and that the striking out of Calgary-Acadia in her written notice was intentional and that she herself had stricken it out.

The purported question of privilege before us today resurrected the question of privilege raised by the Member for Calgary-Shaw last session. Members can certainly read his arguments in the March 12, 2014, *Alberta Hansard* at pages 212 and 213. His purported question of privilege was similar to the one raised by the Member for Edmonton-Centre on Tuesday this week; namely, that there were statements made in this Assembly that allegedly interfered with the ability of members to perform their duties. Another way of articulating this point is to suggest that a member made a statement in this Assembly that was deliberately misleading and accordingly constituted a contempt of this Assembly.

For the benefit of the new members in particular but also for those who may not recall the proceedings on this point last March, *Erskine May's Treatise on The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 24th edition, at page 254 states with respect to the United Kingdom: "The Commons may treat the making of a deliberately misleading statement as a contempt." As well, and as I pointed out in my rulings on November 29 and December 3, 2012, at pages 1190 and 1206 of *Alberta Hansard* respectively, it is understood that a form of contempt that is treated as a question of privilege is just that, as enunciated earlier.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre is raising essentially the same purported question of privilege but distinguishes her argument on the basis of the information contained in the aforementioned Auditor General's special duty report of August 2014. As everyone knows, that report dealt solely with the expenses incurred by the Premier's office. Let me be clear. We're talking about the former Premier.

To clarify the scope of the report, it states at page 2: "This was an audit of the expenses of Premier Redford and her office. It would be wrong for anyone to extrapolate our findings and conclusions to the public service of Alberta as a whole."

The Auditor General states at page 27 of the report:

We found that, on October 25, 2012, Premier Redford flew on a government aircraft to Grande Prairie to attend the Northern Alberta Leader's Dinner. We reviewed Premier Redford's schedule for that day and did not identify any government business scheduled in Grande Prairie.

Clearly, the Auditor General's reference states that there was nothing in Premier Redford's schedule to suggest that she had any government business printed in the schedule he reviewed.

The chair would also note that two days ago, on November 18, 2014, the Minister of Transportation tabled an August 13, 2014, newspaper article from the *Daily Herald-Tribune*, known as Sessional Paper 14/2014, wherein the editor of that newspaper confirms that a funding announcement that was made about the Grande Prairie regional hospital on October 25, 2012, was in fact made at the TEC Centre in Grande Prairie. In other words, some government business obviously did occur during this trip in question.*

Now, it's important to note that the test for deliberately misleading the Assembly or the House is found in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, 2nd edition, at page 86, where the three-part test articulated by former Clerk of the New Zealand House of Assembly David McGee in the 3rd edition of his book *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand* at pages 653 and 654 is

cited. As indicated several times in this Assembly, the three parts of the test are:

One, it must be proven that the statement was misleading; two, it must be established that the Member making the statement knew at the time that the statement was incorrect; and three, that in making the statement, the Member intended to mislead the House.

3:00

The specifics of the flights and the activities of members of the government caucus were extensively covered in March of this year, both in question period and during discussion of the Member for Calgary-Shaw's purported question of privilege at that time. Also at that time the members in question explained the circumstances surrounding their travel on the day in question, including how travel plans were affected by the tragic accident that occurred in St. Paul.

The ruling that there was no prima facie question of privilege can be found at page 215 of *Alberta Hansard* for March 12, 2014. Additional information regarding the flights, of course, was provided by the Member for Edmonton-Centre when yesterday she tabled the passenger manifest for the flights to and from Grande Prairie on October 25, 2012, as Sessional Paper 28/2014.

It is not in keeping with parliamentary tradition to raise a matter that has already been decided. If this were a court, it is my understanding that to raise the same issues that have already been adjudicated would be an abuse of process or subject to the Latin term *res judicata*, which means already subject to judicial determination; in other words, the matter has already been decided.

However, two days ago the Member for Edmonton-Centre argued that the determinations in the Auditor General's special duty report offered some proof, some new information perhaps that, in her opinion, deliberately misleading statements were made by some members in this Assembly. The three members referred to in the purported question of privilege all denied that they had any intention to mislead the Assembly, and, as already mentioned, the Minister of Transportation tabled a newspaper article substantiating his argument that, in fact, a government announcement was made in Grande Prairie during the time in question. The report by the Auditor General clearly focused on the activities of the former Premier, not on every member of the government.

With respect to the esteemed officer of the Legislature, there is nothing in his report that directly contradicts the statements made by the three members in the Assembly on Tuesday, November 18, 2014, at page 28 of *Alberta Hansard*. While the statements were short, they did not move away from their earlier statements in the Assembly which they made last March.

I indicated that I would look at other jurisdictions in formulating this ruling. A 2002 ruling by former Ontario Speaker Carr nicely summarized the issue surrounding allegations of meeting the test of deliberately misleading the Assembly and also the role of the Speaker in adjudicating such purported questions of privilege.

On June 17, 2002, at page 996 of *Ontario Hansard* for that day Speaker Carr said the following:

The threshold for finding a prima facie case of contempt against a member of the Legislature on the basis of deliberately misleading the House is therefore set quite high and is very uncommon. It must involve a proved finding of an overt attempt to intentionally mislead the Legislature. In the absence of an admission from the member accused of the conduct, or of tangible confirmation of the conduct independently proved, a Speaker must assume that no honourable member would engage in such behaviour or that, at most, inconsistent statements were the result of inadvertence or honest mistake.

*See page 98, right column, paragraph 11

In light of the comments made by the members, I would find this to be more a case of disagreement among members over facts, as stated in *Beauchesne's* paragraph 494. Speaker Scheer of the Canadian House of Commons had occasion to rule on an allegation of deliberately misleading the House on April 30 of this year, 2014. At page 4753 of *Commons Debates* for that day he quoted former House of Commons Speaker Jerome, who said on June 4, 1975, that "a dispute as to facts, a dispute as to opinions and a dispute as to conclusions to be drawn from an allegation of fact is a matter of debate and not a question of privilege."

Accordingly, as was the case on March 12, 2014, I find that a *prima facie* case of privilege has not been made out. Accordingly, there will be no more proceedings on this matter because this matter is now concluded.

With that, we will move on.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 3

Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014

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

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 3, the Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014.

This bill will authorize a trade union to collect, use, and disclose an individual's personal information in a specific circumstance if it's related to a matter under a labour relations dispute. Under the amendments the trade union can collect, use, and disclose personal information without consent "for the purpose of informing or persuading the public about a matter of significant public interest or importance" relating to the dispute; if the collection, use, and disclosure are reasonably necessary; or if it is reasonable to collect, use, and disclose the information having regard to the nature and sensitivity of the information in the circumstances.

PIPA is aimed to protect Albertans' personal information with respect to the collection, use, and disclosure by the trade union in the following manner. The legislation clarifies authorized circumstances where the collection, use, and disclosure of information in connection with the labour relations dispute is appropriate. The OIPC oversees how the personal information is collected, used, and disclosed by the private-sector organizations in the province. Additionally, the office investigates, resolves, and, where necessary, orders the remedy for those Albertans whose personal information has been compromised. If a person commits an offence under PIPA, they are potentially subject to a maximum fine of \$10,000 in the case of an individual, a maximum fine of \$100,000 in the case of a person other than an individual such as organizations, and to damages for loss or injury suffered by individuals as a result of this breach.

In the event those amendments to PIPA are not passed, the collection, use, and disclosure of personal information by private-sector organizations will be governed by the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act. Under the federal legislation the following limitations exist. The federal legislation does not include PIPA's mandatory breach reporting provision for affected individuals, thereby limiting current access and the privacy protection for Albertans, the federal legislation does not include the access to protection rights for the employees of businesses that are offered under PIPA, and there will be no

provincial oversight to assess the privacy responsibility of the private sector. The function will instead fall to the federal Privacy Commissioner.

In summary, these amendments will ensure that trade unions may collect, use, and disclose personal information of an individual in a manner relating to a labour relations dispute without compromising appropriate protection and oversight of the personal information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Now I move to adjourn debate on Bill 3.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 4

Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 4, the Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014.

Under the Horse Racing Alberta Act HRA has a mandate to regulate, manage, and promote horse racing throughout Alberta, and this will still be the case even with these proposed amendments. Horse Racing Alberta currently has a 12-member board of directors, consisting of one chair, eight industry-nominated representatives, and three members of the public. All board appointments are currently determined by a board vote.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed legislative amendments to the Horse Racing Alberta Act will decrease the board members from 12 members to 11 and increase the number of public members to six, up from the three it currently has. These changes will provide more public representation on the board and will strengthen HRA's governance structure. The board will also have five industry-nominated members: a thoroughbred representative, a standardbred representative, one other breeds/quarter horse representative, an A-level race track representative, and a B-level race track representative. All public members would be selected from an open competition and screened for their relevant experience and expertise. The appointments will be made by order in council.

Mr. Speaker, with these proposed changes, more than half of the board would be public members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, and one of those non-industry members would be designated as chair of the board.

In summary, the proposed legislative changes are part of our commitment to strong public agency board governance. I encourage all members of the Assembly to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move to adjourn debate on Bill 4.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:10

Bill 5

Securities Amendment Act, 2014

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 5, the Securities Amendment Act, 2014.

As I mentioned at first reading, the government is proposing amendments to the Securities Act to further modernize, harmonize, and streamline Alberta's securities laws. The amendments before you today support the ongoing reform of the Canadian securities

regulatory system and assist Canada in meeting its international commitments.

The amendments relate to a variety of topics, including continued harmonization of general derivative provisions; incorporation of representatives of registered brokers and advisers; enhanced enforcement provisions; recognition and oversight of the Canadian Public Accountability Board as an auditor oversight organization; fee-setting provisions for the Alberta Securities Commission; and other housekeeping amendments to the Securities Act, with consequential amendments to related legislation.

I'd like to take a few minutes to walk you through the proposed amendments. The Securities Act was last amended during the 2014 spring session, when over-the-counter derivative amendments were enacted to help manage and mitigate risks and improve transparency. As you may recall, this type of financial instrument was cited as a contributing factor in the 2008 global financial crisis. This harmonization initiative will take several years to complete, and these amendments allow that work to continue.

Moving on to the next topic, incorporation of individual representatives, industry groups have long wanted a level playing field providing representatives of registered dealers and advisers across Canada with the option of providing securities-related services to their clients through a professional corporation. The proposed amendments will establish a statutory framework permitting representatives of registered dealers and advisers to provide services to clients through a professional corporation. This will be done under the supervision of the registered firm. The proposed incorporation model is a voluntary/optional business structure intended to provide individual representatives with additional flexibility and choice of the most effective structure for their business activities. In May 2012 Saskatchewan passed but has not yet proclaimed similar amendments. Harmonized provisions are expected to be passed across Canada shortly.

Bill 5 establishes a statutory regime to provide the Canadian Public Accountability Board, or CPAB, with the powers and protections necessary to fulfill its mandate to ensure the integrity of financial reporting by public companies in Canada. CPAB was created in 2003 to provide independent oversight of auditors of public companies in Canada following the auditing scandals involving Enron and WorldCom in the United States. The auditor oversight function is essentially a regulatory function designed to help ensure the quality and reliability of audited financial statements. It involves the information in documents that a public company has disclosed to its auditors, some of which may be subject to solicitor-client privilege.

The Alberta CPAB amendments will follow the approach taken in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick of providing CPAB with access to privileged information and audit working papers only with the consent of the client. In a very practical sense this is already happening as all Canadian audit firms regardless of size now use a standard form of engagement letter. This letter provides notice of the audit firm's obligations to provide CPAB with access to the audit working file and requires the client's consent.

Mr. Speaker, effective enforcement and compliance are essential to advancing investor protection and fostering fair and efficient capital markets. The enforcement-related amendments contained in Bill 5 were designed to improve the Alberta Securities Commission's enforcement capacity as well as respond to recent court and commission decisions and to the introduction of the new *Alberta Rules of Court* in 2010. The commission is proposing to update the list of entities they share information with by adding trade repositories, clearing agencies, alternative trading systems, and credit-rating agencies.

The amended act also permits the commission to issue automatic reciprocal enforcement orders without the need to take any additional steps. Currently a hearing must be held before a reciprocal order based on enforcement proceedings or settlements in other jurisdictions can be granted and requires evidence of cross-border misconduct putting Alberta investors at risk.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Securities Commission and its counterparts across Canada are upgrading their IT systems and have replaced their systems operator. The new systems operator has taken over the hosting, operation, and maintenance of the three national filing systems. This requires the embedding of the requirement to pay fees for the use of these filing systems in a harmonized fee rule and has led to the need for the commission to be able to set its own fees. The amendment would permit the commission to set its own fees, including fees related to the operation of these IT systems, just as both the British Columbia and Ontario securities commissions have authority to do so. However, ASC fee changes would require the prior approval of the minister, and the commission would still have to publish fee proposals for comment under the commission's rule-making requirements.

There are several other housekeeping amendments of a technical or housekeeping nature. The intent of these amendments is to improve or clarify existing provisions of the Securities Act: for example, repealing a requirement to send a confirmation of trade that has been moved into the regulations, therefore making the Securities Act confirmation provision redundant; extending the requirement to file a personal information form to apply to promoters; and clarifying how to effect service of documents on the commission.

In addition, there are also some consequential amendments to other statutes, including the Cooperatives Act and the Business Corporations Act. For example, the requirements of the executive director of the commission to be notified of applications for approvals of plans of arrangement under the Cooperatives Act and the Business Corporations Act will be repealed. This is because these plans of arrangement are already subject to court and shareholder approval before they can proceed and the executive director has not taken a position when provided with notice.

The ministries responsible for the administration of the above statutes are in agreement with the proposed amendments.

To sum up, the proposed amendments will ensure that Alberta honours its commitment under the 2004 memorandum of understanding to ongoing reform. Further, these amendments support international commitments made by Canada. The net result is a better functioning regulatory system that provides additional protection to investors while ensuring the efficient operations of our capital markets.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I now move to adjourn debate on Bill 5.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 6 Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and move second reading of the Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No.2), Bill 6.

This bill brings together a number of small amendments to a number of acts under three different ministries. The amendments

are intended to streamline and provide efficiency, clarity, and consistency between acts for those affected by these acts. These amendments have been brought as a single omnibus bill to deal with a number of small items in an encompassing amendment act for the effective use of time of members of the Assembly.

The first set of amendments are from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. They're seeking amendments to the Safety Codes Act. Mr. Speaker, these amendments will allow qualified safety officers to approve pressure vessel designs, which will reduce delays for applicants. As well, the amendments will remove a phrase that could be seen to transfer the owners' safety responsibility to the administrator. These changes will help streamline the process by reducing delays without relaxing standards or safety. The pressure equipment industry will be most impacted as they submit designs for review and registration in order to operate and construct this equipment in their plants.

The first amendment will address a gap and allow for qualified safety codes officers employed by the Alberta Boilers Safety Association, also known as ABSA, to review and register the pressure vessel designs. As it is currently worded, the legislation reads that only the administrator can register pressure vessel designs. ABSA employs safety codes officers who review the pressure vessel designs and make recommendations to the administrator before the administrator registers them. However, this year ABSA will receive approximately 11,000 designs for boilers, pressure vessels, fittings, pressure piping systems, thermal liquid heating systems, welding procedures, complex repair procedures, and alteration procedures.

Mr. Speaker, allowing safety codes officers to review and register these designs will increase efficiency and reduce the delays to owners for the registration of their pressure vessels with ABSA. Once the amendments are made, the safety codes officers who have the appropriate technical qualifications will be designated with the authority to register designs. Currently, ABSA employs approximately 90 safety codes officers, and out of those there are 22 who have the technical qualifications to review and approve designs. There are no risks associated with this proposed change. Safety codes officers are able to effectively perform this function.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, the second proposed amendment dealing with the Safety Codes Act would delete specific wording from the act that is considered confusing. The phrase may suggest a transfer of owners' obligation of responsibility for compliance to the administrator, which is contrary to sections 5 and 6 of the act. Therefore, under section 40(1) specific wording has been removed which could place an unintended burden on the administrator to take steps for the design's safety beyond meeting requirements of the act. This proposed legislative amendment would ensure that owners' responsibilities are clear and that there is no perceived conflict with the responsibilities section of the act between the administrator and the designer.

The third proposed change would delete the word "obsolete." The term "obsolete" is unnecessary. An obsolete design may mean that it is outdated, but it could still be safe and meet the requirements of the Safety Codes Act. If the administrator, in his or her reasonable opinion, considers an obsolete design unsafe or that it does not meet the requirements of the act, the administrator has the full authority of the act to deregister the design. A design that does not meet the requirements of the act is in breach of the act. The design would be deregistered, and the owner would be required to take the unsafe equipment out of service.

It is important to note that the proposed amendments will not have any financial impact, and there is no additional training or costs as these safety codes officers exist and already have the necessary training.

Mr. Speaker, the second ministry requesting amendments is Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. They're seeking amendments to the Workers' Compensation Act that will clarify the WCB's authority to disclose information to the Appeals Commission. The proposed amendments are intended for clarification purposes and to increase efficiency and effectiveness in the appeals process. In several recent decisions adjudicators from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner have interpreted the act differently than the Workers' Compensation Board and the Appeals Commissions, specifically regarding the authority of the WCB to disclose information to the Appeals Commission.

Workers and employers involved in appeals will not see any changes in the process. Staff from the WCB, the Appeals Commission, and Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour met with staff from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner to discuss these proposed amendments, and no further concerns were raised. Passing these amendments this fall will help ensure that the WCB, the Appeals Commission, and the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner have a common interpretation of the act. The Workers' Compensation Board of directors, which includes representatives of the interests of employers and workers, is supportive of the proposed amendments to the WCB Act as they stand.

Mr. Speaker, the third ministry seeking amendments is my Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. We're proposing amendments to combine the Farm Implement Act and the Farm Implement Dealerships Act and repeal the Dairy Industry Omnibus Act of 2002. The Farm Implement Act provides Alberta farmers with warranty protection, legal guidelines on the length of warranty, assurance that replacement parts will be available for at least 10 years after they purchase a new implement, and minimum stated requirements for sales contracts.

The Farm Implement Dealerships Act also provides protection for consumers and dealers of farm implements. Certain requirements are placed upon distributors of farm implements such as prohibiting distributors from terminating an agreement with a dealership without cause, without an order of the court, or without complying with the court order; permitting agreements between distributors and dealers to be terminated by mutual agreement; and preventing distributors from discriminating against dealers in respect of contractual requirements or prices for farm implements of similar grade or quality or for dealing in the products of competitors.

Mr. Speaker, both acts are administered by the office of the Farmers' Advocate of Alberta. It's proposed that these acts be consolidated into a single farm implement and dealerships act to streamline the legislation and provide greater ease of reference for stakeholders to whom the acts apply.

The amendments will also align Alberta's legislation with similar legislation in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario; clarify that all implements purchased at auction are strictly buyer beware; enable the minister to publish information received through notices of failure to perform in order to better protect consumers; clarify roles and responsibilities during a repair or repurchase of a farm implement that fails to perform satisfactorily; expand buyback provisions to include required supplementary materials such as signage and computer hardware and software; repeal transitional provisions that are no longer required; and increase the penalty for any person who contravenes the Farm Implement Dealerships Act from a maximum of \$50,000 to a

maximum of \$100,000. Certainly, when you consider that farm implements can cost well over \$500,000, the fines are needed to reflect the fiscal implications of the items involved.

Mr. Speaker, we're also proposing a repeal of the Dairy Industry Omnibus Act, 2002. This act was proclaimed as part of the transfer of governance responsibility for dairy production and marketing from the provincial dairy board to Alberta Milk. Over 10 years have passed since the transition, and these provisions are no longer required for Alberta Milk. In fact, Alberta Milk supports the repeal of this act.

The amendments before you today are largely housekeeping in nature, updating details to align with similar legislation and current needs. As well, they will provide greater clarity and efficiency in providing services to Albertans. I ask all members to support this legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move to adjourn debate on Bill 6.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate November 19: Mr. Oberle]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have the following list, subject to any changes: the Minister of Education, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Edmonton-Centre, Edmonton-Calder, and Calgary-Shaw.

Please proceed, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me to rise today in this Assembly as the newly elected Member for Calgary-Elbow and address members present in response to the Speech from the Throne. I do want, first, to congratulate the new members for Calgary-Foothills and Calgary-West and Edmonton-Whitemud in their impressive by-election victories. To be chosen by our constituents to represent and serve as their member in this Legislative Assembly and to advocate for their interests is a humbling privilege and a momentous responsibility.

Andrew Oliver, the 16th century public official, rightly said that in many respects elected public service can be a hazardous profession, but he went on to say that politics is still the noblest career any man can choose. Few people will have the opportunity to deliberate and serve the common good in this distinguished Chamber, and I'm deeply humbled by the honour bestowed upon me to represent the great constituency of Calgary-Elbow.

Since 1905 some 58 individuals have represented this geographic region, located in the heart of Calgary, and included in this number are such notable individuals as Premiers Aberhart, Manning, Lougheed, Klein, Redford, future Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, Lieutenant Governor Grant MacEwan, Sheldon Chumir, and Art Dixon, the longest-serving Speaker of this Assembly. To follow in the footsteps of such distinguished legislators who have

represented Calgary-Elbow is, needless to say, both humbling and daunting.

As I'm sure all members here will attest to, success in public life is rarely, if ever, a solo affair, so today with a deep sense of gratitude I pay special tribute to my dear wife, Evangeline Joy. Without her unwavering support and encouragement throughout my years of public service and during the strenuous by-election, I would not be standing here today. Political enterprise is, first and foremost, about people, and the effectiveness of our democratic system of governance is inextricably bound up with the lives and contributions of thousands of volunteers at the local constituency level across our great province. So today I want to recognize and to express my deep gratitude to the over 300 dedicated volunteers who linked arms with me in the recent Calgary-Elbow by-election and who worked tirelessly in support of my election campaign.

3:30

Calgary-Elbow is a vibrant and diverse constituency of over 44,000 residents, and as I talked with thousands of constituents during the by-election, I was struck, Mr. Speaker, by two key observations. First, I was deeply impressed by the decency and civility of the good voters of Calgary-Elbow. Rarely was an unkind or disrespectful word spoken to me at their doorsteps. In contrast, many are the regions of the world where elections are dangerous affairs and where the threat of intimidation, violence, and persecution are endemic to public life. So to be able to conduct our common political life with civil discourse on streets that are safe underscores the robust health of Alberta's democracy and is a blessing to be richly treasured.

Then, whether I was speaking with single professionals or younger parents with growing families or retired seniors, whether my conversations were with educators, small-business people, nurses, or oil patch executives, I was struck by the essential commonality of interests and aspirations of Calgary-Elbow residents when it comes to their government. Throughout the recent by-elections Albertans made it very clear that they want their elected officials to govern with a laser focus that is grounded in their priorities, which respects their tax dollars. During this by-election Albertans were explicit about what they expect from their government, and I share their sentiments.

In the constituency of Calgary-Elbow here's what they said. They said: protect our communities and our great city of Calgary from future devastating floods. With one voice they said: strengthen our core public services of health care and education and provide our seniors with the long-term care facilities they need in order to live with dignity in and near their communities. They issued a loud call to government to manage the public purse in a fiscally prudent way that balances the operating budget, that invests in future infrastructure, that pays down debt and saves for the future.

Albertans know that their future well-being is tied to our collective ability to market Alberta's energy, forestry, and agriculture resources to the world, so they said: put market access for Alberta's resources at the top of your agenda, and don't waver in working co-operatively with British Columbia and with Saskatchewan, our great neighbour provinces, and with the federal government and with aboriginal communities to secure our future economic well-being. But they also said: while you're maximizing the value of our resources, do so in a way that respects and protects our fundamental Alberta values of environmental conservation and the protection of property rights.

Finally, they said: we need you to help restore public trust and end the days of entitlement.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that from day one these five priorities have been and will continue to be the essential hallmark of this new government. Therefore, it's no exaggeration to say that Alberta has entered a new era, with a new government, under new management, grounded in the people's priorities. The steps our Premier and our government have taken over the past 60 days and the government's visionary agenda set forth in the Speech from the Throne have made it abundantly clear that a new day has indeed dawned in Alberta. Guided by prudence, accountability, trust, decency, and respect, our government has begun to deliver on these five fundamental priorities of Albertans.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I want to focus on just two of these priorities. It is difficult if not impossible to fully calibrate the devastation which the people of Calgary-Elbow and other residents of Calgary and High River and our aboriginal communities suffered in the flood of 2013. As I stood at the front doors and sat at the dining-room tables of many Calgary-Elbow residents, I was deeply moved to hear the gut-wrenching stories of how their lives and their families, their businesses, and their communities were turned upside down by the devastating flood.

Mr. Speaker, the first task of government is to protect its citizens. Never again should Calgarians and Albertans live in fear because of our vulnerability to future devastating floods, and that is why one of the first decisions of our Premier and our government was to green-light flood mitigation projects to protect Calgary and High River, two of the hardest hit regions in the province. We also directed a tripling of staff in order to complete disaster recovery program appeals as expeditiously as possible.

Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Education I also want to underscore our government's commitment to continue to secure the future health of our public education system across Alberta. Our province has an outstanding record of providing world-class education for children, and this government has every intention of continuing to make the provision of quality education for Alberta students a marquee priority.

One of the ways we are doing that is by aggressively moving forward, Mr. Speaker, with the largest capital investment in new and renovated school facilities in the history of Alberta and indeed of our country. Alberta is Canada's fastest growing jurisdiction by population, and we need to ensure that we are equipped to give every Alberta student the very best education facilities possible.

Our three-phase program of building and securing Alberta's school infrastructure future now includes over 240 school projects that have recently opened or are under construction or are in the permitting or planning stages. Just this past week, along with my colleague the Minister of Infrastructure, sod was turned on three new school projects in Cochrane and Airdrie, and we look forward to seeing the doors open for kids in these and many other schools in the years to come. That's what Albertans expect, and that's what good government does, Mr. Speaker.

Our government is also committed to ensuring that our K to 12 curriculum focuses on foundational skills of literacy and numeracy while incorporating 21st century skills such as communication and creativity and collaboration. We want to ensure that our grading and reporting approaches across the province are coherent and easily understood by parents.

As Minister of Education I'm committed to ensuring that we help our students become ethical citizens and engaged thinkers with an entrepreneurial mindset. We need to strengthen our focus on individualizing learning as well as placing a high priority on second-language instruction to prepare our students for the new social, cultural, and economic shifts under way in our province and in our world.

To help our students become ethical citizens and engaged thinkers with an entrepreneurial mindset, we need to ensure that we are supporting and coaching teachers and doing all we can to ensure stable, long-term, predictable funding for our school boards. And we need to make sure that every student is taught and nurtured in a safe, caring, and respectful environment because the human dignity of our students and the well-being of our public education system call for safety and security for each and every student.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans spoke decisively during the recent by-elections. They want and Albertans deserve a government that first listens and then acts decisively on the people's priorities. Alberta's new government is doing just that. Each and every day the people's priorities are resonating with this government as we move into a new era in the history of Alberta's public life.

Mr. Speaker, I am sincerely humbled to serve the people of Calgary-Elbow as their member in this Legislative Assembly. With deep sincerity I pledge to work vigorously to represent the interests of the residents of Calgary-Elbow in this Legislature and to ensure that the people's priorities as articulated in this Speech from the Throne remain the enduring focus of my work as MLA and as Minister of Education in the months and years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available. Does anyone wish to rise under 29(2)(a)?

If not, let us move on to Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. But just before we do, I should let you know that there was some time remaining at the top of this particular section for the hon. Deputy Government House Leader to take up six more minutes of the speaking time that he had or something along that line. Maybe he had more time left. However, he waived that, and that's why we went straight to the Minister of Education. For those of you who were asking me that question, that's the answer.

Secondly, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, in fact, will be in the fifth spot today unless otherwise noted, not Edmonton-Calder.

Let's go on to Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, please.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to speak to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne and his relaying of the government's intentions for this session. I found his speech very interesting although in many respects hard to agree with. I'd like to outline some of the concerns I have.

First, I wanted to say a few things about my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I'm very proud to represent that area. I have represented it now for 14 years – it was previously Edmonton-Highlands, then was amalgamated with the Edmonton-Norwood constituency when that was eliminated due to a redistribution – and have represented that area both on city council and here for 25 years now. [some applause] Thank you very much. I know the people and the area very well.

It is primarily a low-income area. It has some of the lowest incomes in the province of Alberta. It has tremendous people, a tremendous sense of community, and a great variety of types of communities, a very interesting area. It includes not only some of the very poorest parts of the city – in the Boyle Street area, the downtown area – but it includes Chinatown, it includes Little Italy, and it includes Alberta Avenue, with a very vibrant arts scene that has been developing there, and I would like to express some appreciation to the Minister of Health in his former position as mayor for the contribution that he made sure took place on the

part of the city of Edmonton to develop that area. I always try to say something nice about them when they come, Mr. Speaker, and something nice about them when they leave. In between it's not quite the same.

But it has made a difference, Mr. Speaker, and it's an exciting area that's really beginning to take off and attract people from not only the rest of the city but from other parts of the province as well with some of the wonderful festivals, the arts festivals and so on, that are taking place there as well as the communities of Highlands, which is a long-established neighbourhood, as well as Newton and Montrose. It is something I'm very proud of, to have represented that area for so long.

It has some issues, and it has some needs, Mr. Speaker. Community revitalization is very important to it, and one aspect that I'd like to touch on with respect to that is the importance of schools and retaining schools in some of the older neighbourhoods. It is an issue that I've worked on in conjunction with other MLAs, with school trustees, and with city councillors in order to do that. We recognize very much the need and the pressure on the government to provide new schools in growing areas, but we also need policies that encourage people to remain in older communities near the core of the city so that the existing schools as well as parks as well as libraries and other important facilities get the full use that they need.

I want to talk a little bit now about some of the aspects of the speech and the five main principles that have been established by the government under the new Premier.

A focused commitment to sound, conservative fiscal principles; ending entitlements and restoring public trust; maximizing the value of our natural resources and respecting property rights; establishing our province as an environmental leader; and increasing Albertans' quality of life by being a leader in the areas of health, education, seniors' care, and skills training.

I'd like to take some of those things in turn.

I notice in the Speech from the Throne that the government says that it "will be cautious in budgeting, prudent in spending, and diligent in saving." Mr. Speaker, it may come as a surprise to some members of this House that I find no basis for disagreement with those principles. It makes sense entirely to me that you should be cautious in budgeting and not spend more money than you have and that you should be saving for the future. That's not something with which I disagree. The question is how it's done and what the intention is in doing so, and this is where I do disagree with the government.

In another statement on the same page of the speech it says, "the rate of increase on spending for government operations will be kept below the rate of population growth and inflation." Even the Wildrose says that spending should keep pace with the rate of population growth and inflation. Now, if you don't do that, Mr. Speaker, what happens, of course, is that you have cuts. You have reductions in spending. You have, really, programs that are eliminated or reduced. You can't meet the needs of the public.

Mr. Speaker, it's always the lower income people and the programs they depend on that get cut first. They don't cut, you know, programs that benefit corporations or oil companies; they get drilling incentives. Other people get aboriginal education programs cut or low-income housing cut. Those are the kinds of things that the government comes for when it tries to reduce spending below the rate of population growth and inflation. That, I think, is really where we're going to have a major difference. It's important that we improve our spending and our programs for low-income people in this province and for average Alberta families.

In fact, many of these things can be seen as investments that will save money in the longer term. If you do targeted social investments in programs to combat poverty, to combat homelessness, to combat hunger, you actually will save money in terms of courts, police, and so on. In many cases these kinds of investments are actually the fiscally responsible course of action to take.

Now, the government is also talking about ending entitlements and restoring public trust, and some of these things, I think, are not bad things. The question is whether they will go far enough, and I believe that they will probably not. The question that I think is most important in this is about the cozy relationship that has developed over the years between the PC Party, the PC government, and the oil industry. It's very, very close. It's very, very cozy. The lack of regulation in terms of environmental protection with respect to new programs, I think, is the consequence of that.

In terms of maximizing the value of our natural resources, that is something we've been talking about for a long time. Peter Lougheed established a number of principles for the development of the oil and gas industry in this province, that I think were seminal. In fact, they'd been adopted by Norway in the development of policy with respect to their industry and put to very good use. Unfortunately, here in Alberta the government has walked away from Peter Lougheed's principles. It no longer thinks like an owner. It thinks more like a doormat, Mr. Speaker, and lets the oil and gas industry basically write its own ticket.

3:50

Peter Lougheed talked about adding value. He talked about getting fair value on the resources that we own. He set a target, Mr. Speaker, that the province would collect 30 per cent of the total value of the natural resources of this province, that belong to every citizen. He achieved that, and in some years he actually exceeded it, but now, far from being 30 per cent, the province of Alberta is collecting just 9 per cent of the value of those natural resources, which is less than was achieved by the Social Credit government in the 1950s and the 1960s. It is unacceptable.

While Norway has a \$600 billion fund from their oil and gas revenue and has raised the level of standard of living of their people, raised the level of services that the people of Norway receive, here in Alberta we're still involved in boom-and-bust cycles, and we've managed to scrape together not much more than Peter Lougheed put together during his term. The rest of it is gone. It's been spent. It's slipped through our fingers. It's gone to Houston. It's gone to Chicago. It's just gone, Mr. Speaker. I think that we really will have a lot of explaining to do to our grandchildren when they ask what happened to the wealth of this province, that was squandered and wasted and not saved for future generations.

I remember when former Premier Ed Stelmach put together a blue-chip economic panel to talk about the major challenges facing the province. I attended the release of their report. That was in 2007. One of their primary recommendations was that Alberta should reduce its dependence on very volatile royalty revenue as a source of income for program expenditures. They identified that 30 per cent of Alberta's program expenditures are paid for by nonrenewable and highly volatile royalty revenues. That hasn't changed, Mr. Speaker, seven years later. The government still talks about it in throne speeches and does nothing.

It's important, in our view, that the royalty revenue be retained for future generations. It doesn't just belong to us, Mr. Speaker. The oil and gas in the ground is the heritage of all Albertans, not just Albertans of this generation. If we spend it on our current

needs, to fund our health care system, our education system, our roads, whatever, then we are really stealing from future generations of this province, and that money should be saved and retained, but it means that there has to be some revenue reform, because under former Premier Klein Alberta's income tax system was gutted.

I was there. I watched Steve West, when he was the Provincial Treasurer, talk about reducing corporate income tax from 15 and a half per cent down to 8 per cent. They have systematically reduced corporate income tax – and this is paid just on profits. They're not taxing companies that are struggling. They're just taxing their profits. It's gone now from 15 to 10 per cent, and billions of dollars of revenue is no longer available to us. We've become more dependent on royalty revenue.

Just before that, when Stockwell Day was the Provincial Treasurer, he brought in the flat tax. The flat tax gave a massive tax holiday to the very wealthiest in our province, and at the same time it raised taxes on middle-income people. Do you know that someone earning \$70,000 a year will pay more in income tax in Alberta than they will in B.C. or Ontario? It's been an increase on the middle class and a windfall for millionaires and billionaires in our province. It also costs us billions of dollars a year, so we're even more dependent on oil prices.

Oil prices. Guess what, Mr. Speaker? Who could have predicted that they go up and down? I don't understand, you know. This is a big surprise to the government every time. I don't know. Once again, we're in a period of low oil prices, and it's going to last, apparently, a couple of years according to the business press.

There was an interesting article in the *Globe and Mail Report on Business* a few weeks ago indicating that because of successes internationally in reducing dependence on fossil fuels, the lower prices may in fact be permanent. I don't know if that's true or not, Mr. Speaker, but the fact is that this government has had plenty of warning about the imperative necessity of eliminating its dependence on royalty revenue for program spending, and it has done precisely nothing. Now they're talking about it in the throne speech again. Well, I like to learn from history, and I've learned that oil prices go up and down. I've also learned that the government talks about changing things and never does. So I'm just going to have to hold my breath.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anybody who wishes. Let's go with Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, and then we'll go from there to Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We heard a lot of talk about all of the things this government was going to do in the throne speech but very little on the 10-year plan to end homelessness. As you were discussing, your riding is probably directly affected as many of our ridings are. I'm just wondering if you can walk me through some of the challenges facing your riding and many of the urban ridings in the 10-year plan to end homelessness given that we're five years in and we don't seem to be actually anywhere near a plan.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think that when the government initiated this, they actually were sincere about trying to do something about it, but they took money from affordable housing programs and put it into programs to end

homelessness, so they just really moved the problem. There wasn't new money that was made available for this. There was some initial progress, but now homeless numbers are rising again, and you can see it. It's not just individuals who are homeless now but entire families that are homeless. I don't think that the province has been nearly as effective or proactive or serious about this as some of our municipalities that have taken action. We could do a lot more if the province would actually get onboard with the municipalities and work with them to do this.

I want to make one more point, and that is that shelters are not homes. Mr. Speaker, they get people out of the cold, they get them out of potentially dangerous situations, but they're not giving them a home. It's a fundamental thing. If you want to tackle the other problems, you know, other difficulties you may have, with child poverty or addictions or things like that, the first place to start is to make sure that every Albertan has a home.

I'll just segue from that a little bit to talk about the absence of any talk in this throne speech about ending child poverty. As people will remember, that was a major promise of Alison Redford in the election that elected all of the government members that are sitting here today except for the last four. Everybody else was elected on a promise, among many other promises, most of which have not been kept, to end child poverty. Yet I can't recall a single mention of child poverty as a priority for this government in any throne speech since, including this one, and I think that that is something that is very much a shame.

I know that schools struggle to raise money from private sources to put on hot lunch programs because there's no systematic approach to deal with that and no assistance from this government. The government doesn't do anything to assist and make sure every child is learning on a full stomach. It's left to people to go begging to private sources and for funds that are available for that purpose. It's not something that the government sees as a priority. I think that's very, very unfortunate.

4:00

I will make one last point, Mr. Speaker, before my time is up. It seems that fundamental things that the government needs to do, such as health care and education, are almost add-ons in this speech. They're a subpart of the fifth point, or the fifth priority, of the government. In our view, they should be front and centre as the major priorities of this government. That is one of the fundamental things that a provincial government in the Canadian system is responsible for, the provision of public health care and public education. To have them almost as appendices, add-ons at the end of the speech, really indicates where they sit in terms of the priorities of this government. It's not good enough.

We've seen today the result of the mismanagement and the neglect of our health care system with this disaster at the Misericordia hospital, something that we've been asking about and demanding answers on for several years now. I think that it's an indication of the very low priority with which this government treats important social services, primarily health care and education. I think we can do better, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I will do my best to intersperse speakers from all four parties based on the requests I receive. At the moment I have Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to rise and speak to the throne speech that was delivered on Monday by our new Premier.

You know, it's interesting. In the two and a half years that I've been elected as a brand new MLA, coming into this wonderful organization and this Legislature on April 23, 2012 – I'd like to walk you through some of the things that I've heard so far.

One of the things is that in two and a half years we've heard three throne speeches. We've heard from three different Premiers. We've had three different visions of government and three different versions of what Albertans want at the door. This is what's important to understand. In all of that, each throne speech throws out a lot of promises, and each throne speech throws out a lot of where we'll focus on and the direction of government. So far we've seen promises made to teachers, \$107 million. We saw family care clinics being the priority of this government in the previous throne speech. We saw the previous throne speech address multiple different avenues about debt, about borrowing, about infrastructure, about not borrowing, about not taking on debt, and they all kind of mismatch together.

We also heard last year from the previous Premier about the bitumen bubble. Funny; that's missing in this one. It's worded slightly differently, but the bitumen bubble is in this new throne speech. It's just kind of worded a little bit more polished. The reason this is important, as my friendly colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood said, is that these promises matter because each and every member in this House, other than the four that were just newly elected, was elected on those very promises. So this new throne speech throws all of that out, just like the baby with the bathwater, and starts fresh and basically says that they have a new mandate from Albertans based on four by-elections.

That's an interesting way to go about it, but, you know, each to their own. We saw the previous Premier go about it, and we saw that she hit a high when she was first elected, and everybody praised her throne speech. We heard all of the members of the party of the day stand up and praise that previous Premier about family care clinics. They all went to the wall. Edmonton-Gold Bar was very vocal in his support of the previous Premier and constantly heckled and chatted all the time about how important the previous Premier's vision for Alberta was. Now we're hearing that the previous Premier's vision for Alberta isn't actually quite what they meant, and we're kind of glad she's gone because that was a bit of a disaster for them. So now they're trying to come all under the nice little tent that the new Premier has created.

Let's talk about the new Premier's five priorities. He talks about "a focused commitment to sound, conservative fiscal principles." I agree with that, as does the hon. member who was just speaking. I think this is fantastic. Unfortunately, the previous Premier also said that. As we know, it's a little bit difficult for these Premiers and this party to kind of keep their word. As we're seeing already, we're getting a little nuanced in our language. They talk about: oh, we're going to have a balanced budget, but it's not a balanced consolidated budget; it's going to be a consolidated operational only, and we'll sort of fudge the numbers on the debt side. They don't tell people that when we take on \$20 billion in debt, they're going to be paying almost \$800 million in interest payments. I think we can all guess what \$800 million could get us in this wonderful province for all of those needy programs that so many Albertans really require.

Now, this next one. I'm going to take a few minutes because it says, "Ending entitlements and restoring public trust." Well, let's start there. Let's talk about ending entitlements and restoring public trust. They talked about strengthened conflict-of-interest guidelines for political staff. Oh, well, that's interesting. Only political staff? I'm pretty sure this government and Alberta Health Services just paid out or is about to pay out \$900,000 to Mr.

Merali in a severance package, that the previous Health minister assured us could never happen. He actually fired the board over it. He said that it could not possibly happen that these severance packages could be paid out, that these contracts are in the best interests of Albertans.

This new Premier is once again going to ignore the problem of severance packages, bonuses, and special perks for everybody except for political staff. While political staff are certainly a problem, he's certainly overlooking the vast majority of the problem in the additional staff outside of that. One of the biggest ministries, the Ministry of Health, has probably one of the biggest areas where these bonuses and perks have really caused this government a great amount of black eyes.

One of the things that we don't see is any mention of an Alberta Health Services sunshine list yet, another promise of the previous Premier that was mentioned in her throne speech, yet it applies to everybody except for Alberta Health Services. One has to wonder what the government is worried about there. Why not disclose salaries of Alberta Health Services employees and of your boards and commissions? But, you know, they don't want Albertans to really have transparency and to really have a way to actually force them to end the entitlements. So there's that one.

Restoring public trust. Well, this sort of hits right at home because restoring public trust means that you don't queue-jump awarding of schools in ridings that are under a by-election. Restoring public trust says that you will treat every riding the exact same regardless of who is representing that riding and regardless of whether or not a cabinet minister is running there in a by-election. There were six other schools that were prioritized higher than Calgary-Elbow modulars, yet conveniently they decided to restore public trust on the day of the election by awarding the modulars in the very riding that had a failed Premier and that needed a solid win. That's not very trustful.

The third one on restoring public trust – and the Premier probably did the right thing as soon as he could. He kind of had to. He sort of had to get rid of those planes. They were really dogging you guys. In restoring the public trust, that was a good one. He had to get rid of the planes because, as the Auditor General has identified, they were being used and abused for partisan purposes. Regardless of how members in this House feel, the Auditor General is an independent, third-party officer of the Legislature, who was very clear that government planes shouldn't be used for partisan business, and they were in the case of Grande Prairie and in others. Many of the members that currently sit today that are part of this government took full advantage of that opportunity, and the Auditor General identified that.

Mr. Mason: They should have a frequent flyer program.

Mrs. Towle: They should. They absolutely should have frequent flyer miles on that.

That creates a real problem for restoring public trust. That's a low-hanging fruit. We get rid of that, but that doesn't necessarily restore anything because you kind of offset it by then turning around and making by-election promises that totally go against everything about integrity and restoring public trust and ending entitlements. I'm happy to award schools. There are multiple schools in this province that are needed. I'm happy to have that infrastructure. I think lots of communities would be happy to have that infrastructure. Lots of communities are waiting. Fifty schools have been announced and lots of sod-turnings have happened, but none have been built. Conveniently, Calgary-Elbow is on the winners list. Good for them.

4:10

"Maximizing the value of our natural resources and respecting property rights." Well, the reality of this one is huge for us in the Wildrose. We certainly campaigned loud and proud on that issue in 2012, as did Albertans. Albertans were very clear that they want restoration of property rights when bills 19, 36, 50, and Bill 2, which came in after you were elected, came in and removed the public interest and did not restore property rights. This Premier talks a lot in the throne speech about how he has, you know, spent 20 years dedicated to property rights and how he's going to hear the voices of Albertans and how he is going to restore property rights. Unfortunately, we saw Bill 1. It contained about seven words, and it didn't do anything except retreat on Bill 19, which was never proclaimed.

Now, we also heard the environment minister stand up and tout the efforts and say that everything is fine but also mention that they will not be repealing Bill 36, which overrides all of the acts that the Premier said protect property rights. It does not bring in fair and timely compensation when your land is taken away from you. That should be a fundamental right for all Albertans, not being able to take your land and not pay you for it and give you fair and timely compensation.

Now we're going to go into the last one and probably one of the most important ones, "increasing Albertans' quality of life by being a leader in the areas of health, education, seniors' care, and skills training." This is fundamental to this province, and it's desperately needed. There is no question that our health care system and our seniors' care system are in a crisis. We have heard from doctors, front-line workers, health care professionals, everyday Albertans, members in this House – opposition has certainly pounded the desk loudly on this issue – about the continuing crisis of emergency rooms and acute-care beds that are being used inappropriately by people who are not able to get care outside of an acute-care setting.

We have also heard story after story of seniors suffering in substandard conditions in government care. We know that the recent CIHI, the Canadian Institute for Health Information, report came out and showed that this government spends 19 per cent less than the national average on long-term care. That means that all of the other provinces in Canada are spending more than us on long-term care. We are the richest province in this country, and we as the richest province should be leaders in long-term care. Some people wonder: well, what does that mean if we spend 19 per cent less on long-term care? It means a lot of things. The first one is that it means that our front-line health care professionals are overworked and unable to provide the quality of care required by some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Many of you know my story. I won't go into it fully, but I can tell you that as a caregiver for a 32-year-old young man who goes into a long-term care centre and can't get the care he needs when he's given two years to live and dies two years and four months later and on average could not get a bath a week could not get home-cooked food – if it hadn't been for my mother and volunteers and other paid staff that we brought in, he probably would have died much earlier.

An Hon. Member: We've heard that speech.

Mrs. Towle: Yeah, you have heard that speech, and it's a good speech for you to hear every single day because those are everyday Albertans. I'm sorry if it's offensive to you on the other side to have it reiterated to you that everyday Albertans go into long-term care facilities and don't get the care they need. I'm sorry if it's offensive to you to hear another long, drawn-out story

about a 32-year-old young man who has Huntington's. I'm sorry if it's offensive to you that people get involved in politics because it's important to them to push these issues so that you will make changes. I hope you do, and if you do, I'm happy to applaud you. The last thing that I would ever want, whether I'm in opposition or not in opposition, is to take the position that we would want to keep people in substandard care in the richest province in this country just because you had to hear one more story about somebody who's dying in care.

I get that it's uncomfortable for you because you own it. I don't own that. I did my part. My family did our part. We had to do our part because the long-term care Alberta Health Services facility that he was in, like for many seniors and many other people in this province, wasn't doing its part, and the government wasn't funding them appropriately to make sure that our front-line health care professionals could do the hard work that they do every day.

I would remind this government that while you're sitting over there so proudly and heckling that you've heard these stories before and don't really care, the government actually spent \$10 million less on continuing care last year than it did in the previous year. That is not something to be proud of. Spending \$10 million less on continuing care last year than you did in the previous year is not a proud moment for you, not when you stand up every day and talk about how this province is growing. Reducing the cost and the resources going into continuing care and long-term care is not a proud moment as our province is growing.

I would also remind you that 77 of the beds that were closed last year at Rouleau house in Calgary were long-term care beds. At the time the government said that they had to be closed due to the flood and they couldn't be reopened because of safety issues. That wasn't true. They had a permit from the city. They had been given the good to go. The city had deemed it safe and ready to reopen. We asked the government about this. This was 77 long-term care nursing beds that were desperately needed while people were sitting in acute-care beds at a cost of \$1,500 a day. They could have very easily been moved over to Rouleau house at a cost of \$200 a day.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. Calgary-Shaw, you were on your feet quickly, so let's go to you.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. Thanks to the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake for her comments. There's been a lot of discussion about the difference between long-term care and continuing care. I note that in the throne speech the words "long-term care" don't appear, but continuing care does. I'm wondering, considering that the Minister of Health is in the room today, if you'd be so kind as to explain the difference.

Mrs. Towle: I'd be happy to. There's a vast difference between long-term care nursing beds and continuing care beds, and fundamentally it is this. For everyday Albertans, this is what it means. Long-term care nursing beds are the responsibility traditionally of the government. A person who goes into a long-term care nursing bed gets 24-hour nursing care. They are funded differently, and when they go in there, their medications and their 24-hour nursing care are covered. You cannot extra-bill or should not extra-bill for that.

Continuing care beds are nowhere near that. Continuing care beds are for people who require a slightly higher level of care but don't necessarily need 24-hour care. They fall under the accommodation act. Luckily enough, by falling under the

accommodation act, what are they allowed to do? They're allowed to extra-bill like crazy. [interjection] That's right. I think it's built into their business plan. Their business plan allows them to charge for medication assistance. It allows them to charge for feeding assistance. It allows them to charge for bathing assistance. It allows them to pretty much charge for everything.

What is happening with this government and what we saw was this government last year trying to close almost 1,379 long-term care beds. What they were doing was forcing people needing a higher level of care into the lower level of care, into continuing care beds. What that meant to the government is that they saved a whack-load of money. They didn't have to cover all those things anymore. What it meant to everyday Albertans is that they got lower levels of care. They didn't get the 24-hour nursing care that they required. They didn't get bathing. They didn't get feeding assistance, they didn't get medication assistance, and their medications were now being charged back to them.

This can make a dramatic impact on the person being cared for but also on the costs that that person sees. More importantly, what ends up happening when they go into continuing care beds and they actually have long-term care needs – guess where they go when that facility can't take care of them? They call the ambulance, and that facility promptly sends them off to the emergency room. The emergency room can't manage them because they don't have the resources, so they take up space in an acute-care bed, and then the acute-care bed has to house them because every single continuing care facility won't take them back because they're too high a level of care.

This, Mr. Speaker, is our fundamental problem in Alberta today. We have 758 people sitting in acute-care beds awaiting mostly long-term care nursing beds, not continuing care. The throne speech identifies that they're going to build 464 continuing care spaces. That's great, except that these are not new beds. These are simply the spaces that will reopen, all the ones you closed hastily last year. You're not getting into new beds. You closed those beds, and now you have to reopen them. They're not new. Let's just walk that theory through a little bit more: 464 beds, but you have 758 people waiting, so it doesn't really matter because you're not going to be able to solve that problem, and it doesn't address the problem that you have today, that more people are coming into care every single day.

4:20

More importantly, though, is the continual closure of long-term care beds. As they close long-term care beds – you can build a thousand or 2,000 continuing care beds, but you are not going to

be able to give the clients what they need because they're not the right level of care.

Again, I would go back to the previous Premier's throne speech, under which you were all elected except for the four, and the promise of 1,000 long-term care nursing beds – her policy platform actually said 1,000 long-term care beds, not continuing care – every year for five years. That is an absolute failure. You haven't built any more beds. You've actually closed more beds. You are nowhere near, and even with 464, even if we're generous – let's just say that you're actually going to get to the whole 1,400 continuing care spaces by 2018. Let's just say that you can do that. You weren't able to do it last year, you weren't able to do it the year before, and I don't think your four new folks are miracle workers. The four new folks aren't going to be able to do it in the years coming up either, and you're going to have a crisis because, as you admit yourself, this government says everyday about how many people are coming here.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I may not be a miracle worker, but I would like to move that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

The Speaker: We'd have to adjourn debate first.

Mr. Denis: Sorry. I would move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: I will adjourn the House in just a moment.

I would like to make one point of clarification. During my ruling on privilege today I indicated that some government business obviously did occur during the trip in question, and I neglected to add the words "by one or more members of cabinet," which is the subject of some notes that have been coming back and forth. So that matter now stands corrected.*

We will move on and adjourn the House until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

Mr. Denis: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: It does please me a lot. Thank you.

The House does stand adjourned until Monday at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:22 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

*See page 88, left column, paragraph 7

Bill Status Report for the 28th Legislature - 3rd Session (2014)

Activity to November 20, 2014

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 199 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

- 1 Respecting Property Rights Act (Prentice)**
First Reading -- 6 (Nov. 17, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 30-31 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., adjourned)

- 3 Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014 (Quadri)**
First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 89 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., adjourned)

- 4 Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 89 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., adjourned)

- 5 Securities Amendment Act, 2014 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 89-90 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., adjourned)

- 6 Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2) (Olson)**
First Reading -- 22-23 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 90-92 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., adjourned)

- 201 Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014 (Anglin)**
First Reading -- 86 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., passed)

- 202 Safe and Inclusive Schools Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (Blakeman)**
First Reading -- 86 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 24, 2014

Issue 5

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Campbell, Hon. Robin, West Yellowhead (PC)
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 24, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, help us to understand the needs of others and to speak up for them as part of our duties here in this Assembly, and continue to guide us always in our deliveries for all Albertans. Amen.

Please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem as led by Mr. Robert Clark.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you very much, everyone, and please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

10th Anniversary of Elected Members

The Speaker: Hon. members, last Saturday marked the 10th anniversary of service by six members of this Assembly who were elected on November 22, 2004. On that date the following members were elected and have served their constituents for the last 10 years.

Before I name them, I want to prepare the pages with the presentations. I'll ask each member to stand and wait until the page arrives and presents them with their 10-year pin. Why don't the rest of us wait until they've all been presented, and then we can give them thunderous applause for their outstanding service.

Would the following members please rise: the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, and the hon. Minister of Energy. Let us thank our colleagues for their outstanding service to and for Albertans and to this Assembly.

Congratulations, hon. members, on reaching this important milestone. We hope that you will wear that pin loudly and proudly.

Let us move on.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a good friend whom I've known all his life. He grew up in Stirling just two doors down from us. He's a true Albertan and a statesman. His rural roots show in his common-sense approach to rules and regulations. He's a friend to all Albertans and is helping us fulfill the Premier's promise to strengthen property rights, specifically

through Motion 501. The hon. Jim Hillyer, Member of Parliament for Lethbridge, is here with his lovely wife, Livi, and I now ask that they stand to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with the introduction of school groups. The hon. Minister of Human Services, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege today to introduce through you and to you some students from St. Pius X elementary school in Edmonton-Glenora, with teachers Rasa McCormack and Diana Lefebvre. I believe they are at School at the Leg. for this week, having a fantastic time. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Livingstone-Macleod.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 56 grade 6 students from the Fort Saskatchewan elementary school in my great constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. These students are here today and have had the challenging opportunity to debate by participating in their very own mock Legislature activity. They are accompanied today by teachers Mr. Tyler Nyznyk and Miss Kristine Bowden as well as EAs and parent volunteers Mrs. Nicole Hammel, Mrs. Joanne Gaudet, Mr. Jim Dietrich, Mrs. Lorraine Kochanuk, Mrs. Amanda Fraser, Mrs. Elizabeth Masterman, and M. Claude Campeau. They are seated in both the public and the members' galleries, and I would like them to rise now and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 24 grade 6 students and their chaperones from Millarville community school in the constituency of Livingstone-Macleod. They are seated above, in the public gallery, as I've already indicated, and are here this week to participate in the legislative school program. Their teacher, Ms Serena Sanders, who I've met and worked with in the past, is leading this wonderful group of young Albertans today. I'd ask the students and their teacher to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other school groups?

Seeing none, let us move on with the introduction of other important guests. Calgary-Bow, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three members of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, called SACA. I will be tabling the SACA 2013-2014 annual report in the House later today. Reverend Dan Van Alstine was appointed to SACA in May 2013 and has been an ordained minister of the Anglican church for 35 years. Reverend Dan resides in Edmonton

and received the province of Alberta volunteer service award in 1988 as well as the McClung award in 2006 for all the work he's done and continues to do in his community and church.

Roger Laing is the executive director of the Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton; it's called SAGE. Mr. Laing was instrumental in establishing the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council, ESCC, and the Alberta Association of Seniors Centres, both organizations that work to enhance the quality of life for seniors in Edmonton.

Luanne Whitmarsh is the CEO of the Kerby Centre in Calgary. A registered social worker and a certified professional consultant on aging, Luanne's background and credentials offer a unique voice to SACA, and she is a valued member of the team.

My guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, followed by the leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege to introduce five students from a University of Alberta Canadian public policy class which I recently had the opportunity to speak to. Now, my lesson was quite comprehensive, and I like to think that I told them all they need to know about the Alberta Legislature. But I challenged them to come here and see if they could learn anything – anything – from the rest of my hon. colleagues. However, they have yet to show up, so that may be a sign. Regardless, please welcome Holly Strang, Jennifer Yurkiw, Ashley Williamson, Alyssa Siggelkow, and Yuqiang Feng.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:40

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. leader of the ND opposition, I understand that you have two presentations. Please proceed, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first set of introductions. I am honoured to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of artists, musicians, and volunteers, all of whom participated in my yearly community art gallery, called Art from the Unknown, in the constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona. Originally started under former MLA Raj Pannu, Art from the Unknown has been running for nearly two decades. In that time we've offered gallery space to more than 500 emerging community artists. Year after year artists, musicians, and volunteers in our community have come together to make this event a success. I ask them now, all of them if possible, to stand and remain standing as I read their names: Brad Johnson, Margaret Clark, Michael Conforti, Joanne Wojtysiak, Krista Acheson, Ariana Brophy, Trevor McNealy, Sabrina Hanson, Svetlana Troitskaia, Evelyn Ritch, Anna Kattryan, Paul Thorne, Eleanor Ruth Logan, Sherien Lo, Bruce Mitchell. Oh, and Brent Kelly. There you are over there; sorry. I hope that the Assembly can join me in welcoming these great artists to our Assembly. You can be seated now.

Just to let you know, in November of every year if anyone is looking for good art, you can always check out Art from the Unknown.

Anyway, the second introduction that I'm honoured to provide to and through you, Mr. Speaker, is Estefania Cortes-Vargas. Estefania has a passion for human services that was instilled by her parents. During high school Estefania founded the first

Colombian youth group that facilitated a safe place for immigrant youth involved in at-risk behaviours. She's currently volunteering with families with children with disabilities as a tae kwon do coach and an educational assistant. She's currently at the MacEwan University social work placement program, and I'm happy that she's chosen to come and work in my constituency office. She's accompanied by my constituency assistant Brent Kelly. I would now ask both Brent and Estefania to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a hard-working young businessman from Calgary. Mr. Chang Liu is chief financial officer and co-founder of GL Petroleum Corporation, a private Calgary-based oil and gas exploration and development company which is representing a growing number of Chinese investment energy companies in our great province. What's made it even more special today is that we can be so proud that our province not only attracts foreign investment but keeps young talent. Mr. Liu worked over 10 years in New York and has recently returned to Calgary to take on a leadership role in this company. Now I would like to ask my colleagues to extend our warm traditional welcome to Mr. Liu. He sits in the members' gallery.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

Freedom and Democracy

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to speak about two little words, "freedom" and "democracy." To each of us these words have many different connotations. For me these words speak to the genius of our Canadian system of parliamentary democracy, based on the unequaled Westminster model. They also speak to our freedoms of conscience and religion: freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression, including freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and association, and freedom from discrimination.

For me those words are also intimately and irrevocably connected to Canada's armed forces and those who have served our country now and in the past. Canada has a long and proud tradition of stepping onto the world stage in defence of our values of freedom and democracy. Mr. Speaker, my grandfather Tom Brown served in our country's army during World War I, in which he was gravely wounded by an enemy bullet in the Battle of the Somme. My father, A.K. Brown, served as a pilot officer during the Second World War, during which he made a forced landing and escaped from behind enemy lines, while my mother, Irene Shaw, served in the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service on our west coast. Mr. Speaker, I could add Korea, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and numerous other peacekeeping missions where Canadian armed forces have stood tall in the defence of our values of freedom and democracy. Today Canadian men and women of our armed forces are serving abroad in a fight against a monstrous and barbaric group in the Middle East who are committing rape, murder, and genocide and who threaten the stability of the region and pose a present danger to all freedom-loving people of the world, including those of us within the borders of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that I speak for all members of this Assembly in saluting all of the members our Canadian armed

forces – our army, navy, and air force – who are serving here at home and abroad.

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, followed by Calgary-Bow.

Disaster Recovery Program

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, last June the flood waters rushed through southern Alberta and disrupted the lives of thousands. The flood brought out the best in Albertans, and I still get choked up when I think of the countless volunteers who showed up to clean up homes and basements. However, some of the government's efforts have fallen short. The disaster recovery program has itself been a disaster. Slow, imperious, tone-deaf, fickle, and even occasionally vindictive: those were the phrases used to describe the DRP and its administrator, LandLink.

Last spring the government acknowledged this and ended its relationship with LandLink. The government also introduced further appeals processes and promised that we would see a dramatic improvement by the summer. Later today I will ask questions based on the experiences of two different homeowners in my riding. They continue to be victimized by the DRP in different ways.

Rita Girlings's home will need to be demolished. The flood did that much damage. Since the flood she's been working to get help, but it's been a painfully slow process. She has finally been told that she'll get \$225,000 to build a house. Now, Rita has particular medical needs, so that won't be enough, and the DRP told her to get help from a charity to build the house. Now they've told her that they are going to deduct the small amount she got from insurance from her DRP settlement. She has already spent some of that money to live on. No one at the DRP offices is returning her phone calls. It's disheartening.

Then there is Montrose Murals townhouse condos. The flood did quite a bit of damage, but insurance covered most of it. There is also an outstanding file for the items that are supposed to be covered by the DRP. Their insurance was recently cancelled. At the last minute they found new insurance but for five times the premium and with a deductible that is 10 times larger. By law the condo board can't make any more special assessments this year, and if they don't get their DRP money soon, they don't know what they are going to do.

The DRP has let down both of these homeowners and so many more, and this government doesn't seem to care. That, Mr. Speaker, is not good enough.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by Calgary-Fort.

Sexual Harassment

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to address the serious issue of sexual harassment and bullying in Alberta workplaces. This issue spans beyond the borders of my constituency, affecting both men and women globally. The consequences of workplace harassment are real, and they're significant and, until recently, a secret kept by many.

Media attention during the past few weeks has brought a spotlight on these actions, centring on high-profile incidents of sexual harassment and assault, some in the context of workplaces and others in private life. It is a deep secret too often harboured by victims, both men and women, who have felt shame and intimidation. Recently open conversations have prompted many

more victims to come forward and tell their own story and ask for help. The brave openness of these individuals has taken the conversation away from the shadows and into the clear light of day. Every employer, every employee, and members of our communities all have a personal responsibility to create a comfortable and respectful workplace, and everyone deserves to feel safe at work and in their community.

I'm proud that Alberta has a number of regulations, laws, and support services in place to help victims, but we can also do more as Albertans to ensure that everyone is safe and respected. First, we must understand the severe impact on victims. They experience fear, shame, and anger, which can lead to depression, an inability to work, and a diminished quality of life. Next, we must end victim blaming. No one asks for and no one deserves to be objectified, demeaned, and disrespected. By pledging to believe and support those who report, we're changing societal attitudes for the better. Albertans see themselves as leaders, and leadership starts here.

If someone you care about has experienced sexual assault or harassment, please support them through the healing process. If you see harassment happening, if you hear inappropriate, sexualized, abusive comments . . .

The Speaker: Thank you. I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but the time has lapsed for private members' statements.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Let us begin. Remember that you have 35 seconds in which to pose your question, and you have 35 seconds within which to answer. Let's start with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Investigation into Release of Information

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, back to the topic of integrity. Last week I asked the Premier about the leak of a cabinet member's cellphone bills by government insiders. An innocent person's identity was stolen, and the privacy act was breached. Now, the Calgary Police Service has confirmed to us that they have dropped the criminal investigation, but Premier Hancock was so concerned that he ordered an internal investigation. Now we've been told that the new Premier cancelled that investigation. Why?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, no such investigation was cancelled at any time by me. There have never been any instructions given to that effect or anything that could be construed as such direction under any circumstances. I look forward to hearing the results of the investigation.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Premier Hancock was deeply concerned about this leak and launched an internal investigation. Someone, either a senior political staffer or a senior civil servant or possibly an elected official, leaked confidential documents to damage the Premier's opponents. It's distasteful, and it may also be illegal. A rigorous internal investigation is the least the Premier can do. If the Premier is serious about integrity in his government, will he commit to getting to the bottom of this matter?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've always said that we need to get to the bottom of this matter, and there is a rigorous investigation under way. To correct the Leader of the Opposition, there's never been any suggestion by anyone in my office or myself that that investigation won't carry through to completion.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, there are legitimate ways for information to be released. Our privacy act is often cumbersome, but it generally works, as this government is well aware. This information was not released legitimately. This confidential information of at least one cabinet minister's cellphone records was mailed illegally to a journalist. This is wrong. Will the Premier ask the Privacy Commissioner to step in to investigate?

Mr. Prentice: Well, I think that as the hon. member has pointed out in her previous question, the former Premier of the province of Alberta launched a rigorous investigation into this. I certainly look forward to receiving the results of that, and we'll deal with it in due course when that's received.

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Infrastructure and co-chair of the Premier's leadership campaign was shopping this leaked information to our staff and to other MLAs this spring just as the PC leadership race began. Of course, the information was quite useful to the Premier as it dealt specifically with one of his opponents. If he and his cabinet did nothing wrong, you'd think they'd want to clear the air and they'd want to clear it quickly. Does the Premier want to know who done it?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, the allegations that the hon. member opposite makes are very serious. I hope that she will co-operate with all of the authorities in terms of getting to the bottom of this. That is certainly what I want to see on behalf of Albertans.

The Speaker: Let's be careful not to delve too deeply into anything that would even remotely resemble internal party matters.

Ms Smith: We're talking about a cabinet leak, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. leader, do you have your first supplemental?

Ms Smith: Yeah. We're talking about a cabinet leak of private documents, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I understand.

Ms Smith: The Calgary Police Service conducted and ended their investigation without ever interviewing the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, whose cellphone bill was leaked. They also didn't interview the senior political staff, elected officials, and civil servants who are supposed to protect and safeguard this information. It appears the privacy act was breached to benefit the Premier's leadership campaign, and no one really wants to get serious about investigating this and get to the bottom of it. Surely the Premier is concerned about the appearance of impropriety.

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I didn't really hear a question there, but if the hon. member opposite is seriously impugning the credibility and the integrity of the city of Calgary police department, she should put that on the record.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier is not off to a great start on integrity. We can't ask questions to the Education minister because he started his mandate under investigation by the Ethics Commissioner. Now we find out that he himself has delayed the internal investigation into a breach of the privacy act and the fact that the Calgary Police Service has prematurely ended their investigation into the same matter. Can the Premier call in the

Privacy Commissioner to independently investigate this breach and clear the air once and for all?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, the matter is being investigated in exactly the manner that the hon. member has referred to, which was initiated by the former Premier of the province of Alberta. We trust the judgment and the integrity of the authorities respectively to deal with this. Again, if the hon. member is impugning the integrity of the city of Calgary police department, she should put that on the record both in this Chamber and outside.

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

Hospital Infrastructure

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The third flood in over a year at the Misericordia meant closed emergency rooms, a roof caving in, and a closed cafeteria. Well, a closed cafeteria may not seem like much, but patients and families go there for solace. To the Minister of Infrastructure: when are you going to fix it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Myself, the Minister of Health, and our Premier have said that deferred maintenance is a very important priority in our government. We're spending over \$1.6 billion over our current three-year capital plan and will be working with the Minister of Health and Alberta Health Services to ensure that the needs of Albertans at that hospital are met.

Mrs. Forsyth: The kitchen at the Foothills hospital is stuffed with mould and asbestos and has had an infestation of mice. It has been receiving public health citations for years. Minister, when are you going to fix it?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, there's currently \$222 million in our capital plan for deferred maintenance funding with Alberta Health Services. We have made a commitment to ensuring that deferred maintenance is something we catch up on. It's something we mentioned in our throne speech, and it'll be something that the members will look forward to seeing addressed further.

Mrs. Forsyth: Minister, I can't tell you how many years this has been on your infrastructure priority list.

The Wainwright hospital has serious problems with its sewage system. It's deteriorated to the point that the entire facility is at risk of closure, and you've known about it for years. When are you going to fix it?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, once again, we have \$222 million allocated to Alberta Health Services, who then decide what specific programs and projects they provide maintenance on. That's \$222 million that we're spending to ensure that Alberta's health facilities are in good shape, and 96 per cent of Alberta's health facilities are rated to be in fair and good condition. As I've said before, this is a priority for the government, and we'll see more action coming.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Health Care System

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The results are in from an Alberta Liberal FOIP of AHS performance, and they're terrible. Emergency wait times: fail. Surgery wait times: fail. Community

placement wait times: fail. Hospital staff engagement: fail. Hospital infection rates, you guessed it: fail. The PC government is failing our health system in almost every measurable way, and Albertans are suffering. To the Premier: unlike your predecessors, will this new management finally admit that continued PC privatization and mismanagement is causing these failures?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we take very seriously the health of all Albertans. Recently we have put in place a program in order to move people into long-term care from acute care to open up beds to create opportunities for Albertans to have the kind of care in hospitals they need. We are very serious about ensuring that all Albertans get the kind of care they need in the right kind of environment, and we'll continue to do that.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the same private care that has caused the failures we have today. By the way, I hear that this will be the last public report.

Mr. Speaker, the PCs blame Alberta's growing population and seniors for out-of-control health spending and poor results, but the facts say differently. PC spending on health care has increased 40 per cent over the last five years while the population has only grown by 11.1 per cent, and Alberta is getting younger every day. The PCs are spending more money and getting worse results. To the Health minister: why aren't Albertans getting better results from a health system, and why will you no longer report this comprehensive report?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The care of Albertans throughout our system is vitally important to all of us. We realize that as our population has grown immensely over the last number of years, there have been pressures placed upon our system. We're working very, very hard to develop more facilities so that Albertans can get the care they need. If you look across the province of Alberta, we've built and improved a number of hospitals and constantly make efforts to ensure that Albertans get the kind of care they need. This government is committed to ensuring that we get the necessary care like everybody in this country.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I believe the answer is that waste and mismanagement has caused the problem.

Talking about hospitals, Mr. Speaker, another Liberal FOIP has uncovered over \$630 million in deferred health infrastructure maintenance, maintenance delays that have led to a leaky and rundown Misericordia hospital. Yet the PC government annually wastes at least half a billion dollars on consultants, AHS management changes, warehousing seniors in hospitals, and expensive Band-Aids on the system. With that amount of money we could already have fixed all the hospitals and built a new Misericordia hospital, fixed facilities for care. To the Health minister. My constituents want to know: when will you stop wasting time and money and build a new . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, on Friday morning, after the event that happened at the Misericordia on Thursday, I went by the hospital. What I would like to say is that the people at the Misericordia worked incredibly hard to make sure that hospital was back in operation the next day. The people worked so hard. It was unbelievable. But the cause of that leak wasn't the hospital's fault.

There is construction going on on the second and third floors to improve the facility. As a result of that, an error was made by the contractor. He punctured a waterline, and that waterline ended up flooding the area. But they took care of it very quickly. I think credit has to go to the people at Covenant Health for doing that kind of work, to clean that up quickly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to give credit to the front-line workers, who are constantly cleaning up after these folks' mistakes.

Child Poverty

Ms Notley: Twenty-five years ago today Ed Broadbent, the NDP federal leader, orchestrated the unanimous approval of MPs to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. Two and a half years ago this government's caucus committed to Albertans that they would eliminate child poverty in five years. Today a report has been released which reveals that we have 143,200 children in Alberta living in poverty. Halfway through your mandate nothing has been done. What are you going to do?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government takes very seriously our responsibility to look after vulnerable children and families as well. I think we need to clarify that Statistics Canada tells us that 8.2 per cent of Alberta's children under the age of 18 live in poverty. I think we need to have this conversation, but it concerns me when information is put out that is not correct.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have more faith in the people that wrote that report than I do in this caucus or that government.

The solution to 143,200 Alberta kids living in poverty reads like a top-10 list of this government's failures: rejecting the idea of a child tax benefit; spending less on child care than any other province in the country; and keeping the second-lowest minimum wage in the country unless, of course, you're a waitress, very likely a woman, in which case it's dead last. To the Premier: how can you continue to maintain these regressive policies of your grandpa's PC Party while 143,200 children are living in poverty . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I need to give our top-10 of all the great things we're doing here in Human Services, including the family employment tax credit; the \$170 million in child care subsidies; the 4,700 child care spaces that we opened up this last year, bringing it to over a hundred thousand. We have free parenting and play programs for families through parent link centres in more than 180 Alberta communities. We've also accredited more child care workers and support child care workers in the child care system this year and invested \$1.8 million as well.

Ms Notley: One hundred and forty-three thousand two hundred Alberta children living in poverty.

One of the most critical planks for reducing Alberta's nation-leading levels of inequality and our unacceptable level of child poverty is the introduction of a fair tax system. Today's reports call for the elimination of our flat tax, which benefits only the very

wealthy at the expense of the food and housing security of too many Alberta children. Again my question is to the Premier, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: will you bring in a progressive tax system, or will you continue to let 143,200 Alberta children pay the price for this failure?

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important to understand that in Alberta we have a widespread income advantage and incomes are higher than the national average across occupations, industries, and educational levels. But, more importantly, in Alberta not just high-income earners are seeing an increase in their real incomes. The share of Alberta's population made up of low-income earners is below the national average and has continued to decrease.

The Speaker: Thank you.

We'll start with question 6, and please curtail your preambles to any supplementals.

Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Calgary-South East.

Carbon Offsetting

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2011 the Auditor General reported that this government was failing to properly police energy in agricultural greenhouse gas reductions. The AG said that not one of the agricultural carbon offset credits it checked could be sufficiently verified. Since this AG's report what measures has this government taken to improve the transparency of Alberta's carbon offset system?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General brought up some very good points. We have responded by accepting all of his recommendations. We are working towards trying to provide more clarity around these. There is work going on on several of the offset credit programs, and we hope to complete that work sometime in the near future.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the AG cited inadequate supporting documentation as one of the main reasons for this failing grade, what verifiable documentation can this ministry provide to this Assembly as credible proof that Alberta's carbon offset system is actually reducing greenhouse gases?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General did identify an area that is problematic. We must be doing a better job in making sure that we are verifying the greenhouse gas emissions from our programs. This matters to Albertans. It matters to the world. It matters to our customers. We are investing a lot in our climate change strategy. The international community is watching us, so we must make sure we tell our story.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there is a farm advisory warning farmers not to sign contracts with nefarious carbon offset companies like Failsafe Canada and Carbon Merchants, why are these companies still listed on a government

website as approved agents to sell carbon offsets, and how does this help improve our credibility?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, I think that carbon offsets are one tool that will allow us to meet our climate change objectives. However, I will take that question under advisement from the member. If you could provide my office with some information, we will certainly look into it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-South East, followed by Highwood.

Education System

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Without belabouring the point, we know Alberta is facing extreme growth pressures. In Calgary-South East we feel this acutely as one of the fastest growing constituencies in Alberta. This government has been addressing our expanding needs by announcing 13 new school projects in our community, and for this we're incredibly grateful. The buildings are important, but they're just bricks and mortar. Alberta's greatest resource, our children, must be educated and cared for in these buildings, and we must address this as our principal concern. My first question is to the Minister of Education. What is your plan to ensure that we are funding our children's education appropriately in terms of student per capita funding?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to investing in education so that our children have every opportunity to reach their full potential. Over the past decade our investment in Alberta's education system has increased by a significant 65 per cent while during the same period student enrolments increased by 13.6 per cent. We continue to put students first, and we are staying well ahead of the curve.

Mr. Fraser: To the same minister: given that money is not always the answer to our challenges, what is your ministry and department doing to meet the needs of our children with special needs?

2:10

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, every student in Alberta deserves a very high-quality education. As a national leader in education our commitment is strong. We do invest over \$400 million annually to support inclusive education and help meet the needs of all of our students, including those who may have special needs. Working to implement an inclusive education system in Alberta is a priority. It's embedded right throughout our ministry. Thanks to the supports that are in place, students with special needs are getting the help they need to achieve the outcomes of the curriculum and have shown improvement in high school completion rates, diploma exam results . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Final supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Again to the same minister: given that educators face the same growth pressures in terms of class sizes and an increasing number of children with special needs, how do your plans accommodate for this increased workload on our educators as well as for parents' concerns that this may affect their children's quality of instruction?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, under Budget 2014 we provided a 2 per cent grant increase for inclusive education. School boards do have the authority, the responsibility, and the flexibility to determine how funding should be spent to meet the needs of each and every student, and we trust school boards to make responsible decisions. Schools across Alberta have embraced inclusion. They're working to ensure that each and every student has the very best opportunity to learn in a safe and welcoming environment.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Disaster Recovery Program

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the disaster recovery program continues to victimize those who lost their homes to the flood. The former Minister of Municipal Affairs committed last spring to having almost everything resolved by the summer. Well, it's almost December, and flood victims are still frustrated. Rita Girlings of High River had been promised help by the DRP for her destroyed home from the very beginning. Every time she talks to a DRP officer, the story changes and it gets worse. What does the Premier want to tell victims like Rita, who feel like they've been lied to over and over and over again?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My heart and our hearts go out to all of the victims from the 2013 floods. Over 80 per cent of the files have been completed. This is the largest disaster, as we know, that has happened in Canada. Over 10,500 applications were put forward. We've dealt with 80 per cent of those. We have committed to be there until we have dealt with every single file.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, after appeals and delays Rita was told that she would get \$225,000 and that she should ask Habitat for Humanity for help in building a new house with that money. Now she's been told that the cheque will be delayed and that it will be \$40,000 smaller. No one from DRP will return Rita's calls. Is the Premier proud of how his government is treating Rita and so many others like her?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have committed under the leadership of this Premier from day one when he came in to triple the amount of appeals officers. The majority of those appeals have been committed to and have been gone through. We had 900 appeals, and we are down to less than 344, and that is because of the leadership of this Premier making sure that we are tripling that staff. We have put over \$3 billion into this program and over \$100 million for individuals, and we'll continue to be there for them.

Ms Smith: Really, Mr. Speaker? From six staff to 18 staff?

Montrose Murals condos are also suffering from DRP delays. The flood damaged the complex, and some of it was covered by insurance, some by DRP. Now they're struggling to find affordable insurance. They've done a special assessment to cover a 500 per cent increase in their premiums, and if they don't get their DRP money soon, there's going to be another massive cash call. Adding a mere 12 people to the DRP appeals staff is not nearly good enough. Why won't the Premier do more?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, within a couple of weeks of being sworn into this ministry, I had an invite from the mayor and

council and their team to come into their community and view it. What I got from them was a thank you, a thank you to this Premier and a thank you to this party and a thank you to all the emergency people, including those in High River and those in the province of Alberta, for the incredible job they are doing. There has been no disaster like this in the entire nation. People have been doing a great job. Are all the files complete? No, they're not. But we are going to be there until they are complete.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Influenza Immunization

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans simply need to look around their workplace, classroom, or community to know that we're in the middle of that dreaded annual influenza season, and with emergency rooms already strained, we simply cannot afford an additional health crisis. For many the flu is something that's inconvenient – it comes and goes without major consequences – but for some it can be very serious. My first question is to the Minister of Health. How many Albertans have been hospitalized so far this year due to the flu, and how many have actually died?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I much appreciate the question. Influenza season, the flu season, is really a very, very difficult time for so many people in Alberta. With great regret I'd like to say that, unfortunately, 69 people have been hospitalized and seven have passed away as a result of influenza. That's a horrible, horrible number. You know, each of these cases, when they go to the hospital, costs us about \$17,000 a person. It's very expensive. All we have to do is to take the time to go to one of the many, many clinics or pharmacists in the province of Alberta to get immunized, and it will help to stop that in our province.

Mr. Rodney: Many Albertans do everything they can to get their flu shots at the earliest opportunity as an important component of their complete health and wellness plan, but for various reasons some Albertans still refuse to get the flu shot. To what degree can the minister assure Albertans that this year's flu shot actually covers the correct strains for this year?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Yes. Mr. Speaker, many people comment about their concern about whether or not the vaccine will cover this season's particular strains. I can assure you that the people at Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services work diligently with the necessary groups of people to ensure that what strains we have this year will be covered by the vaccine this year.

Also, it's important to remember that, you know, vaccines don't happen overnight. You need to spend some time. It takes two weeks for them to take over and make sure that you're immunized. I would encourage people again to go out and get that immunization, and they'll be protected.

Mr. Rodney: To the same minister. In the past, including during the early days of H1N1, Albertans experienced a certain degree of chaos, truth be told, in getting their shot due to planning challenges in supply and distribution of flu vaccines. How has the minister's department budgeted for this year? How many doses?

How much confidence does he have that we have sufficient supply for this year?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, there have been 2.1 million doses of the vaccine ordered. We hope to raise the number to 45 per cent of Albertans being vaccinated. Last year it was 27 per cent. Again, we'd encourage as many people to come out as possible to make sure that they do get vaccinated. You know something? By going to one of the many clinics – and on the weekend, beside my office there was a constant flow of people going into one of the Alberta Health Services clinics, so people were getting immunized. We encourage people to do it. It's all over the city. Get out, get immunized, and you won't have a problem.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Poverty Reduction

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has spent years consulting with poverty groups and making plans to reduce child poverty as the numbers continue to rise, now over 140,000 – 140,000 – based on the low-income measure. The social policy framework includes a commitment to reduce inequality even as Alberta has become the most unequal province in the country. Homeless families have doubled in Calgary while this government has failed to provide its share of family and community support services funding for the past six years. To the Minister of Human Services: what new resources . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. The 35 seconds has lapsed.

Let's move on to the minister's response.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the report was released on the 24th. I think what's very clear to be said is that we know that there is a good system in place. The report admits that, and we need to maintain that. Again, moving forward, we talk about some of the things that Human Services is doing, including the recent family community supports safety program, which is going to provide \$20 million to communities, agencies for innovative solutions, and to the root causes of poverty. The other area that Human Services is looking at is in helping individuals upgrade their skills so they can stay in the workforce.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Partnerships are meaningless when the government ignores its own commitment to the 80-20 relationship between municipalities and the provincial government. Will you return to the balanced, shared FCSS funding?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I actually went to the FCSS AGM and spoke to everyone in the room, all the hard-working front-line individuals delivering services across Alberta. We know that local matters, and we know that's important. So I'll be having a conversation with them and talking about the challenges they're facing and looking at innovative ways of providing services and linking them to some of the things that we're already doing in Human Services.

2:20

Dr. Swann: I'll take that as a no, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure the communities will be very interested to hear that.

Why won't the government at least follow other provinces and implement a proven measure, a child benefit based on family income?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, just so the hon. member doesn't create the impression that we're doing a worse job in Alberta than nation-wide, I mean, if he looks at the statistics, he'll find that in the 20 years between 1991 and 2011 the percentage of low-income people in this province went from 11 per cent down to 8.5 per cent. At the same time nation-wide it has actually increased, from 11 percent to 12.5 per cent. Alberta is doing a better job, frankly, of keeping people out of poverty than anyone in the country.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Bitumen Upgrading

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pipelines and extraction produce relatively few good-paying long-term jobs. Upgrading and refining, by contrast, produce plenty of high-paying permanent jobs. Yet in spite of study after study that shows that Alberta loses out on good jobs when we ship raw bitumen, the Premier still thinks that Alberta needs to, quote, build pipelines in every direction. To the Premier: why won't this Premier commit to refining and upgrading products right here in Alberta instead of shipping raw resources and the jobs that come with them down the pipeline?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, it is, in fact, very important that we build pipelines in all directions to ensure that we get our products to world markets and we get world prices for our Alberta products. But I'll agree with the hon. member that it is indeed very important that we upgrade products right here in Alberta. He may know the incremental ethane extraction program, for example, that's built an ethane value chain right here in Alberta. He may also know that we've used the BRIK program to incent the construction of an upgrader right here in Alberta. He probably won't know that we're also working on other initiatives right at the moment.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's too bad that the Premier can't be bothered to answer questions that are put to him.

Given that the bitumen royalty in kind program only involves 70,000 barrels per day of raw bitumen, a very small portion of the over 1.7 million barrels produced each day in this province, and given that the North West upgrader has a similarly small capacity relative to the amount of production in the province and requires a massive and growing subsidy from the province, to the Premier: will you admit that the BRIK program is entirely inadequate and insufficient in ensuring that we are adding value and keeping the good-paying long-term jobs that result?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, on the one hand, we should incent upgrading; on the other hand, we'll be criticized when we do incent upgrading. The current upgrader under construction is appropriately sized. We are looking for other

opportunities, and we'll continue to do so. It's absolutely key that Albertans get the most value out of the resource that we can.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Premier is beginning to show a real pattern of disdain for the opposition by refusing to answer questions put to him.

Given that over the last 20 years this government has become increasingly cozy with the oil and gas industry, who largely financed the PC Party's election campaigns, and given that exporting bitumen to Texas and China may be good for the bottom line of the big oil companies but it sacrifices good jobs for Albertans, to the Premier: why won't the Premier admit that his government has sacrificed the interests of the people of this province in favour of the bottom lines of their friends in big oil?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I reject the premise of that question outright. We're doing everything that we can to ensure that there's value-added done here in our province, to expand the profile of value-added that's done here already, to ensure that the most value for our resources is captured right here in Alberta, and that there are good-paying jobs for all Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Calgary-Bow.

Feeder Association Loan Guarantee Program

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the end of the calf sale season is drawing to a close, there's mounting pressure on this government to rectify a mistake made in the rural action plan. Recent changes to the cattle feeders loan guarantee program saw the individual loan maximum double, which is good, but failed to increase the program's total guarantee. The end result is that fewer Albertans will now have access to monies for the purchase of cattle, leaving the stock available for sale to the U.S. To the minister of agriculture: will you increase the total amount to ensure that Alberta feeders have access to continually provide the great meat we see in Alberta?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. minister responsible for agriculture.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. I answered this question a couple of days ago, and I'll just repeat for the hon. member that this program is a 77-year-old program born in the depths of the Depression, so back in the mid-30s, when it was very difficult for any farmer to buy anything. We're now in a scenario where we have record cattle prices. That has caused some stresses, but I would also explain to the member that the changes that were made were as a result of consultation that's been going on for the last year.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, given that this year the total cattle exports to the U.S. are already 17 per cent higher than the previous year and are on their way to reaching a total of 1.2 million cattle exported to the U.S. this year and given that the average plant in Alberta, such as the one in my riding, processes approximately 1.2 million cattle in a year, can the minister see that without this guarantee increase, more cattle will be shipped down to the U.S. and it will hurt our processors, feeders, and agricultural industry as a whole?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I think this is a question of how far the government needs to go in terms of taking responsibility for providing guarantees. Right now the guarantee is at \$55 million. We recognize the issue. The question is: how much further financial responsibility should a government take when we have record prices in this industry, some 65 per cent over prices just a year ago? That is something that we need to get our heads around. We're certainly talking about it, but that is an issue because it creates a precedent for many other sectors as well.

Mr. Hale: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the cattle industry is still reeling from the BSE change and the other issues that we've seen in the marketplace – this is the first year we've had record increases, which is great for the cattle industry, but we're still trying to recover from years gone by – will the minister take the next step to ensure the viability of our cattle and agriculture industries and increase the total amount guaranteed?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, again I thank the member for the question. I wouldn't want him to have the impression that our government is not doing a lot of things for the beef industry and for other sectors of the industry. We provide significant support in many areas. We're also working very hard on mandatory country of origin labelling. We're starting to see maybe some signs that there will be a possibility of a relook at that in the United States with the changes through the mid-term elections. We have a long list of very significant programs that are being used to support the industry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Signs of Safety Program

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know everyone will agree that the protection of children is a fundamental duty of society and of this government. For that reason, I was greatly encouraged by the decision to implement a new framework for child intervention casework called signs of safety. Signs of safety is a positive reinforcement approach that has shown positive results by building the strengths of the family and collaborating with the family to build a safe environment for children. To the Minister of Human Services: where are we in the process of implementing the signs of safety framework?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Signs of safety is a tool that helps workers focus on family strengths and resources to reduce the risks to the safety and well-being of children and to promote a healthier home while empowering them and assisting them with keeping their children. It's an internationally recognized program. We have seen a 12 per cent decrease in the number of children receiving child intervention services from April to September this year thanks to the hard work of our front-line staff using signs of safety and other approaches.

Ms DeLong: To the same minister: what has been the response to this implementation from front-line child intervention caseworkers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are indeed the only North American jurisdiction that is using the signs of safety program. The feedback from both staff and families has been very positive because of the impact it's having on the children, the

youth, the families, and the social workers themselves. Family members are fully included in the process and fully engaged, and that helps build positive relationships. We are investing \$2 million this year to support signs of safety.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. To the same minister: when will there be a follow-up done to evaluate the success of this implementation?

The Speaker: Madam Minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll be conducting an evaluation of all the casework approaches, including signs of safety and the other approaches, beginning in April 2015. At the end of the day, the government's goal is to keep all children healthy and to keep children with their families.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

2:30 Rural Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The continuum of care often begins with EMS having first contact as the patient is taken to a hospital. The current organizational structure has fostered a positive, effective working relationship between EMS and hospitals. Albertans have benefited, with the arrangement showing great promise, especially in rural areas where EMS becomes part of the team that works in and out of the hospital. Will this government continue allowing and encouraging this relationship?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. I've had an opportunity to meet with a number of communities throughout the province in dealing with their challenges and concerns about EMS. What I've been most pleased about in rural areas is how pleased they have been with the system. We have to tweak some things and change things to make it more adjustable to the kinds of things that they might need, but I will assure that we will continue doing what we're doing but hopefully improve it so that we can get better service to everyone throughout the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that local volunteer ambulance services continue providing excellent service to their communities, complementing that supplied by AHS EMS, will local ambulance services continue to be part of the emergency response in their communities and be allowed to work in a complementary fashion with EMS?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah, Mr. Speaker. There has been a real sense of co-operation between those communities that have the fire service separate from EMS, and we will continue to work with them. The challenge is to make sure that we get to the accident in the most expeditious way, and whoever can get there first should be the ones who can deliver some service. We really appreciate that the fire service and the volunteer areas work so hard to make sure that they can deliver the service they need. We really appreciate the co-operation and will continue to work with them.

Mr. Bikman: Mr. Speaker, given that this government has recognized the importance of provincial standards and has also realized that this is best achieved with relationships and decisions being made at the local level, will EMS continue to be part of the organizational structure that functions in each region in spite of comments recently made to get it out from underneath political control?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has definitely given me direction that we should make sure we do all we can at the local level to work with our communities to make sure that they have the kind of service they think they need and they're passionate about, and we will continue to do that. EMS service is one of those really, really important services. We're looking at a variety of ways to work with communities to make sure that they get the service that they want, and we'll continue to do that.

We thank the member for the question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Highways in Northeast Alberta

Ms Fenske: Thank you. I appreciate the Premier's recognition of the need for highway improvements in northeast Alberta and welcome him to my world of highways 16, 45, 15, and 29. These are all major economic corridors in need of maintenance to preserve existing infrastructure as well as new investment such as a bridge across the North Saskatchewan River. To the Minister of Transportation. Highways 16 and 45 have been on the three-year plan for several years and have been scheduled for an overlay. When can we expect to see these projects commence?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for her question. She's a great advocate for her constituents. I'm pleased to tell this House that paving work on highway 45 has been tendered and will be completed in 2015. Also, two paving projects on highway 16 will soon be tendered, with completion for 2015, and four more projects in various stages of engineering, design, and construction will proceed when funding allows. In all we have 40 kilometres of overlay on highway 16 in our current three-year . . .

The Speaker: Thank you. The time is up.
First supplemental.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. To the same minister: what's the plan and timeline to ensure that our agricultural producers can haul 100 per cent loads year-round on highway 29?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I understand how important it is for agricultural producers to be able to use these roads without restrictions, but sometimes bans are necessary to protect the roads in soft conditions, specifically in the spring and summer months. My department completed significant patchwork on highway 29 last summer, and I'm hopeful that, you know, we won't have to ban these roads in the future.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Minister. That would be appreciated.

My final question to the same minister: with respect to heartland infrastructure what are the steps to seeing additional twinning of highway 15 and the new bridge?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, my department has completed functional planning for twinning between the existing portion of 15 and 831 in Lamont and will proceed as budget allows. In the meantime we'll proceed with improvements at the intersections of highways 15, 37, and 28 to improve the safety for motorists. We also know that the Capital Region Board has identified the need for a bridge at this crossing, and we're currently working on a long-term plan with them to proceed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Acute Health Care in Consort

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been three years' worth of reviews and assessments showing a need for more acute-care beds in Consort. Now, under the rural physical action plan, AHS is launching yet another review into something we already know Consort needs. To the Health minister: when will you stop these reviews and deliver the acute-care beds Consort needs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dr. Starke has been going across the province and working with some incredibly hard-working people throughout rural Alberta to bring forward ideas of what communities like Consort might need. His report will be coming out soon. We will act upon that. We are very pleased with what he's doing. I attended a meeting on Saturday. There was tremendous passion. We look to move forward as quickly as possible.

The Speaker: Just a reminder. There is a custom and tradition to not name members who are elected in this Assembly by their first or last names.

Let's move on to the first supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. The minister is spending taxpayer money on these reviews when three years of reviews have already shown that Consort needs these beds. Does he think this is a good use of taxpayers' dollars?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, this isn't just about Consort. It's about a variety of communities throughout this province who are in need of support in a variety of different ways. This report will work towards making sure that communities throughout Alberta are taken care of, including Consort, we hope.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister is here to change the way AHS works, will he consider publishing, then, an AHS infrastructure priority list so that there can be definitive timelines that these communities can work with?

The Speaker: The hon. Mr. Minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are working through capital investments and capital programs as we speak, and we'd be more than glad to talk about them at that point in time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Calgary-McCall.

Dental Services in Northern Alberta

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The McLennan dental training program is an important institution in my constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. Beyond serving over 5,000 patients in our community, it produces professionals trained within a smaller community who may come back to the area to work, something that is vital to our rural regions. Cutting funding to the clinic while waiting on government to develop a plan to provide those same services seems, at best, arbitrary. The same is also happening in High Level and La Crête. To the Minister of Health: can you provide the reasoning behind why such valuable resources for our communities are being cut out?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to confirm that these will continue. The province of Alberta is committed to having facilities like this throughout Alberta, and having the University of Alberta participate in this makes it even more successful. We know that McLennan and La Crête are two very important parts of our province, and we will continue to support them.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that each community has distinct needs, what kinds of assurances can you give to the municipalities affected that they will be involved in the process of finding a long-term solution? You've agreed that they are to stay open but, I understand, only for a short while.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, rural Alberta and especially northern Alberta are very, very important to this government. We'll continue to work with the communities for Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services to deliver the services they need. Dental care to these communities is vitally important because it's not available in many other ways. We will continue to support the communities and will work with the hon. member in order to meet the needs.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I need to emphasize to the same minister that many of our community members who use these services live in remote areas, where services are limited, while many are financially disadvantaged and lacking third-party insurance. We need assurances from the minister that the same level of services will be maintained.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. High Level, McLennan, and La Crête are very, very important to the province of Alberta. Individuals in those communities who are in need, who we must support, will continue to get that service. You know something? It's vitally important to this government and to this Premier that we continue to work with communities so that the services they expect to get they will continue to get. This is one of those very, very important programs. Some of the confusion is that oftentimes we'd be accused that it's been shifted from Alberta Health to Alberta Health Services. We'll continue to work with the community to make sure that it continues to work so that . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Home Renovation Contractors

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recent bankruptcy of the Remodelers, a well-known Calgary renovation company with its own TV show, raises serious questions about Service Alberta's licensing and oversight of prepaid contractors. In the case of the Remodelers some two dozen homeowners say that they gave the company money up front for renovations that were never completed. To the Minister of Service Alberta: why did his ministry fail to see the red flags . . .

The Speaker: Thank you. The time has lapsed.

Let's go to the Minister of Service Alberta. Hopefully, you picked up something there.

Mr. Khan: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member for his question. Our department is very much aware of the issue with the Remodelers. We're currently undergoing an assessment of this situation. We're taking this situation very seriously. Consumer advocacy is a big part of our ministry, and we're going to be working very hard on the Remodelers issue.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. One of the homeowners paid a deposit of \$300,000, yet Service Alberta only required the company to post a surety bond of \$25,000. That just doesn't make sense. How is the minister going to fix the process so that the surety bonds more accurately reflect deposit amounts and victimized homeowners will be able to recover more than just pennies on the dollar?

The Speaker: I heard a question there. The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Khan: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Again I thank the hon. member for his question. As the hon. members says, we at Service Alberta take this issue of contractors and how they deal with the public very seriously. This issue that he raises, the Remodelers, is an issue that we're currently working on in terms of assessment. We're working with the Calgary Police Service, and we do take this issue very seriously. If the hon. member has some information he'd like to share with my office, we'd be very happy to work with him on this issue.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now to the minister of culture. Is the province going to accept some degree of responsibility for the mess since the Alberta media fund was used to help support the Remodelers' TV show, which ultimately convinced many unsuspecting homeowners that this was a reputable company?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of culture.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very serious issue, and we are working with my colleague's department to try and get to the bottom of it.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister of Culture and Tourism. My apologies for leaving out the Tourism part.

Hon. members, today we recognized 17 different members for a total of 102 questions and answers, and that is a record for quite some time. Congratulations to all of you, and thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Let us carry on with private members making statements, starting with Calgary-Fort, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

Remembrance Day Observances in Calgary.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about a ceremony I attended in Calgary earlier this month. If you travel along Memorial Drive in Calgary from November 1 to 11, you will notice a very special park that is lined with about 3,000 crosses. Each cross carries the name, rank, regiment, age, and date of a soldier from southern Alberta who died in military action. This annual memorial field of crosses is a testament to our Canadian soldiers who have paid the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom. From November 1 to 11 there is a flag-raising ceremony at sunrise that includes a bugler and a piper, and at the sunset ceremony the flags will be lowered.

These ceremonies are open to the public, who are encouraged to visit the site at any time and can lay flowers at their loved ones' memorials. This memorial helps us to remember that freedom comes with a very high personal price. The memorial project was started with initiative from the Murray McCann family in co-ordination with the late George Bittman of the Calgary poppy fund and numerous volunteers.

Another major event is Valour Canada's Calgary Flame of Remembrance, another symbol of remembrance in the city. This event began on the evening of November 10, initiated by the Valour Canada organization and featuring Royal Canadian Navy Captain William Wilson, who lit the Flame of Remembrance on the Calgary Tower. This year marked the second annual lighting of the Flame of Remembrance on top of the Calgary Tower.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Kananaskis Country

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On September 22, 1978, Premier Peter Lougheed officially dedicated Kananaskis Country. This 4,200 square kilometre recreation area quickly became a cherished location for Albertans to connect with the environment and spend time with friends and family, to hike, climb, and be active on the eastern slopes of the Rockies.

Mr. Speaker, Kananaskis Country is much more than just a park. It's a unique multi-use area where the needs of industry, ranching, and tourism are balanced with a mandate to maintain a healthy ecosystem. Within Kananaskis Country you will see a variety of commercial activities occurring on public lands outside of parks. Recreational activities take place in both the parks and the multi-use public lands of Kananaskis Country. Nearly two-thirds of the area is protected as either park, ecological reserve, or recreation area, nearly all of which is located in my constituency of Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Speaker, the plan to protect the Kananaskis area was not just the dream of Peter Lougheed. Former Banff-Cochrane MLA the late Clarence Copithorne recognized the need to provide managed recreational opportunities for a growing population in the Calgary area. Serving as minister of transportation, he played a major role in the development of Kananaskis Country.

Mr. Speaker, Kananaskis Country is a great example of managing use of public lands in a way that is respectful of the

environment while at the same time meeting the needs of recreationalists and industry. Faced with the unprecedented growth of Alberta's population, the challenges of use on public lands are greater than ever before. With the recent approval of the South Saskatchewan regional plan and the success of Kananaskis Country I'm ever hopeful that we can find solutions for land use throughout the eastern slopes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Child Poverty

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There's an emergency in Alberta that continues to be talked about without meaningful action. For 43 years this PC government has watched the numbers grow, the families broken by learning, health, and social problems associated with poverty. Each day children in our midst are sick, hungry, frustrated, and despairing at the unequal opportunity because of lack of income. First Nations, now increasingly looking for success in urban centres, are doubly challenged by such disadvantage, discrimination, and denial of success and well-being. This represents not only a violation of rights as citizens but a profound loss of human potential and civic contribution.

It's been 25 years since Canada vowed to end child poverty, and an increase to 143,000 children in poverty now exists in Alberta today according to a 2012 joint report of Public Interest Alberta, Edmonton Social Planning Council, and the Alberta College of Social Workers. This PC government has spent years consulting with poverty groups and pledging to reduce child poverty, including in its social policy framework a commitment to reduce inequality even as Alberta has become the most unequal province in the country.

This government likes to talk about partnerships and working together. FCSS, an 80-20 provincial-municipal partnership to prevent the social chaos resulting from inadequate basic needs, has been starved of a provincial share for the past six years. Partnerships are meaningless when one party to the agreement refuses to keep its commitment.

Alberta Liberals believe a progressive tax would enable all levels of government to produce the kinds of benefits that Albertans need and establish a basic child benefit program for children, proven in other provinces to benefit everyone. It's so basic, and it's so essential. If we are serious about this profound failure of PC governance in the 21st century, we must see change, real action. All Albertans, especially those in desperate straits, recognize this as an emergency. We need to save the lives and well-being of 140,000 children, our children.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. The time has lapsed.

2:50

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the Government House Leader to give oral notice of Government Motion 9.

Be it resolved that, one, the 2013 annual report of the Property Rights Advocate office be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship for the purpose of conducting a review of the recommendations outlined in the report; two, that

the committee also review the 2012 annual report of the Alberta Property Rights Advocate office; three, the committee may, without leave of the Assembly, sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued; and four, in accordance with section 5(5) of the Property Rights Advocate Act the committee shall report back to the Legislative Assembly within 60 days of the report being referred to it if the Assembly is then sitting or, if it is not then sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the Minister of Seniors to table the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, or SACA, 2013-2014 annual report.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark or someone on behalf of. Perhaps later? Okay. Let's move on then.

Are there any other tablings? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. One is the press release of Grassroots Alberta, a property rights-landowners conglomerate. A number of groups belong to this organization, and what they have done is that they have submitted, I think, to every member of this Assembly via e-mail their proposals on what needs to be done to correct the property rights issue in Alberta. So I have both of these for the Assembly here today.

The Speaker: Is that it, hon. member? Yes? Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is from constituent Maurice Shank, who notes – and he's writing about Bill 202 – that as a gay individual he would have benefited greatly from a GSA when he was in junior or senior high school.

Second is another e-mail from another constituent of the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, Christie Traff, who is writing to note that in 1987 her younger sister Carol committed suicide and that she felt that her sexuality was a big part of this and that she knows that getting GSAs would help other children.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Mandel, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Combined Laboratory and X-Ray Technologists 2013 annual report, the Alberta Dental Association and College 2013 annual report, the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta 2012-2013 annual report, and pursuant to the Regional Health Authorities Act the Alberta Health Services 2013-2014 annual report.

The Speaker: Thank you.

There are no points of order today. Let us move on, then.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

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

Court Delay Costs

Q1. Ms Blakeman asked that the following question be accepted.
What were the estimated costs to the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General for the 2013-2014 fiscal year as a result of court delays associated with self-represented litigants?

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move Written Question 1 standing on the Order Paper under my name. The government has kindly allowed it to come up today which, by the way, is allowing it to come up earlier than normal. Usually they would sit on the Order Paper for another two weeks. So thank you very much to the House for accommodating me.

No surprise: this is about legal aid and the financial restrictions that Legal Aid has found itself under because of the funding it receives from the government. So I have a number of questions that are related to that, and I'm hoping that I'm going to get the information I'm looking for about the estimated costs from the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for this question. Unfortunately, I do have to reject it. Currently the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General does not collect data specific to court delays associated with self-represented litigants. However, Alberta Justice and Solicitor General has undertaken to research a number of these issues pertaining to court delays and has implemented numerous measures to enhance access to justice in this province.

First of all, the department is a partner with the cost of justice research project. The goal of the project is to "develop methods to measure what our civil justice system costs, who it serves, whether it is meeting the needs of its users and the price of failing to do so." The cost of justice project seeks to meet the need for information about the costs and benefits of pursuing justice through various dispute resolution pathways, and this project will provide an understanding of the cost of justice and a foundation for policy, practice, and programs that improve access to legal services and resources. I would suggest that the hon. member take a look at the website, www.cfcj-fcjc.org/cost-of-justice, for more information.

Also, Mr. Speaker, research is being undertaken in Alberta looking specifically at the costs of family disputes, and we are examining the costs of research in other provinces for its applicability here in Alberta. This research is the building of a foundation of an evidence-based approach to make sure that the justice system is more accessible and sustainable. We need to find ways to reduce the cost and complexity of resolving these legal issues.

Individuals have the right to represent themselves in court. This is a well-recognized common-law principle across the common-law democracies. They also have the right to do so for many reasons, of which cost is only one.

Justice and Solicitor General is committed to increasing access to justice for Albertans by making the system more efficient and simplifying the process where appropriate. We are in the process of implementing recommendations of the civil claims review project. As I've indicated before in this House, Mr. Speaker, the

Provincial Court of Alberta recently increased its monetary jurisdiction over civil claims matters to \$50,000 – previously it was \$25,000 – allowing more Albertans to make use of the straightforward and affordable process of Provincial Court, which is colloquially known as small claims court. In addition, draft versions of the regulated forms have been developed, designed to provide options for the most common claims and intended to be more straightforward for self-represented litigants.

As of December 18, 2014, there will be case management offices in 14 locations across the province.

Mr. Speaker, we do not have specific data pertaining to the hon. member's question. Justice and Solicitor General recognizes the issue around self-represented litigants and is taking meaningful action to enhance access to justice for these individuals as well as all Albertans and will continue to make progress in this area.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Edmonton-Centre, I'll recognize you later, but if I recognize you now, that closes debate.

Cypress-Medicine Hat, did you wish to add a comment?

Mr. Barnes: Just to add a comment, I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Centre bringing this forward, and I, too, would like to see the government work harder at improving transparency and openness. There's a business principle that in order to manage something, you need to be able to measure it. I think that the idea behind here is to see what this is costing our system, and costs in opportunities for people to be involved in the process on a more full basis with more choice are a detriment.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I guess at this point I can recognize Edmonton-Centre to close debate, then.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much. I'm not surprised, but I'm disappointed that the department has not kept any kind of statistics on the estimated costs of court delays specifically associated with unrepresented litigants because I suspect that if they had, we might have been able to resolve the issue with legal aid a little faster than it happened. We are seeing far more unrepresented litigants in court because they're just finding it too expensive either to take it out of their own pockets, or they don't qualify for legal aid.

This is a much larger issue. I hope the Minister of Justice didn't blow his whole wad on that one question because there's a bunch more coming. Mind you, I've never known him to be short of things to say, so I suppose I can look forward to the rest of it.

3:00

Really, the issue of access to justice is complex and is serious in this day and age. What kind of a society are we if we can't help people get access to justice? I think that case management, while an interesting idea, is not going to help the people that are most disadvantaged. They, overwhelmingly, tend to be people that are of low income, women, and often dealing with a physical or a mental disability. Many people that end up in the remand centre end up in there because they fulfill one of those conditions and find it very difficult to find representation. I think this is a significant cost, and I think it's too bad that these weren't kept. Mind you, I suppose it's a good thing for the government because it would have shown that you knew all along how much this was costing you.

I do urge caution as to how the minister is expecting to go forward in reducing other access to court costs. I have a great concern that some of the other considerations that he has in front

of him are not going to be in the best interests of people that are trying to access the courts, mostly because what I see is him taking the courts away, so there's nothing to access. In that, I'm briefly referencing the traffic court situation, where he wants to appoint an adjudicator.

But on we go, Mr. Speaker. Let's have a vote on this one and move on to the next one.

[Written Question 1 lost]

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

Legal Aid Recipients' Income

Q2. Ms Blakeman asked that the following question be accepted.
What was the median income of legal aid recipients for the 2013-2014 fiscal year?

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Now, I expect this one the minister shall be able to answer in that he has the contract with Legal Aid through his department and they are surely able to supply him with the information, or he is collecting it separately to be able to tell us what that median income was from legal aid recipients for the year that I have set out.

I do move this motion, and I'm looking forward to a positive response from the minister.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rejecting Written Question 2, on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, as posed by the Member for Edmonton-Centre and as set out in the Order Paper of November 24, 2014.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, Legal Aid Alberta operates independently of the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General. Alberta Justice and Solicitor General doesn't keep information specific to the median income of legal aid recipients. Legal Aid Alberta may have this information, but their records are not within the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General's control.

However, I remind this member that we promised Albertans that if we could not get a commitment from the federal government for more funding for Legal Aid Alberta, we would examine all of our options. Though we will continue the discussion with the federal government to find ways to improve the legal aid funding model, it was imperative we take action now. That is why we have worked with Legal Aid Alberta to increase the financial eligibility guidelines to allow more applicants, including individuals receiving AISH, greater access to legal aid services.

The Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General looks forward to continuing to work with Legal Aid Alberta to improve access to justice for vulnerable Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

If not, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close debate.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I respond to that statement with a raised eyebrow. I find it very difficult to believe that the very government department that has a contract with Legal Aid outlining exactly what they're supposed to be providing and outlining the terms of the contract – the time length of the contract, the amount of money that is going to be handed over and at what schedule – is unable to get the pretty simple information that I asked for.

Yes, indeed, Legal Aid does operate as an independent body except that 100 per cent of their funding, or darn near, comes from the government. Their reason for being is coming from the government by way of the contract. So I find it really odd that the government can't just phone them up and say: hey, what are the answers to that? It should be pretty easy to get that, so I'm really surprised that the government is unable to do that. That makes me start to wonder if maybe they just don't want to ask because they don't want other people to have that kind of information because that might tell us a whole bunch of other things.

There's also a level of sort of a cavalier attitude to this whole thing. You know, I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that in the time that I've been in this Assembly, getting information is harder and harder and harder and harder to do. The last time it got to this pitch of difficulty, there was a meeting with the Premier in the Public Accounts Committee meeting in which we were trying to get information out of him.

But, really, I ask a simple question. I can't get it from written questions and motions for returns. I've written letters to ministers, and I don't even get a response ever, which, to me, is pretty shoddy. I mean, I know that I hold your feet to the fire. I know you don't always like me. Some days I know that I'm amazing, but most days you don't like me. Fair enough. But there's absolutely no reason that I can see that would result in not even a letter being forthcoming answering my letter.

I'm trying to do work for my constituents right now. I can't get through and often don't get a phone call back when I try and give one. I try and resolve a situation outside of this House so that I'm not embarrassing ministers in question period; I can't get anyone to call me back. There is just such an attitude of secrecy and never letting one peep of information out in any way, shape, or form that it's like a brick wall over there. As a result, we just get angrier and angrier, the public gets angrier and angrier, and somewhere in there is going to be a little aneurysm that's going to happen that is going to pop that information out.

For those of you that were around on that day in 2004, you'll remember that that was the beginning of the end for a Premier several back because of that secrecy and the unwillingness to release information.

So this is not a good sign. It's certainly not a good sign for a new Premier that says that he's all about accountability and transparency. It just puts the lie to it, Mr. Speaker. It just means that that doesn't mean anything. It means: oh, yeah, accountability and transparency, but we're not going to give you any information whatsoever even when we can easily get it. That's telling me something else.

Thanks very much.

[Written Question 2 lost]

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

Legal Aid Denial Due to AISH

Q3. Ms Blakeman asked that the following question be accepted.
How many letters, e-mails, and phone calls did the government receive between March 1, 2012, and October 31, 2014, from individuals denied legal aid due to receipt of income from assured income for the severely handicapped benefits?

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Now, I know this government logs every phone call, every e-mail, and every letter that comes in, so this one I'm sure they have the information on, and I look forward to receiving it. This should be fun.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, I just want to assure this member that I do not dislike her. In fact, just the opposite. I appreciate her service to this Chamber even though we may not always agree on every particular item.

Mr. Mason: Or on anything.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is chirping away, and he is quite correct. I don't agree with him on anything. He's quite correct about that.

As I've stated before, Legal Aid Alberta operates independently of the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, as it should, frankly.

In terms of the phone calls received by the government pertaining to individuals denied legal aid due to receipt of income from assured income for the severely handicapped, or AISH, benefits, we don't cover that kind of information. We do track specific information related to people's income level and source. However, this member could contact Legal Aid Alberta as they may have that information directly.

3:10

As I've indicated, we have worked with Legal Aid Alberta to increase the financial eligibility guidelines to allow more applicants, including more individuals receiving AISH, greater access to legal aid services, providing an additional 5 and a half million dollars in this year's budget. Of course, Mr. Speaker, it is our desire that that goes to dealing with the eligibility requirement and not just to increasing legal fees, not that paying lawyers is a bad thing.

We look forward to continuing to work with Legal Aid Alberta to improve access to justice for vulnerable Albertans, and I thank this member for her inquiry.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I do want to just indicate that with respect to the last few questions, that the government has rejected, I'm a little bit dismayed. The government keeps trying to tell us that they're open, that they're transparent. I know they don't have a minister of transparency anymore, but that is no big loss. This is not the gold standard of transparency, in particular not being willing to share the median income of legal aid recipients or how many people are denied legal aid and contact the government.

The question is not: how many people contact Legal Aid about these problems? It's: how many people contact the government? The government has that information, but they're choosing not to share it. I'm quite sure that they also have the answer to the median income of legal aid recipients, and again they're refusing to share that information. You see, legal aid is set up to help people that can't afford a lawyer, so income is a huge issue, and it needs to be measured, and if the government is not measuring it, then it is making just another disastrous omission.

I'm quite sure that the government isn't as bad as that. It's pretty bad, but the fact that it would not even gather information on the income of legal aid recipients would simply be more negligence. I'm quite sure that they have this information, but they've chosen not to give it to the opposition. Why? Because we've been making a fairly effective case that legal aid in this province is failing many, many people. These are people who can't afford a lawyer. They're being taken to court, and they're suffering consequences, whether it's a financial consequence or a consequence of incarceration. They may be innocent. They may

have benefited greatly from proper legal representation, but they don't get it in Alberta. That's a point we're trying to make. That's a point that's perfectly legitimate for the opposition to make, and the government is throwing up obstacles and preventing us from having the information that we need to make the case.

That's just putting their interests – the government's interests, their political interests, protecting their own hide – ahead of the interests of people who may be denied legal representation when they need it. That really is, I think, a very, very disappointing attitude on the part of any government, that it would actually put its own interests, its own political interests, ahead of the interests of people that it's supposed to be representing by denying the opposition the information that it needs to do its job. That's what's happening here, Mr. Speaker, and it's unacceptable.

Is this what the new Premier means by putting Alberta under new management? If it is, Mr. Speaker, it's very much like the old management, and I don't see how things are improving, at least in the functioning of this place. I see the Premier refusing to take questions from party leaders other than the Leader of the Official Opposition. It just represents a contempt for this place and for the role of the opposition that I find very, very disappointing given the promises and assurances that he made during his leadership race, during the recent by-elections, and subsequently. His actions do not match his rhetoric, and I think that that's going to become increasingly apparent to Albertans.

I'm very disappointed to see this continuation of the attitude. This is old management, and Albertans deserve better, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to raise some issues about this question that's being posed by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. I think it's tied to what we've actually seen happen, the consequence of not sharing this information. We've actually had judges make an issue of this in court proceedings where individuals who are typically, you know, sometimes on AISH are a lot of times challenged in even understanding why they're being brought before the courts. So when a judge has to get involved in the legal process to make sure that somebody is duly and properly represented, I think that's a key issue of identifying where the system is failing. This could be supplemented by caseworkers being able to share information with all members of the government as to how many individuals on AISH may be going to court, trying to represent themselves and not even understanding why they're being called to do that.

I would definitely call upon the government to consider this written question, consider making sure that this information is collected and that there is a measurable outcome that can be brought forward that is beneficial not only to the individuals on AISH but to those who are receiving the legal aid as well as the justice system itself.

I thank the member for bringing this forward. I really appreciate that. Thanks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close debate.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm sensing a pattern here. I think that pattern has to do with not sharing information. And you know what they say when you're a kid: you're supposed to share; it's not a good thing not to share. That's what I'm seeing here.

The second thing that I'm seeing is – you know, transparency means you can see right through something, which is what this government wants us to think they're doing. But more recently I

started to think: I don't know; I'm not seeing any transparency. I can't see through any of this. I'm not getting any information at all despite how nice I am or how not nice I am. So I thought: you know, it's not really transparent; it's translucent. Light comes through, but you can't actually see anything.

I've now reached the point, Mr. Speaker, where I can't even say it's translucent. We have reached the point of opaqueness. Let me just give you a definition of that. It says: not transparent or translucent, not shining or bright, hard to understand, dull or unintelligent. Oh dear. Sorry. You didn't need the last bit. But it does make the point that there's no light coming through. There's no information coming through. It's just a brick wall.

I remember that before this session was prorogued in the spring, I was starting to hear a lot of muttering about: "You guys have got to quit doing so many FOIPs. We're just drowning in FOIPs here. It takes so much time. Stop doing that." Well, guess what, folks? We wouldn't have to do them if you just gave us the darn information in the first place, nicely, you know, in response to the first request that comes by a nice letter. Then we get to the point where, in fact, it's a whole FOIP process: it's costing you more money; it's costing us staff time to have to go through this; there are appeals; you want to charge us tens of thousands of dollars for a piece of paper; and we have to figure out exactly how to ask for it or you dump all these useless bits of whited-out paper on us. Not a happy process for anybody.

All we want is some pretty simple information: how many people complained to the government about not being able to get legal aid? They know it. I know they do because they record every single phone call that comes in. Now, having called a couple of times to complain, I don't know that they always stay on the line long enough to get the total specificity and detail from me of what I'm complaining about, but they get the gist of it.

So we're seeing something else from some pretty innocent questions here. We're building a case for some not-so-nice things. I'm very disappointed in the government.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 3 lost]

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

Legal Aid Denial Due to Employment

Q4. Ms Blakeman asked that the following question be accepted. How many letters, e-mails, and phone calls did the government receive between March 1, 2012, and October 31, 2014, from individuals denied legal aid because they receive income from full-time minimum wage employment?

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. This is essentially the same question. In other words, these are the working poor. They are working, but they're being paid minimum wage, which puts them under the poverty line, but it also puts them as too high of a wage earner to be able to qualify for minimum wage. Once again, I know the government's got it because I've sometimes seen their records. I know they record all of this stuff, so I guess the real question now has become: why won't you share it?

Thank you.

3:20

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, in listening attentively to the Member for Edmonton-Centre, I recall a few years ago an exchange between the Member for Calgary-McCall and the former Minister of Transportation, Luke Ouellette, when he said: I keep getting the

same question, and I keep giving the same answer. Unfortunately, I do have to give a very similar answer.

Let's go to the phone lines here. In terms of the phone calls received by the government pertaining to individuals denied legal aid due to receipt of income from AISH, we do not ask the people information related to their income level and their source of income. It is important to remember that Legal Aid Alberta provides many services beyond full representation as well as providing some services without financial qualification. Indeed, there are many things that lawyers can do for society.

As with all clients, AISH recipients are encouraged to contact Legal Aid Alberta to discuss the support that is available in their specific situation. Again, Mr. Speaker, we look forward to working with Legal Aid Alberta to improve access to justice for vulnerable Albertans. If the Member for Edmonton-Centre has any specific questions pertaining to Legal Aid Alberta, I would suggest, respectfully, that she contact them directly. I may be an only child, and only children sometimes have difficulty sharing, but, again, I have to have information that I am able to share, and unfortunately I do not with this written question either.

The Speaker: Are there others?

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It comes down to, again, open and transparent government. All we are asking for is information. It doesn't take rocket science to provide the information. My office has been getting lots of phone calls from people who have been denied legal aid because they did not qualify. Even for people with good jobs, I think that the way their lives are so expensive, they can't even afford a lawyer. Lots of people are going without any legal representation before the judge, and sometimes the judge had to step in to force the government to provide more money for legal aid. There should be more money put in, and more people should qualify for legal aid. We're not asking for much. Here we are asking for information so we can all work together to improve the legal aid system in Alberta.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close debate.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. I'll just remind the minister that I didn't ask – these last two questions were not about information that Legal Aid held. It's about information the government held. I know they hold it, so they just decided not to share. But that leads to the other information I gave about increasing FOIPs.

I urge the government members to break rank. It's private members' day. Go wild. Vote in support of Written Question 4. Thank you.

[Written Question 4 lost]

Legal Aid Recipient Satisfaction

Q7. Ms Blakeman asked that the following question be accepted. In each of the 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 fiscal years what percentage of legal aid clients reported being "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the service they received?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to advise that we are rejecting Written Question 7 posed by the Member for Edmonton-

Centre and as set out on the Order Paper on November 24, 2014. The Department of Justice and Solicitor General does not have the information for the years in question.

I can tell the hon. member that Legal Aid Alberta continually works to improve their services and respond to client needs. Legal Aid Alberta has recently improved its services by providing duty counsel at all courthouses in the province, by increasing the number of courthouse services by the criminal resolution office, and by making a legal services officer available at the Edmonton and Calgary provincial criminal adult and youth courts, Mr. Speaker. We are working with Alberta Legal Aid to find ways that together we can support low-income and vulnerable Albertans and ensure a predictable and long-term plan for the delivery of legal aid services, Mr. Speaker.

However, I would remind the member opposite that the federal government also has a role in helping to ensure that Albertans have an accessible justice system, indeed all Canadians. We were disappointed that we could not get a commitment on increased federal funding for legal aid, but the federal government has said that they remain open to further discussions. Mr. Speaker, legal aid funding is a shared responsibility between the province and the federal government, yet more than 80 per cent of the annual government funding is provided by Alberta at this point. Since 2005 Alberta has more than doubled its funding to legal aid. Federal government funding has stayed about the same in that period.

We recognize that the long-term sustainability of legal aid must be addressed. We will continue working with Legal Aid Alberta to find ways that together we can provide the best services that we can in order to support Albertans' access to justice.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask everyone in the House to join in supporting the Member for Edmonton-Centre's Question 4. There are four elements of it that I think are particularly important, four elements that I would like to discuss.

First of all, the openness and the transparency. The new Premier has campaigned on being open, has campaigned on the transparency that 4 million Albertans deserve. After all, it is their tax money that, you know, allows government to be involved in things. Time and time again it's impossible for them to get the information.

I'm noticing a little bit of a push-back. I had a chance to read one of our daily newspapers today, and two of the letters to the editor were all about how modular schools jumped the queue on the priority list, from seven to one. The nature of the letters was that two people wanted information, wanted to know what would have warranted their going from seven to one, or whatever the numbers were, more than just a by-election that someone needed to win, more than just buying promises from taxpayers with their own money.

So to everyone in the House, guys and gals, there's a legitimate desire for Albertans to be involved in how their tax money is being spent. There's a legitimate need and a legitimate desire for this information to be shared. After all, it's their tax money. It's their information.

An earlier speaker had a good point about FOIPs. In today's technology world, where information is easily gathered, where information is easily kept, where information is easily disseminated from there, it's absolutely incredible that we're charged thousands of dollars, wait a year and a half, and 85 or 90 per cent

of it comes blacked out. So we go fishing. What else are we supposed to do? Wouldn't it be a better situation for a government to legitimately provide this information, Albertans' information and taxpayers' information, in an easy and open manner?

The fourth thing that greatly concerns me. It's like, again, this government doesn't care about what kind of value the taxpayer is getting for the money they are providing. Whether it's enough money or too much money, we can debate that forever. Those are the political issues that divide us, that make us think of different ways to spend taxpayers' money. But not measuring the success, not measuring the outcomes of where taxpayers' money is going is totally wrong. We've seen this in buildings and infrastructure being rated as poor or being rated as good and still having leaky roofs. We've seen this in billions and billions of dollars being poured into health care without monitoring the outcomes. Something as basic as helping a segment of Albertans that greatly deserve help from time to time and not making sure that it's effective, that the outcomes are proper, is inexcusable.

I would ask that you support this request.

3:30

The Speaker: Are there others?

If not, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close debate.

Ms Blakeman: Question.

[Written Question 7 lost]

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

Transportation of Inmates

Q8. Ms Blakeman asked that the following question be accepted.

What was the total cost to the province of transporting inmates from the new Edmonton Remand Centre to Alberta courthouses between March 19, 2012, and March 31, 2014?

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. You gotta know this one: "What was the total cost to the province of transporting inmates from the new Edmonton Remand Centre to Alberta courthouses between March 19, 2012, and March 31, 2014?" You gotta know that.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Government House Leader to advise the House that I'm rejecting Written Question 8, posed by the Member for Edmonton-Centre as set out in the Order Paper November 24, 2014.

Mr. Speaker, the format in which our sheriffs branch tracks transport and escort costs does not capture the data in a manner which matches the request. Thus, we're unable to provide an answer to the request as worded.

Mr. Speaker, all inmate transport – i.e., the moving of inmates, and escorts; i.e., accompanying and supervising inmates, including court security – regardless of the purpose for the movement and/or the escort, are recorded in one master account. There are no subcategories. This includes inmate transfers between facilities, trips to court, inmate pickups from police services, et cetera.

However, Mr. Speaker, I can inform the Member for Edmonton-Centre that for the fiscal year 2013-14 sheriffs conducted 71,950 prisoner escorts throughout the province. For the fiscal year 2013-14 sheriffs travelled over 2,800,000 kilometres to conduct prisoner transports. Sheriffs had no escapes from custody in 2013-14. The costs for court security and prisoner transports are combined in the branch budgets as sheriffs provide both prisoner transports and court security, and we don't track

those costs individually for these separate duties. The court security and prisoner transport section spent \$38,384,000 while conducting their duties in 2013-14.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to address how the new Edmonton Remand Centre is set up to use closed-circuit TV. The Edmonton Remand Centre officially opened on March 19, 2013, at a construction cost of \$580 million. The state-of-the-art facility was built based on our commitment to provide safe communities for Albertans. It's the largest, most technologically advanced correctional centre in Canada. Part of that technology is for the use of CCTV, or closed-circuit television. I can inform the member opposite that the number of inmates who are now appearing by CCTV has gone up dramatically from when the centre had first opened. Appearances by CCTV save taxpayers money and reduce opportunities for inmates to escape.

Fifty-five video court booths service 21 provincial court locations and as of October 2014 include Queen's Bench and immigration hearings. In June 2013 there was an average of 112 inmates appearing daily, 560 weekly. In October 2014 this increased to an average of 136 inmates daily, 680 weekly. An estimated average of 20 inmates are transported daily for in-person court appearances. Since January 2014 there has been an estimated 724,000 kilometres of travel saved by having inmates appear via CCTV.

I thank the hon. member for interest in this matter, and I ask for her support in our common-sense, conservative approach to justice in Alberta.

The Speaker: I have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, but before we go there, could we have unanimous consent to revert briefly to Introduction of Visitors? Does anyone object?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Hearing no objections, let us revert, then, and recognize Edmonton-South West.

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Apparently, my guests did show up, and they're here to learn a lot about public policy. Please welcome Holly Strang, Jennifer Yurkiw, Ashley Williamson, Alyssa Siggelkow, and Yuqiang Feng. If I've mistaken any of those names, I apologize. Please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Written Questions

Transportation of Inmates

(continued)

The Speaker: Let us carry on with Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make a couple of brief comments on this request for information. It seems fairly self-evident that the information does exist. In fact, when the member was giving us a very extensive selection of information around transportation and kilometres and trips and so forth, well, it seemed to me that you could break out that information fairly easily and find out what actually was spent during these very crucial months between March 19, 2012, and March 31, 2014. Certainly, we know that there have been so many

very, very difficult circumstances around the new remand centre, that the transportation, the level of security, the management of this facility at the very highest level was not well done. Certainly, we as a public body need to be able to demonstrate how public monies are being spent and to demonstrate whether something is effective or not, quite frankly.

We know that events around the remand centre were a particular low point in the history of both labour relations here in the province of Alberta and in terms of public security and the public's perception of security here in the province of Alberta. We are having to do many months and years of work to try to repair that damage that took place. Certainly, we know that the information is there. Through the global numbers that the hon. member just presented here, I could easily see that within that the individual numbers for transportation do exist. Why don't you give them to us, please?

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Anyone else?

If not, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close debate.

Ms Blakeman: How curious, Mr. Speaker. I think we've got a very good civil service, and I think they work very hard. It must be a strain some days to serve government. I certainly couldn't do it, so I have all the more admiration for them. But it strikes me that one of the key management tools is analysis, and I am really surprised that the government claims not to keep that information. How on earth would you know that having videos is in fact less expensive if you didn't keep the amounts and break it out in the way that I asked for it.

I have the member, who actually is the minister of something . . . [interjection] Sorry. The Minister of Energy.

An Hon. Member: They've changed so much. It's hard to keep track.

Ms Blakeman: It is hard to keep track.

The Minister of Energy is claiming that, you know, they've saved a certain number of kilometres because they haven't been transporting people. He even gave an amount of money for the number of kilometres that they haven't driven, I think. So, you know, is it possible that the political masters are telling good managers, good civil servants not to collect this information or analyze it? I find that very hard to believe. How could you possibly know you were saving money?

If there's one thing this bunch likes to do, it's to spin those numbers so it'll look like they're saving money, you know, things like recycling press releases. If you can recycle a press release more than three times, I think there's some kind of prize they get over there. Or with sod-turning on schools – what? – is it the same shovel or different backgrounds? I mean, how many times can you possibly announce that and still nothing rises from the ground?

So I know you're good at recycling, but what I want to know is why you would not be using a management tool that's a pretty obvious management tool to use, which is being able to put those numbers together and go: all right; this is how much it's costing us doing it this way, and this is how much it costs us this way. It tells me something about this government. It would be a lot easier to snow you guys than it looks like.

All righty. Thank you.

[Written Question 8 lost]

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

3:40

Medical Student Loans

Q14. Mr. Hehr asked that the following question be accepted.

What is the average amount of total federal and provincial loans provided to a medical student enrolled in an Alberta university who began repayment in 2013-2014?

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think this information is very important to us on the opposition side. As everyone is well aware, we have some of the lowest university enrolments in the nation, if not the lowest. One of the things we're concerned about is access to postsecondary and, in particular, how we do need medical doctors in this province. We've needed them for a long time.

We have tremendous capacity issues, especially in our rural communities, and if we can find ways to get Alberta students to university in a reasonable fashion, well, my goodness, I don't think we'd have to look all around the world to find ways to bring physicians over here. I think a much better strategy is to get young adults the opportunities they need here in our university system.

Again, you know, the cost of education keeps going up. Whether this is an impediment, we need to find out, and having these numbers and having access to this information is very important from our side. That's the information we'd like to receive from the government. If they're willing to provide it to us, I think that would be of assistance.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin, who is also the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education, and advise the House that I'm rejecting Written Question 14, posed by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. The question asked what the average amount of total federal and provincial loans provided to a medical student is for those enrolled in an Alberta university. Well, I'd suggest that the proper avenue for obtaining information about federal government programming, including the total amount of federal loans provided to a medical student at an Alberta university, would be from the federal government itself.

I can say that the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education is very focused on student aid and student loans in Alberta, and I'm glad that the member has asked about student assistance in Alberta because, of course, we want to ensure that our system is accessible to Albertans. Accessibility is indeed a priority for this government, and we're proud of that record, Mr. Speaker. We invest \$234 million in student aid supports. That includes scholarships, bursaries, grants, debt management programs. There is approximately \$234 million available for student aid supports, including \$74 million in scholarships, \$69 million in bursaries and grants, \$45 million for debt management programs, \$34 million for program support, and \$11 million to support the Alberta centennial education savings plan.

Further, Mr. Speaker, we have \$408 million in student loans available to Albertans. Alberta learners are successful, and they're successful in paying back their loans. We expect that 90 per cent of Alberta student loan dollars issued this year will be repaid. Any Albertan who is eligible for a loan gets a loan and can further their education. In the past several years we have supported an increasing number of students.

To make it easier for Albertans to get the funding they need to pursue their education, we've been making significant improvements to student aid, Mr. Speaker. We've streamlined the processes, relaxed eligibility requirements, and created grants to support low-income learners. I can also add that the Alberta

government supports more than 900 scholarships, which are available to apprentices and occupational trainees each year through the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board family of scholarships. Beginning in 2015-16 \$9 million in new scholarships and awards will be available for apprentices out of earnings from the Alberta heritage scholarship fund. We're also exploring ways to better support Albertans that may face barriers to education, particularly low-income, rural, and aboriginal learners.

Now, Mr. Speaker, some members in this House sometimes talk about affordability, accessibility, and how those terms relate to tuition. It's important to note that despite a variety of cost pressures tuition in Alberta increased by a mere 1 per cent in '14-15. This represents the second-lowest increase in all of Canada. Alberta's average undergraduate tuition is below the national average. The latest numbers also show that Alberta has the third-highest expenditures per full-time student in the country.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Innovation and Advanced Education has a lot of information up on their website, and members can see that at studentaid.alberta.ca. While the federal government is the best source of data for their own student loans, this government recognizes the importance of student loans and student aids to Alberta learners, and we thank the hon. member for his question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise today to also thank the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for bringing this question to the government. It's interesting that the hon. deputy House leader was talking about the question not being quite accurate in asking for "federal and provincial," but he then went on and on about all these great programs that the government offers. I do appreciate that, but when we're asking for specific information, it would be quite fine if you say: we can't supply the federal information; you need to go elsewhere. But we're asking for specifics through this question. It's amazing how that's dodged all the time, but the broader general numbers are brought out as in a big fanfare or a parade. In the time that it took for the deputy House leader to do that, he could have simply addressed the question on the provincial side.

The information that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has asked for could be very, very beneficial, and it would go a long way to show how many medical students have actually found work in Alberta, or did they have to go elsewhere? He's asking: how many students began repayment in the 2013 year? I think that's indicative of: are we meeting the needs of local students? Are we attracting and retaining individuals? Are we making an environment here in Alberta for medical students to actually stay here, choose Alberta, find work, or are they finding work in another province or possibly in another country?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Also, something else that this question may provide us information on is: why not share the yearly debt load for one area of postsecondary education that is in high demand? We do know that the medical field is in high demand across this province, as it is around Canada and around the world, but it's what we do with our resources in our own backyard that's most important. I think, again, if this information was made available, it would be a great way to track it and, I guess, identify: are we meeting those needs? Are we missing anywhere? Can we adjust programs to improve on the results? I think that's what we're all here for.

Also, you know, to be a medical student, it's not your average tuition costs. Obviously, these individuals face higher tuition than the average person, and they also face a longer number of years in postsecondary. To be able to track how much is available to these students and how much they are graduating with as a debt, again, would be very beneficial for all Albertans to know, especially when you're talking about parents of children who want to become a medical student. I think the more information that we can provide to them to make qualified decisions in their career path is, again, only beneficial to Albertans.

Finally, I think it goes to the point of something that the minister talked about. I think Alberta is very good in providing financial support, and it is appreciated throughout the province by students and parents. But I think one thing is: is it enough right now with the cost of education going up? I know the minister across, the deputy House leader, was talking about that tuition has only gone up about 1 per cent, but it is still an increase. Are the student financial aids keeping up? I think that's one thing that we need to consider when we're looking at gathering information. At the end of the day, we do want to have a strong postsecondary education system. We want to have students that are coming out with as little debt as possible, also with the supports that best support them through their venture to whatever their goal is, this one being a medical student.

With that, I'd like to say thank you.

3:50

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to ask this House to support the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo's question. An answer to this I think has tremendous value to the taxpayer and the citizens of Alberta. In addition to all the good reasons for openness and transparency that I have already talked about a couple of times as well as members of the opposition of this House, the reasons that Albertans need to know where their tax money is going and the reasons that transparency would go a long, long way to get people more involved, I really think that this question is of particular importance: "total federal and provincial loans provided to a medical student enrolled in an Alberta university who began repayment in 2013-2014."

Why do I think it's particularly important? In Medicine Hat it's estimated that we are some side of 20 or 30 family doctors short. Redcliff, with 7,000 people on the edge of Medicine Hat, has now gone three years without a family doctor. I was shocked. I was shocked to discover when I was first elected that this province is growing at 70,000, 80,000, 100,000 people a year, and of course these people don't bring their schools, they don't bring their roads, and they don't bring their hospitals. Well, guess what? They don't bring their doctors either. I remember one of the first things that I discovered was that the U of C and the U of A medical schools used to admit 200 new entrants per year. That was reduced for some reason to 185 even though the population is going up.

It absolutely, again, makes me question what the outcomes are or what outcomes the government in the province of Alberta tries to measure. Is it part of a rationing strategy? Is it part of a desire not to care? And then it hit home again this year. One of my son's friends, 22 years old, called me. I've known this young man since he was 12 or 13 years old. I've never known this young man not to be an absolute leader in the community, an absolutely top-notch person, and I've never known a time when my oldest son has come home and said that his young friend hasn't got 100 per cent

marks in absolutely everything all through junior high, all through high school, and all through, now, four years of university. This young man was turned down for the second time to get into one of our two medical schools.

Of course, I am wondering: what the heck does it take to train qualified young Albertans that are, like so many others, some of our best, that want to help Albertans, that want to stay in Alberta? I'm thinking that the answer to this question could go a long, long way for those without the means, possibly, but certainly with the desire and the ability. This could really, really shine some light on what we need to do to get that number of spots increased, to get young people that deserve a chance into our medical schools so they can help us all.

Again, I wonder if it's about rationing. I wonder if it's about not caring and certainly not responding to a fairly basic question that relates directly back to the taxpayer, the 4 million of us that are providing the money for the opportunity for fellow Albertans, I think a provision that we're all happy to make. I wonder why the government won't provide something that appears so basic, that appears like it could go a long, long way to solving a problem that's at the heart of so many of our communities, especially our mid-size communities, especially our rural communities, especially our rural areas.

In closing, I commend the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for an excellent question, an excellent idea, something that could go a long, long way to make Alberta stronger for our seniors, our workers, our families, and our next generation. I ask you to support his question.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close debate.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to belabour this any further. Many good reasons have been given. I am going to say that that's one answer, saying: go to the federal government to get their information. But we should have a global understanding here in Alberta what the combined totals are. Are those programs that run together, and are our students facing those challenges of both components of federal and provincial loans? The answer I got wasn't really an answer. It should be information the ministry can provide, and it should be something that we have access to on the opposition side of things.

In any event, I'll leave it where it is and go from there.

[Written Question 14 lost]

Student Debt

Q23. Mr. Hehr asked that the following question be accepted.

For each of the fiscal years 2010-2011 to 2013-2014 what was the average amount of net debt for a postsecondary graduate following the six-month grace period?

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, this is important for many obvious reasons. I stated earlier that we have the lowest university participation rate in the nation. We have to look at: what are the reasons for this? Of course, one is that, well, we don't provide as many seats as other provinces do, but we also have to look at whether there are root causes, whether we are actually doing enough on the provision of student loans and looking at the debt here in this province that young Albertans are graduating with and to see whether that's impacting.

Of course, Alberta is a very expensive place to live for housing and other things that are not necessarily factored into our student loan provisions. I think that has to be looked at in a global sense as to what is actually happening here in Alberta. It's not a direct comparison when we just compare what our funding levels are compared to other provinces' and the like. We have a unique set of challenges here that face our graduates, and we need that information to do our jobs properly on this side of the House. I think the government has every ability to provide us with this information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin, who is also the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education, I wish to advise the House I'm rejecting Written Question 23, posed by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo asked for the average amount of net debt for a postsecondary graduate following the six-month grace period. That's the substance of the written question. In his remarks he talked about contributions to student loans. That's not what the question asked.

I expect the hon. member doesn't appreciate that all Alberta student loans aren't accessed by all students. In fact, we only serve about 1 in 3 students. For example, many students from Alberta don't utilize the government's student loan system at all, and many other graduates are international students and aren't accessing our student loan programs.

We're rejecting the question because, clearly, the member should understand that the Ministry of Innovation and Advanced Education does not collect financial data on all graduates of postsecondary institutions, Mr. Speaker, so we couldn't speak to their net debt level. However, the Ministry of Innovation and Advanced Education certainly focuses on ensuring our students are successful and receive a great return on their education. Tuition in Alberta is a shared investment. An individual learner's education is a shared investment between taxpayers, students, institutions, and their donors. It's a balance and one that our government as a steward of Alberta's tax dollars will get right.

It costs approximately \$22,500 per year, on average, for a student to earn an undergraduate degree in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. The student pays approximately 25 per cent, or \$5,625 per year. The remaining cost is the responsibility of taxpayers and institutions. Most of the cost, around 60 to 65 per cent for an undergraduate degree, is covered by the Alberta government.

The type of question posed here by the hon. member often speaks of affordability, accessibility, and the price of tuition. It's important to note that Alberta's average undergraduate tuition is below the national average. Despite a variety of cost pressures tuition in Alberta increased by a mere 1 per cent in 2014-15. This represents the second-lowest increase in all of Canada. The latest numbers also show that Alberta has the third-highest expenditures per full-time student in the country.

4:00

After graduation, Mr. Speaker, we work with graduates to repay their loans. If graduates are having difficulty, the department also provides the repayment assistance plan, or RAP. The repayment assistance plan is available for both Alberta and Canada student loans. If a student is eligible, an affordable payment will be calculated based on family size and income. Some borrowers will not need to make any monthly payments; others will make an

affordable monthly payment. If you need to continue receiving repayment assistance, you have to reapply for RAP every six months. You could be eligible for RAP if you are currently repaying an Alberta or Canada student loan. If your student loans are in good standing and you're having difficulty making your payments, use the estimator tool on the CanLearn website to see if you're eligible.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at the question as worded, it isn't data that the department of Innovation and Advanced Education would have available. We do not know the net debt for all postsecondary graduates and therefore don't have the data for the hon. member's question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for again bringing a question forward for the government to not answer, and I do appreciate the response by the Deputy Government House Leader.

I found it interesting that the timeline the Member for Calgary-Buffalo was referencing, 2010-2011 going until the 2013-2014 fiscal year, covers a time frame when we had some pretty good years – income was good for the government; revenue was up, so then budgets were also up – but it also covers a time frame when revenue was down. There were some fiscal challenges. Budgets, therefore, went down, and there were some financial decisions to be made as to how funding went to postsecondary institutions. I think what's really relevant is: how did this affect the students? Students are one of the revenue streams of postsecondary education institutions, so if the institution is losing funding on the government side, how else do they offset some of their budgetary challenges? I think we all know that the cost of going to postsecondary is rising. It may only be 1 per cent overall – again, that's an average – but I think that this would help to determine what the differences were based upon those time frames as to what a student was facing at that time as well.

Again, I think that this is great information that could help students and their parents when they want to make a long-term decision because it does give them some insight as to what their potential long-term debt may be and also the opportunities that parents and students have for obtaining financial assistance through the government programs, whether they be provincial or federal. It does bear the question: what is government doing to make sure that education is going to stay affordable for students?

We also think that students do need to have skin in the game – we don't think that education should be free – but at some point, you know, there should be something that's very clearly defined as to: what are the expectations of the student for the cost of their education? What is the expectation, clearly defined, for the province? Those are the two main revenue streams that make these institutions viable and functional. I think that until we actually get to that point of discussion, this issue will probably be discussed over and over again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others?

Seeing none, I'll ask the Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close debate.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It should be a concern to everyone in this House that we have the lowest university

participation rate in the nation right here in this province. Primarily it's because we don't make enough seats available for our students to attend, yet we have to look at whether there's an opportunity for kids to go to university and whether or not the debt that they are leaving university with is too high to allow them to contemplate going. If this is not information the ministry has, maybe it should be tracking this, and maybe it should be looking at whether it is actually impeding Alberta students from attending postsecondary. But if they don't have the information, I understand that.

I guess that with that, we'll close debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Written Question 23 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Legal Aid Funding

Q30. Ms Blakeman asked that the following question be accepted.
How many applications for legal aid funding have been granted by the Alberta courts between January 1, 2014, and October 31, 2014?

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really interested in what the answer is here because – yeah, I'll just let it go at that, and I'll see what the answer is.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to advise the House we are rejecting Written Question 30, posed by the Member for Edmonton-Centre as set out in the Order Paper for November 24, 2014. The reason we're rejecting this question is based on the dates that the hon. member has requested in the question. The ministry began tracking these requests in February 2014, when changes to legal aid rules resulted in a greater number of low-income Albertans no longer being eligible to receive legal aid. Individuals who have been denied legal aid can make an application, called a Rowbotham application, requesting that counsel be ordered by a court. Since that time, being February 2014, the number of Rowbotham orders made by the courts is 159.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Then I'll recognize and offer the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre the opportunity to close debate.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Well, that's what I was waiting for, just to see whether, when I knew they had the information, they would give it out. In fact, the Minister of Justice gave out at a press conference on October 30, 2014, that they had between 60 and 70 Rowbotham applications or decisions at that time. I'm glad to see that they would at least give that information out. Good catch, because I sure would have caught you.

I'm also noticing that there's a couple of things going on here. I'm very aware that there's a private member with a bill that he wants to get up, and I will try and hustle this along. But I'm also very interested to see the amount of time that the government is taking to do private commercials on behalf of what they believe they want to get out to the public. They can't answer our question,

can't give us any information except that they can manage to give a whole bunch of other information not specific to the question but as a sort of televised commercial about what they think they are doing. Times have certainly changed, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much for the information. Looking forward to receiving it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Written Question 30 lost]

Motions for Returns

Legal Aid and Self-represented Litigants

M1. Ms Blakeman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any studies or briefing notes prepared for the government between January 1, 2012, and October 31, 2014, regarding legal aid or self-represented litigants in Alberta.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to advise that we're rejecting this motion for return based on the question that's being asked. The minister wishes to advise that the ministry does not keep track of every document it receives that mentions legal aid or self-represented litigants. I would remind the member opposite that Legal Aid Alberta operates independently of this government. It may have the information that this member would like to obtain, but their records are not within the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General's control.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

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

Are there others?

Mr. Mason: I'd just like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that the question doesn't ask for information within the possession of Legal Aid; it asks for information within the possession of the government. The minister is responding on behalf of the government in a rather disingenuous fashion, I would say.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Then I'd offer the Member for Edmonton-Centre the opportunity to close debate.

Ms Blakeman: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question has been called.

[Motion for a Return 1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton-Centre.

Energy Regulator Incident List Omissions

M2. Ms Blakeman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of records of any spills omitted from the field surveillance incident inspection list used by the Alberta Energy Regulator.

Ms Blakeman: I think we can step this up, Mr. Speaker, because I think it's pretty clear I'm not going to get one – one – of these to pass. They're going to reject every single one, which is why they are on the Order Paper today. How clever of you all.

All right. Motion for Return 2: be careful because I know what I'm looking for here.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the hon. member for the motion for return. I'll point out that Motion for Return 2 requests copies of records of any spills omitted from the field surveillance incident list used by the Alberta Energy Regulator. I'm advised as late as today that all reportable incidents that the AER is involved with are included in the incident reporting spreadsheet maintained on their website. The AER does not omit any incidents. The only information not presented on their spreadsheet would be incidents under active investigation, where there would be a need to preserve evidence for judicial proceedings.

The field surveillance inspection list the member opposite references is a product that can be ordered from the AER's Products and Services Catalogue, which is why she says that she knows what she's talking about, probably. This is data available for purchase about incidents reported to the AER from 1975 to the current date. As before, the AER does not omit any reported incidents.

I recommend rejecting this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Are there others speaking to the motion?

If not, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, would you care to close debate?

Ms Blakeman: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question has been called.

[Motion for a Return 2 lost]

Wildlife Casualties at Cold Lake Air Weapons Range

M4. Ms Blakeman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of lists of all wildlife found dead and in rehabilitation as of October 31, 2014, due to the continuing bitumen emulsion at the Cold Lake air weapons range.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We will be rejecting Motion for Return 4. This is a situation that is still under investigation by the Alberta Energy Regulator . . .

Ms Blakeman: And why is that?

The Deputy Speaker: The minister has the floor.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government respects the due processes set out by the Alberta Energy Regulator to do a full and complete investigation. As the Energy minister just made a comment on, particularly when there are investigations where there may be a charge laid in accordance with legislation, it's important for the investigation to keep its integrity. The integrity of that evidence is key to their investigation. In fact, releasing this information would actually undermine the integrity of the regulator, and that would be something that would be far more damaging than anything that we could provide to the public at this point in time.

I do want to direct the hon. member to the Alberta Energy Regulator website, aer.ca, which has an update on some of the actions that have been undertaken since the environmental protection order was issued as a result of this incident, including an investigation status. At last update the AER expects that CNRL and the independent panel will complete their reports by December 2014, and shortly afterwards the reports will be made public. At that time, then, you know, certainly there would be the possibility of entertaining the release of any information in regard to these investigations.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there others? I recognize the Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand up and speak to this motion for a return. As the Energy critic I work very diligently with the parties involved in this. The oil company, CNRL: we talked many times, and I think they did a good job. The AER came out and, you know, had a lot of information. They could have maybe had a little bit more information from Alberta Environment, but that was in that transition phase where they were combining both ministries, so I think there might have been a little confusion on what roles each one of them takes.

You know, CNRL on their website have a lot of great information regarding this incident. They did updates to their website once they had a handle on the situation. They did what they could to inform the public. Sometimes a little bit of information maybe wasn't shared. It could be looked at as a good thing because you don't want to start a panic across the whole oil and gas industry. You want to speak with facts, not theories and fiction. As far as I'm concerned, the CNRL company did a good job. They put on their website what they can, and, working with the regulator, they're continually monitoring and working to find solutions.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to add support for this Motion for a Return 4. It's so nice to see the Member for Edmonton-Centre as concerned as we are in the Wildrose about clean air, clean land, clean water, and getting the right balance between the environment and the economy.

I asked to be our ESRD critic about a week or so ago. You know, from time to time I'm discovering that the government hasn't always had the monitoring, hasn't always had the rules and regulations. Our industry, who, as our Energy critic just said, so often takes the leadership in providing jobs, providing wealth, providing cheap energy for all Alberta, for all Canada, and for all the world, is unsure and unclear as to what the rules and regulations are, the balance that we need to maintain between the environment for our generation and future generations and a strong economy so that we can have the lifestyle and the quality programs that Albertans deserve. We saw in all the earlier questions a reluctance from this 43-year-old government to provide openness and transparency on so many of the questions that Albertans and Alberta taxpayers deserve. I would encourage the government to be as open and transparent as possible to help ensure that the balance between the economy and the environment is obtained.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to rise in support of this motion for a return also, not for the reason that the Official Opposition just said but for just the opposite reason. I didn't think that CNRL behaved very well at all. I think the only time they actually fell within the guidelines that Alberta Environment required them to was when they were forced to. Actually, if I had any criticism, I think Alberta Environment should have earlier demanded more so that we could have gotten the accurate information sooner rather than later.

4:20

I find it somewhat disingenuous that the Wildrose would say that they are for the environment and in favour of the environment since when I was the environment critic and I tried to put out a press release on this very issue, CNRL actually was given the authority to approve my press release. That's a very bizarre thing, to have industry control what the opposition actually says. Now, that may be a shock to some people, but I don't think that should happen in our democratic process. We should have freedom not only of expression but freedom to look at a situation and actually make a comment based on the best possible information, not a company controlling an opposition, what they will say.

So I disagree with the opposition, but I will agree with them that we should have this information. Hopefully, the minister will give this information for the right reasons: the reasons to protect the environment, the reasons for transparency, and the reasons that the public needs to have faith in the system.

Our laws are good. What we need to do is hold some of these companies accountable when they act poorly. In the case of this bill CNRL acted poorly, and they needed to be held accountable. Those are just the facts of the matter.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others?

Then the Member for Edmonton-Centre has the opportunity to close debate.

Ms Blakeman: What a revealing exchange, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for opening the door to talk about investigations because I think there is a difference in investigations. [interjection] Oh, yeah, that gave you a little to swallow, didn't it?

I think there's a difference between doing a good investigation and dragging your feet. Right now on CNRL we've been waiting for almost a year and a half or just over a year and a half, and now I'm being told it's another month, so a year and three quarters or whatever, and we're over a year on the Obed, which is the next question I've got. I am really seriously beginning to wonder if there isn't just an enormous amount of foot-dragging going on here, and then by the end the minister says that maybe we'll get the information. At the end of it all. That's not appropriate.

[The Speaker in the chair]

This is our land. It's not yours. It's our land, and if we have a company that is going to spew gunk all over the place that kills wildlife, trees, any kind of vegetation, we have a right to know about that, and you should be producing the report ASAP for all of us.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 4 lost]

Wildlife Casualties at Obed Coal Mine

M5. Ms Blakeman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of lists of all wildlife found dead and in rehabilitation as of October 31, 2014, due to the October 31, 2013, rupture of Sherritt International's Obed coal mine containment pond.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Sherritt International's Obed coal mine containment pond: the definition of gunk, if I may be so bold. I'll be really interested to see – I'll bet we're going to get the same answer, don't you think, Mr. Speaker? Cut loose, Mr. Minister.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We will be rejecting Motion for a Return 5 for very much the same reasons. This is an incident that is still under investigation by the Alberta Energy Regulator. It is a very complex investigation, and it is very important for the integrity of this investigation that this information not be released at this point in time. You know, it is actually quite sad, truthfully, that the hon. member even wants to suggest that anybody over on this side of the House or the other side of the House doesn't care about what happens on our land, as she likes to speak. We take that very seriously, and that's why the integrity of this process is very, very important.

I can understand the level of frustration. Any time I hear on TV or the media of an ongoing criminal investigation of something that's happened in our community and, you know, law enforcement officers don't necessarily release all of the information, we're clamouring to find out what happened, what was going on, but we understand that they don't do that because there is an ongoing investigation, and by releasing that information, you could compromise that investigation. What is very, very important, if this member honestly cares about protecting our environment, is that we maintain the integrity of the Alberta Energy Regulator. Yes, sometimes it takes time to investigate some of these incidents, and sometimes it is important to allow that investigation to come to completion before releasing results.

Again, I want to point out to this member that it's not like the government or the company has been withholding information. As part of the environmental protection order, if you go to the website obed.ca, you will find weekly and monthly update reports that are part of the environmental protection order. Clause 39 of that order states:

In addition to any other reporting required by this Order, the Parties shall submit to the Director on the first day of each month, commencing on December 1, 2013, a status report in writing that contains a summary of all activities undertaken in accordance with this Order in the previous month, and all activities that are planned for the next month.

Then clause 40 states:

The Monthly Status Reports shall be submitted to the Director until the Director advises otherwise.

Again, all of this information is available. There is an ongoing investigation, and we will make sure that that investigation comes to completion and that appropriate actions that will result from that investigation based on the facts of the situation will inform our next steps.

The last thing we need, Mr. Speaker, is a bunch of innuendo and assertions and false conclusions about what has happened and

what hasn't happened there. A great example of this is when the member stands up and says that these companies have spewed "gunk" all over the environment. And while that is a very, very unfortunate incident that no doubt has had some environmental impacts, I don't believe "gunk" is a technical term for anything that's being investigated.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actions taken by the government make me want to ask everybody in this House to support this motion for a return. Of course, anything that affects the environment for future generations is of great concern to all of us. When this first occurred, I recall the government coming right away and suggesting that by the spring of 2014, which, of course, has come and gone, we would have the information in the public domain as to where we were with this and what we could do to prevent it and ensure, you know, where the baseline testing was.

In two and a half years I've seen, as in the earlier questions today, where the government is reluctant, tries sometimes to never release the information, takes FOIPs, takes years, takes thousands of dollars. We have to prove it is in the public interest to get that money back. After a promise was made that this information would be in the public domain five or six months ago and when information is hard to get, is it any wonder that people are questioning as to the job the regulator is doing, as to the job the minister is doing, as to the job the government is doing to ensure that we have clean air, clean land, and clean water?

The hon. member is asking for aerial photographs, lists, documentation. Again, as I said earlier, it's so important to get the balance right between our strong economy, our good leaders, our business leaders – the two very, very much want to generate jobs, generate wealth, and generate cheap energy for all of Alberta, all of Canada, and the world but are unsure of where the government is at with rules, regulations, and information.

4:30

I look forward to time in the House over the next month and into the spring, when we could actually talk about – not talk about photographs, lists, and aerial documentation that they're never going to provide anyway, but let's talk about a better framework for practice, something that will actually help our industry leaders understand better where they need to go so we can continue with a strong economy and continue to protect our environment for the next generation.

With that, again, I think it's important for 4 million Albertans to understand how our government is protecting our environment. I think it's important for world leaders to understand what we're doing. I would ask that you support our colleague from Edmonton-Centre, her Motion for a Return 5.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I read this motion for a return, it just says: copies of lists of wildlife found dead and in rehabilitation between a time frame. Now, no one wants to obstruct an investigation. I would agree with the minister in that regard, that if an investigation is on the way, the last thing you want to do is interfere or obstruct an investigation. That's true. But I'm not sure how a list of dead animals or those in rehabilitation

would interfere or obstruct. We're talking about something that took place a year ago. This is information now that should be finalized.

The investigation, in my understanding, should be about the actual breach of the dike, the actual breach at the mine site. The damage done is the damage done, and I think that not just the members of this House but the public has a right to know about the effects that have happened as a direct result of the spill. Clearly, the wildlife found dead is something that I think is of importance to the public interest, to know this a year after the fact so we can make some sort of assessment or evaluation.

Now, I would love to see a detailed finding, the finalized report. I would like to see that tomorrow. But if I have to wait a month or two months, what I want to see is a complete and comprehensive finding so we know exactly how this happened, how it came about, the damage that was done, and how we can make sure this never happens again. Asking for a list of the wildlife found and that wildlife that would be in rehabilitation a year after the fact, I fail to see how this would compromise or obstruct an investigation. What we want are facts and not hearsay. We want to know exactly what the government knows in this regard and what the investigators know so we can make an assessment also on how this thing is progressing and what is the state of the water, what is the state of the river. That is important in evaluating the policies of this government.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

If not, let me recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close debate.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This has just been an interesting, revealing day.

You know, we've already got photographs. These were released in October, I think, from Alberta Environment and the company and somebody else, so it's not as though there's nothing around. I just think that if we're going to see these, we should be able to see some of the other ones. Given that, you know, at least one of these operations is still running, I would think that these investigations could have gone a little faster, but evidently not.

At this point I would just ask that we go to the vote on this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 5 lost]

Disturbances at Obed Coal Mine

M9. Ms Blakeman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of photographs of all soil and vegetation disturbances as of October 31, 2014, due to the October 31, 2013, rupture of Sherritt International's Obed coal mine containment pond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For the same reasons I mentioned before, we will be rejecting Motion for a Return 9. This is an ongoing investigation that hasn't come to completion yet; therefore, it would be not responsible to release this information at this point in time, and we will leave it at that.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close debate, please.

Ms Blakeman: Question.

[Motion for a Return 9 lost]

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

Disturbances at Cold Lake Air Weapons Range

M10. Ms Blakeman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of photographs of soil and vegetation disturbances as of October 31, 2014, due to the continuing bitumen emulsion at the Cold Lake air weapons range.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion for a Return 10 on the Order Paper under my name: are you sensing a theme?
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We will be rejecting Motion for a Return 10 for the same reasons as stated before in regard to this particular incident, that is still under investigation.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Ms Blakeman: Question.

[Motion for a Return 10 lost]

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

Wildlife Casualties at Obed Coal Mine

M11. Ms Blakeman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of photographs of all wildlife found dead and in rehabilitation as of October 31, 2014, due to the October 31, 2013, rupture of Sherritt International's Obed coal mine containment pond.

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, we'll be rejecting Motion for a Return 11, that I believe we're on, for the same reasons as before. This is an ongoing investigation, and to maintain the integrity of the investigation, this information will not be released at this time.

The Speaker: Are there others?
Seeing none, hon. member, do you wish to close debate?

Ms Blakeman: Question.

[Motion for a Return 11 lost]

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

Obed Coal Mine Pond Rupture

M13. Ms Blakeman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of aerial photographs taken between October 31, 2013, and October 31, 2014, showing the effects of the October 31, 2013, rupture of Sherritt International's Obed coal mine containment pond.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, I know you've got these ones.

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, we'll be rejecting Motion for a Return 13 for the same reasons as mentioned in previous motions. This is an ongoing incident that's under investigation by the Alberta Energy Regulator, and to maintain the integrity of the investigation, we will not be releasing this information at this time.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Ms Blakeman: Question.

[Motion for a Return 13 lost]

Bitumen Emulsion at Cold Lake Air Weapons Range

M14. Ms Blakeman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of aerial photographs taken between June 1, 2013, and October 31, 2014, showing the effects of the ongoing bitumen emulsion at the Cold Lake air weapons range.

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, I'm just wondering: do you think it's the rejection jig or the rejection polka or the rejection mambo, maybe, seeing as we're now . . .

An Hon. Member: How about the twist?

Ms Blakeman: The rejection twist? Yeah. This is a cute game. You know, we ask questions because we're trying to get information, and the government thinks it's tee-hee funny to go through an entire afternoon rejecting every single one of them.
Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, that's unfair. Obviously, the hon. member has seen my dancing skills.

We will be rejecting Motion for a Return 14, again, for the comments made under previous motions. This is an ongoing investigation by the Alberta Energy Regulator, and to maintain the integrity of the investigation, we'll not be providing this information at this time.

4:40

The Speaker: Are there others?
Seeing none, do you wish to close debate?

Ms Blakeman: Question.

[Motion for a Return 14 lost]

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

Bill 201 Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014. I move the bill . . .

Ms Blakeman: In second reading.

Mr. Anglin: . . . for second reading. I was getting there. I'm there. It's interesting because we refer to it as the deregulated electricity system, but there's nothing deregulated about it. It is very much a restructured system that is complex. What this bill proposes is something very simple in nature, but behind that it is actually quite complex. That's why in this bill I have asked that the commission itself report back within six months to the minister to come up with a standardized bill because when you go out into the public and you ask people about some of the complaints that they have around these utility bills, one of the things that is absolutely clear: people don't understand the bills.

One of the dilemmas of this government to make this restructured market work is to allow the providers access to compete, and if customers and the consumers don't understand, it makes it that much more difficult for the competition to get off the ground; hence, we still have about 60 per cent of all Albertans on the regulated rate option. If those members in the House remember, last year the Minister of Energy was asked: what option do you have? He said: well, I'm on the regulated rate option because I don't understand what's going on. That's true. That's true of the average consumer out there. So something has to be done, and that's where it starts to get complex.

The bill does not dictate what is going to actually happen. What it does is that it goes back to the authority that should be making this decision on how we come up with a standardized bill so consumers have information at their hands to make informed decisions on what is best that meets their needs dealing with electricity bills.

Now, there are all sorts of side benefits, but I want to talk about some of the complex issues that have confused consumers. In our restructured market system transmission facility owners are fully regulated companies. Distribution facility owners, called DFOs, are fully regulated companies. Retail companies, of course, are deregulated, and of course the generators are deregulated and are free to compete. From that it then gets really complex because there are all sorts of regulations around how electricity is generated, and there are all sorts of regulations dealing even in the retail market on how these companies can market and sell their information. When you add in the DFOs, the distribution facility owners, they make these billing invoices difficult – some retailers would say deliberately – but for lack of evidence let's just say inadvertently complex.

If you ask the consumer, "Who are you buying your electricity from?", many don't even know unless they have a fixed contract. Even then, when they have an issue with their bills, they don't know whom to call, and they get the runaround. If they have an issue with an outage, they may not call Fortis. They may not call EPCOR, Enmax, or ATCO. They may call their billing company. So there are lots of complexities dealing with this whole issue of transparency and clarity in the billing.

Now, I've been in conversations with some of the members in this House, and I think there are some amendments that are going to come forward to help make this better. I hope that they do come forward. But there is also an opportunity here to lower the cost of regulation. One of the things that happens when we deal with the regulated portions of this bill is that we have what are called rate-based hearings. It's not included in this bill, but it is a by-product that we may obtain if we have a standardized bill, which is: should we just have one regulated rate-based hearing maybe every quarter versus multiple hearings for different companies on how we're going to bill for these regulated charges?

That is an open-ended question. But it's costly every time the Alberta Utilities Commission holds a hearing. It costs millions of dollars, basically, to hold these hearings, and we have numerous hearings ongoing all the time. So should there be one rate-based hearing for all of the transmission companies? Should there be one rate-based hearing for all of the distribution facility companies to come up with a universal charge so that people could compare bills? That is something that is open ended.

What this bill proposes to do is to just put onto the commission the mandate that they need to come forward with a standardized bill so that it is clear and concise and consumers can actually understand how they're being charged and, most importantly, so that they can compare. If any member here were to actually go out and take a bill, say, from the Edmonton area and try to compare

that to a bill, say, from the Calgary area or some rural area dealing with a co-op, you would have three different bills showing three different mechanisms on how people are charged. It's just absolutely confusing to try to put together why one bill has one charge for transmission and another bill has three charges for transmission, why one bill has two charges for distribution and another bill only has one charge for distribution. Trying to figure out how those charges are actually compiled or calculated is a near impossibility.

As you can see, creating a standardized bill is simple to state, but it's far more complex, and it needs the expertise of the Alberta Utilities Commission to think about it, to possibly even hold a hearing if that's what they think is something that they need from the providers so that they can come up with a report to submit to the minister so we can actually move forward in the sense of giving consumers the information they need to make decisions. That's all this bill is striving to achieve. With all of the issues dealing around electricity, if we can just accomplish this, if we can just get consumers more informed to make better decisions, just possibly the system could work.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we're going to now proceed in an alternating fashion, so we can start with the government side – let me just get my road map here – the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

After that, could I suggest, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, that you speak with the Wildrose opposition and the Liberal opposition to see if they'll grant you the permission you're seeking to go next. We understand the importance of an event you have to attend shortly, so if you could speak to them.

In the meantime let us go to Calgary-Varsity.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise in support of Bill 201, Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. In our opinion, Bill 201 builds on and actually reinforces the relationship between the Alberta Utilities Commission and the Minister of Energy, calling on the commission, as the member suggested, to provide a report on transparency in billing. We believe this report will recommend improvements to the billing and formatting of electricity bills, which is a good thing for consumers.

Mr. Speaker, as you may know and as I was very interested to learn during my brief tenure as associate minister of electricity and renewable energy, Alberta has a very competitive market-based electricity system. And let me admit to you that I'm a bit of an energy geek. My sons actually chide me for talking about electricity at the dinner table. I truly believe that if more Albertans understood how our electricity works in Alberta, they too would embrace this sense of excitement.

Alberta restructured its electricity system in 1996, leading to the deregulated market we now have. This move to a market-based electricity system, with investor-owned, not government-owned electricity generation, opened the door to competition and encouraged efficiencies and innovation in the sector. I believe this bill moves in the same direction.

4:50

Our deregulated market is able to provide consumers with a reliable supply of electricity at a consistent and fair cost even as our economy and our population have grown. Healthy competition in our electricity market avails retail customers in Alberta with a range of choices. For example, consumers in my constituency of

Calgary-Varsity, indeed across the province, can choose green energy if that's their personal preference. In a competitive marketplace consumers get to decide. Of course, like any commodity, electricity prices can fluctuate. The existence of healthy competition in electricity generation helps to ensure that the prices for end-users are likewise competitive.

But for some consumers market volatility can be uncomfortable. To manage this sensitivity, we have retail service agreements, as the member has mentioned, for electricity agreements that offer flat rates. Again, in our marketplace consumers have choices. They can choose to accept market fluctuations in the price of their delivered electricity, or they can choose a default payment for electricity, called a regulated rate option. As the member has talked about, the RRO is calculated based on analysis and forecasting of the overall average electricity market in Alberta.

So, Mr. Speaker, in Alberta we have market-based electricity generation and a competitive retail market which sets the conditions for competitive and safe generation and sale of electricity. We also have checks and balances in place, including a strong regulatory role and the oversight responsibilities of the Alberta Utilities Commission to protect the interests of consumers. Bill 201 reinforces and strengthens the ability of the Alberta Utilities Commission to assure protection for electricity consumers here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, not only am I an energy geek; I'm also a governance geek. It's kind of a double whammy. So I want to dig a little deeper into the implications of this proposed bill on governance of our electricity system here in Alberta. The AUC is an independent agency mandated to ensure that Albertans receive safe and reliable utilities at fair and reasonable prices. People often ask about the relationship between the AUC and the government of Alberta's Ministry of Energy. To reiterate, the AUC is a quasi-judicial, independent agent of the government of Alberta. Decisions made by the AUC are not to be influenced in any way by the Minister of Energy.

Based on my first-hand observation of this relationship I can attest to the ferociousness with which the AUC protects its independence. I personally applaud and support this governance approach. Decision-making within the AUC must be free of government influence and focused on what is best for Alberta's electricity consumers. The distance between the minister and the commission ensures this consumer protection. Incidentally, this separation of government and regulator in our electricity system here in Alberta is quite unique. In many jurisdictions there is little or no separation.

In the hon. member's bill it is proposed that we utilize the benefit of the AUC's independence and empower the commission to research and prepare a report on how to create even more transparency and consistency in billing. In this AUC report standardized electricity bills would be proposed to clearly communicate fixed and variable costs for customers. Mr. Speaker, I hope many people in this Legislature and many Albertans spend a little time to look closely at their electricity bills to understand the elements that are included and the ultimate price to be paid to receive a safe supply of electricity, that invisible energy, on a reliable basis.

Bill 201 would empower the AUC to build on the work already done in Alberta to educate electricity consumers and would build on the levels of transparency in billing and other emerging standards of practice within our utilities sector. People may ask: "How would the AUC prepare this report? Are they qualified?" Again, based on first-hand observations the AUC's analysis of energy markets, market rules, and reliability standards perfectly positions them to prepare this report. The AUC is chock full of

economists, engineers, and even a few lawyers with specific knowledge and experience. They know how to do research, and they are primed to stay abreast of innovation and changes in this sector that could positively or negatively affect Albertans.

The AUC's role necessitates their ongoing engagement with stakeholder groups, regulated entities, and regulatory agencies. They need to keep a hand on the pulse of this sector at all times, and their research doesn't stop at the Alberta borders. They must look beyond our provincial borders to proactively anticipate change and innovation. On the basis of this mandate and their expertise, the AUC is perfectly positioned to make wise choices for the benefit of all Alberta utility consumers.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre has proposed a bill that would be of great value to consumers and that builds on the strengths and expertise that already exist in the regulation and governance of our electricity system. With this bill in place Albertans will reap the benefits of the independence and expertise of the AUC and their ability to recommend how to improve transparency in electricity bills for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support this bill, and I look forward to this bill being further debated in the House. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, as you know, 29(2)(a) is not available at this time for this type of bill.

However, I would ask your indulgence to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests. Does anyone object to giving unanimous consent?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, please proceed with your introduction.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my brother Jason Fox. I am pleased that he's here today. We've been together through the turbulence of life, and there's a lot of turbulence left to go, but I am ecstatic today that I get to welcome him back to the province of Alberta as he's just moved back to this wonderful province from Dawson City, Yukon. Jason, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Bill 201

Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing)

Amendment Act, 2014

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood given the agreement to allow him to proceed. You have three minutes left on the clock, and we'll see where it goes.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Three minutes? Okay. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to support this bill even though I don't think it really tackles the basic problem with our electricity system, which is that it's completely chaotic. It was a well-organized, regulated system before. It's not anymore. The government has added middlemen.

They've added all kinds of uncertainty in terms of trying to make a market work where a market can't work. We've seen that the big power producers in particular have repeatedly attempted to game the system in order to drive up prices. TransAlta, for example, has been found responsible for that by the regulator in the past. They either export power when we need to import power or they shut down generators for maintenance and create a shortage. Because you can't store electricity, then that shortage produces a very pronounced spike in prices, so consumers in Alberta are paying way too much.

They've introduced middlemen. Somebody buys the power from the producer, who used to sell it to you directly, and then they resell it to you. Of course, they take a cut. They have their own profits to make, and they have their own bureaucracy to pay, so it adds cost to the system. That kind of confusion and multiple – what's the word I'm looking for?

An Hon. Member: Layers of bureaucracy.

Mr. Mason: The layers of bureaucracy and profit takers are reflected in a confusing bill. You have got the people that produce the electricity, then it gets distributed, then it gets bought by a retailer, and then it's resold to you. All of these costs are then reflected in the bill, and the bill itself becomes very complex because it is reflecting the system that's very complex.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre may actually simplify the bill somewhat, but the fact of the matter is that the basic problem remains. We have an unnecessarily complex, bureaucratic, and highly regulated system that goes by the misnomer of deregulated electricity.

Mr. Speaker, I'll just tell the House that when this was first brought in, I asked one of the pages to go to the library and bring me every regulation and law of this province that dealt with the previous regulated system. It consisted of three documents, and it was about this high. Then I asked the page to go to the library and get every regulation and piece of legislation in the library that related to the so-called deregulated system. It took a poor page – she came in with her hands down here, and the paper came up to her chin. And that's the deregulated system, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I regret having to interrupt you, but it is 5 o'clock, and the time for consideration of those matters is now over.

We'll move forward.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Constitution of Canada Amendment

501. Mr. Fox moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly authorize His Excellency the Governor General to issue a proclamation under the Great Seal of Canada amending the Constitution of Canada in accordance with the schedule set forth below.

Schedule

Amendment to the Constitution of Canada

1. The Constitution Act, 1982, is amended by adding the following after section 7:

7.1(1) Everyone has the right not to be deprived of the title, use or enjoyment of real property or any improvement made to such property, or any right connected with such property, except in

accordance with the law and for full, just and timely financial compensation.

(2) Subsection (1) applies only to the legislature and government of Alberta in respect of all matters within the authority of the legislature of Alberta.

2. This amendment may be cited as the Constitution amendment, [year of proclamation] (No expropriation in Alberta without compensation).

Version Française

L'Assemblée législative a résolu d'autoriser qu'une modification soit apportée à la Constitution du Canada par une proclamation de Son Excellence le Gouverneur général sous le grand sceau du Canada, conforme à l'annexe ci-après:

Annexe

Modification de la Constitution du Canada

1. La Loi constitutionnelle de 1982 est modifiée par adjonction, après l'article 7, de ce qui suit:

7.1 (1) Chacun a le droit de ne pas être privé du titre de propriété ou de l'utilisation ou de la jouissance d'un bien immeuble, ni des droits se rattachant à un tel bien ou des améliorations qui y sont apportées, sauf conformément à la loi et moyennant une indemnisation financière intégrale, équitable et en temps opportun.

(2) Le paragraphe (1) s'applique uniquement à la législature et au gouvernement de l'Alberta, pour tous les domaines qui relèvent de la compétence de la législature de l'Alberta.

2. Titre de la présente modification: Modification constitutionnelle de [année de la proclamation] (expropriation interdite en Alberta sans indemnisation).

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great exuberance that I rise today to introduce Motion 501. My colleague from Drumheller-Stettler has a saying: history is easier read than made. My friends, that is where we are today. One way or the other, today we will make history in Alberta on behalf of all Albertans.

Why do Albertans believe that there is a need for this? Let's look back at our history. In 1972 the Alberta Bill of Rights was enacted. In that bill we have the enshrining of "the right of the individual to liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property, and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law." What is not mentioned and is unfortunate is that the law has a limited scope as it can and has been overridden by this Alberta Legislature.

One form of expropriation is where the public authority pursuant to its statutory powers may regulate the use of land or restrict other property rights of the owner, and though the title of the property is unaffected, that landowner may feel the impact of the regulation as if the property had been taken. This is what's called a regulatory taking. These have the same effect as stripping the land of its value.

An example of this would be a dairy farm owned by a family who holds the title to the land. A confined feeding operation approval would be issued by the Natural Resources Conservation Board, and there would also be a water licence. The Land Stewardship Act calls the latter two rights statutory consents. It used to be the case that confined feeding operation approvals could only be rescinded under certain circumstances such as the surrender of the approval or the sale or abandonment of the land. Well, the government argues that by rescinding these statutory consents, the family's title to that land is not affected, but it is obvious that the farming operation will no longer be able to

continue to operate without them. This violates the expropriation component of property rights.

Without the protection of statutory consents there cannot be a functional economy. Under the new land-use framework the government can decide what Albertans can and cannot do on private land in a way that has never been seen before in the province of Alberta and possibly in any other parliamentary democracy in the world. It used to be that Albertans, like most people in free societies, were able to do whatever they wanted on their land as long as no activities were generally harmful. Now Albertans may only conduct activities on their lands that achieve specific outcomes determined by this cabinet even if that overturns something that the government had explicitly permitted either yesterday or generations ago. You have no guarantees for compensation in Alberta.

Now, there is no tradition in Canadian common law of protecting these. It is currently the view in Canada that there is no expropriation in the country of Canada unless the government acquires the title to the land from its owner. The Supreme Court reiterated this view in 2006 in the case of the Canadian Pacific Railway versus the city of Vancouver.

Hon. members, Mr. Speaker, Albertans know that Bill 1 doesn't go far enough. When the Premier toured this province over the past summer seeking the leadership of the PC Party, he spoke repeatedly about property rights and the need to address legislation from successive PC governments. Last week Albertans got to see the Premier's Bill 1. The body of that legislation is literally one sentence long and has less than 10 words in it. It says that Bill 19, the Alberta land assembly act, is repealed. The land assembly act is the least controversial of the five laws that have been advanced and/or defended by the Premier's predecessor, Premier Alison Redford. Each of these five laws took a knife to the property rights of Albertans, yet these laws remain and hang like daggers around the necks of Albertans.

The Premier should be bringing all of these anti-property-rights laws out into the open in order to slay them in the same way that he has done for Bill 19, the Alberta land assembly act. The additional grave markers should read: here lies Bill 24, the law that took away underground property rights from all Albertans; here lies Bill 36, the law that gave cabinet the power to deny people access to the courts and compensation while cabinet tore up legal agreements and contracts, that enabled it to control what people could and could not do on private property; and here lies Bill 2, the law that extinguished a landowner's statutory right to a hearing and the right to notification when the government approves an energy project on private property.

Even if these laws are deep-sixed, the Premier must yet reach further if he is to follow through on his promise. His promise wasn't just to repeal existing unproclaimed legislation; his promise was to establish legal protection for property rights here in Alberta. He can do this. He can do this today. You all can do this today by supporting Motion 501. We all know that the surest way to protect Albertans' rights is through a constitutional amendment.

Some people may not realize that the amending formula for the Constitution clearly indicates that if one province wants a constitutional protection for property rights, all it has to do is request that the House of Commons and Senate act upon a request from the provincial Legislature – no other province needs to be consulted because no other province is going to be affected – under section 43 of the amending formulas in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Only the placement of property rights in the Canadian Charter can achieve this kind of ironclad protection for property rights here in the province of Alberta. The Official Opposition on behalf of all Albertans has advanced a

carefully worded proposal that can be passed here today in the Legislature and then submitted to Ottawa for passage in the House of Commons and the Senate.

If the Premier does not follow through with his promise, opposition members will be calling on the Premier to attach a single question to the ballot paper during the next provincial election asking every voter in Alberta if he or she would be in favour of constitutional protection of property in our province.

Hon. members, not only does Motion 501 recognize what has happened to Alberta property owners in the past, but it will strengthen future property rights for all Albertans by enshrining them in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, our nation's highest law, forever protecting Albertans' ability to own and be compensated for their property. Fellow members, I ask you to show your equal support to all Albertans, for all Albertans by supporting Motion 501 and enshrining property rights in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms for the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to rise today to support the motion of my colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka and to say how wonderful it is – I'm exuberant, just as he is – to be talking about property rights, which is one of the reasons why I decided to run for provincial office. When I came back from working a year as an intern at the Fraser Institute, the very first job I had was as the managing director of the Canadian Property Rights Research Institute, which I ran for a couple of years before getting into politics and then into the media.

5:10

At the time the issues that we had were with federal legislation that was coming through, the Species at Risk Act and the concern we had that it was not going to give adequate compensation. Of course, we had issues with the federal long gun registry, and we had issues with the Canadian Wheat Board, all of which under the new federal government of Mr. Harper have been addressed. We still have some issues, obviously, with some of the federal orders coming through in certain areas under the Species at Risk Act, but the repeal of the long gun registry and the repeal of the Canadian Wheat Board, allowing for dual marketing, were two really important promises that our federal government kept to western Canadian farmers.

The problem that we've seen over recent years, though, is that we've had a number of pieces of legislation that have passed at the provincial level. As much as I started into property rights advocacy because I was worried about federal powers, as it turned out, it was our provincial government that we had the most to fear from. We saw multiple examples of this. Bill 50, I think, was the first example, when it came through. I can tell you that when they came through with a process that would allow them to put in two new transmission lines without giving proper notification, proper hearings, and proper input from landowners about what the route was, we heard all kinds of stories from individuals whose property values were impacted.

Once you pass these kinds of projects and you're impacting people's property value without a provision for compensation, it can be a huge financial hardship. I remember going to a business owner's place up in northern Alberta. They owned a pumpkin field and a pumpkin maze, and every year they brought the kids in. But the Bill 50 lines would have had one of the lines going

right through the pumpkin fields, destroying the value of their business and in such a callous way, without any compensation or any appropriate amount of consultation. Those are the reasons why Bill 50 was fought against so hard.

I'm hopeful that they'll continue with the process of doing better consultation and won't do this type of approach in the future, but that kind of callousness – we can do what we want because we've got the power of the provincial government behind us – is exactly the reason why we need to have property rights protection.

Of course, we have Bill 19, which my colleague mentioned. The fact that they would be able to freeze land into green zones for up to 30 years, pending approval of what sorts of development they wanted to do in future, was a huge infringement on people's property rights. We're glad that it's being finally repealed. If the government wants to take land, they should do it through the Expropriation Act and make sure that they're compensating landowners for all 19 heads of compensation that they're eligible for. The Land Assembly Project Area Act was, once again, an act that they brought through thinking that they could just force it through without having to deal with the issues of property rights because they weren't protected in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Bill 36 remains a problem. This is why we were so disappointed when the Premier did not take the opportunity to address this in his opening bill. We have numerous problems with Bill 36 that impact individual property rights. Section 11 outlines the right of cabinet to rescind rights. When we're talking about rights, we're not just talking about deeded land; we're talking about all sorts of statutory consents. When individuals have the ability to have a grazing lease or a forest management agreement or a mineral licence or a permit or a land development agreement, all of these things go to the value of their business or the value of their operations, yet we still have an act that allows them to be able to rescind those rights.

Section 19 restricts the right to compensation for landowners. Section 13 withholds a landowner's right to the courts unless cabinet allows it. Section 15(1) binds municipalities, regulators, and all Albertans to that bill. Section 15(3) withholds a landowner's right to make a claim against the government. Section 15(4) limits the role of the courts. Section 17(4) stipulates that the bill trumps all other acts.

There are huge, huge problems that remain with Bill 36 even though they've gone back and tried to revise it once before. We had rather hoped that we were going to be able to see that change come through in Bill 1.

The nice part, though, about passing the motion tonight, that's been put forward by the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, is that it gives our landowners recourse to be able to go and attack these bills in the courts to get proper compensation when the government has refused to rewrite them.

Bill 24 is another act that allowed the government to expropriate all the pore space between the surface landowner's holdings. In the past you used to be able to own from the surface all the way to the centre of the earth, excepting certain mines and minerals. By coming through and expropriating the pore space without compensation for the ill-fated carbon capture and storage scheme, which still does not have any viable projects, they took away landowner value without compensation.

Then, of course, Bill 2. We continue to have a problem with Bill 2. My colleague from Strathmore-Brooks tried to put in proper provisions to ensure that landowners had proper consent to be able to proceed, that there was proper notification, and that there was a proper appeals process. Unfortunately, the government did not

accept the amendments that were put forward, and we continue to hear problems about that today.

There are still numerous bills on the books that have an impact on the real property that individuals own, which is why the motion that my colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka is putting forward is so important today.

What I was excited to learn about – I had always thought that to entrench property rights in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, you had to go through and use the full amending process, that you had to get seven out of 10 provinces representing 50 per cent of the population to be able to agree, that otherwise you wouldn't be able to get it into the Charter. That seemed like an impossible task. I think we all know the fatigue that the country has in trying to do constitutional talks. They haven't given it a try again since the 1990s.

What I so admire about the approach that's been taken here and with our colleague from Lethbridge at the federal level is the ability to use section 43 to be able to get a specific amendment for Alberta, which would mean that there would be no laws that could be passed in this province that would deprive a person of "the title, use or enjoyment of real property or [the] improvement made to such property, or any right connected with such property, except in accordance with the law and for full, just and timely . . . compensation."

I think that this is the type of clause that we would like to see apply across the entire country, but, barring that, why can't Alberta show a little bit of leadership? Why can't we demonstrate, by passing this motion and also getting our federal counterpart to pass the same, that we can amend the Charter of Rights and Freedoms so that we can ensure that not only can these bad bills that have been passed in Alberta before have an avenue to be able to be addressed and corrected but that we would be able to make sure that every new piece of legislation coming through would have to be examined through the lens of this guaranteed Charter right?

To me, having these kinds of protections is the greatest assurance that we're not going to have sloppy legislation pass, like the bills that we've had before. Let's look at the government's history. They passed Bill 50 then had to come back and amend it. They passed Bill 36 then had to come back and amend it. They passed Bill 19. Then they had to come back and amend it, and now they're coming back and repealing it. We haven't made much progress yet on Bill 2 and Bill 24, but I have no doubt that amendments are coming to those bills as well.

The solution is to make sure that you're crafting good laws in the first place. There is a way to be able to have public use provisions. We all recognize that the government has the ability to take land for public use if they can justify it, but the main key is that there has to be full, fair, and timely compensation so that any individual person is not at risk of suffering unduly as a result of government action. If the public is going to benefit as a result of government action or zoning agreements or restrictions on development, then it's the public that should pay for it through full, fair, and timely compensation.

I recognize that we do have some protections at the provincial level through the Expropriation Act and through the Surface Rights Act, and I know that the Premier has mentioned those two before. I think the biggest tragedy is that we started off with such a strong foundation for how we balance rights through the Surface Rights Act. It's the way that we balance access to mineral leases with the surface landowner to make sure that not only can those resources be developed but that when they are, the surface landowner or leaseholder is fairly compensated. It's an excellent system.

There are multiple ways in which individuals can be compensated under the Surface Rights Act. The same with the Expropriation Act: we have always had the ability for our municipal governments and our provincial government, if they do need to take land for a highway or some other public works project, to be able to have a process where they can go through and do that and ensure that the property owner is given full, fair, and timely compensation, with multiple levels of compensation and considerations given.

That, I think, is the reason why we were so alarmed by the fact that these five bills have been passed in the last few years. There's been a fundamental change in the way that the government has been approaching its land-use decisions. It seems like whenever landowner rights or leaseholder rights get in the way of what they want to do, they just pass a new piece of legislation to override it. We think that's not right. We don't think that's the Alberta way. It's certainly not the Alberta heritage.

We know that Bill 1 falls well short of correcting the mistakes of the past, and the only way to be able to truly correct the mistakes of the past to make sure that they don't happen again in the future is by passing the motion that has been put forward by my colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka to make sure that we have property rights entrenched in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms applying to the province of Alberta. I can only hope that if we're able to get this passed here and if it's passed in the House of Commons and the Senate, then other provinces will look at Alberta as the leader on this, and we'll be able to see other provinces take a similar type of approach. Ultimately, the goal would be that we would have property rights entrenched in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms for all provinces and applying to federal legislation as well.

5:20

But as I look at this motion, realizing that it is not a perfect step in all of the protection that we want to have but a good first step in getting us to where I think we need to go as a province and also as a country and correcting the oversight that happened back in 1982, when the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was first passed into law and made into our Constitution, I have to say that there can be no reason to vote against this. I urge all of my colleagues in the Legislature to vote in favour of this motion so that we can make sure that we have property rights protected in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, followed by a member from either of the two other caucuses.

Dr. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to speak to Motion 501, being sponsored by the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, which proposes to entrench certain property rights in the Constitution of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the property rights of individuals and those of the Crown, which represent the greater good of the public at large, must always be kept in balance. The basic principles of these are ancient, and they're entrenched in our common law here in Canada. They were started under the Magna Carta of 1215 and the great charter of 1225. In a nutshell, those documents provided that no free man should be "stripped of his rights or possessions . . . except by the lawful judgment of his equals or by the law of the land."

Since that time we've had a lot of refinements, and protections of private property rights have been introduced over the years, including, as the hon. leader mentioned, the Expropriation Act, the

Surface Rights Act, and the various processes that were established under them – the Land Compensation Board and the Surface Rights Board – and by a number of other provincial statutes.

Now, refinements to the balance between individual rights and the rights of the public at large are always to be made, as they need to be, from time to time. There have to be adjustments to legislation, and right now we have a bill before the House, Bill 1, which does exactly that. We also have the Premier's commitment to take into consideration the suggestions of the Property Rights Advocate and any suggestions which might flow from the all-party Committee on Resource Stewardship.

Mr. Speaker, regarding the specific proposal of Motion 501, brought forward by the hon. member, to entrench certain property rights in the Canadian Constitution, I must oppose this motion most vigorously. Under the Constitution Act of 1982 the provisions of the BNA Act of 1867 were preserved as to the distribution of powers, and section 92.13 of that BNA Act stipulates that laws pertaining to property and civil rights in the province are within the exclusive power of the provinces.

In negotiations leading up to the Constitution Act of 1982, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and his Liberal government attempted to do what the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka would have us do now and that some of his Official Opposition colleagues, I guess, would have us do now as well; namely, to insert the protection for property rights into the Constitution.

Now, that move was vigorously and successfully opposed by all of the Premiers, including Alberta's Premier of the day, Premier Peter Lougheed. Mr. Speaker, there is an old adage that states that politics makes strange bedfellows, but I am sure that many Albertans would be surprised to see members like the hon. members for Lacombe-Ponoka, Highwood, Strathmore-Brooks, and Drumheller-Stettler align themselves with the policies of Pierre Trudeau and against those conservative principles espoused by former Premier Lougheed and the other provincial Premiers.

Make no mistake about it. The effective entrenchment in the Constitution proposed by Motion 501 would be to give up some of our provincial constitutional powers and to weaken the democratic powers of this House. It should be strenuously opposed by all members of this House. The effect of transferring powers accorded to our Legislature into the Constitution would be to transfer additional powers to unelected judges, who are the final arbiters of what is or isn't in accord with the Constitution of Canada. More judge-made laws equal fewer powers accorded to the democratically elected representatives of the people and of this House.

Mr. Speaker, in summary, Motion 501 is antidemocratic. It would derogate from the province's constitutional powers, it would weaken this Legislative Assembly, and it would subject Albertans to more judge-made law. Accordingly, I urge all hon. members to join me in defeating it.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some interest in speaking to Motion 501. The motion, as far as I can see, calls for the insertion of property rights protections into the Constitution Act of 1982 but only as it applies to Alberta. The current section 7 reads that "everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice." This motion seems like it won't change that text but add a section 7.1, which just applies to Alberta.

Certainly, the Alberta New Democrats agree with the basic idea that a person is not to be deprived of their property without the due process of law and compensation and, to be clear as well, that it is already well established and well protected in common law here, which governs the country in which we live and the province of Alberta, too.

The interpretation of section 7 has also been expanded further and further by the courts in recent years to include stronger protections around government actions that deprive people of their rights in a manner that violates the principles of fundamental justice. Both the Canadian Bill of Rights and the Alberta Bill of Rights recognize this as well, as does common law, Mr. Speaker, which is incorporated into the Charter by virtue of section 26.

There are at least, I think, in my view, a couple of problems with this motion, not the least of which is that it seeks to protect something that's already quite well protected, not just in the Canadian Constitution but in almost a thousand years of common law jurisprudence that has shaped our government and set our law and that continues to be the law of the land here today. Yes, there may have been some notable exceptions here in the province of Alberta recently, but I would venture to say that the problem here is with this PC government, that demonstrates over and over again that they have no respect for the rights of ordinary Albertans. They trample over the Constitution whenever it seems to suit them.

Take, for example, Bill 45 from almost exactly a year ago, which violates sections 2(b) and 2(d) of the Charter, or their refusal, as another example, to uphold section 15 of the equality rights of our schools by keeping a very offensive section, 11.1, of the human rights code on the books and by allowing schools to impose morality clauses on their students. Or another one, the unwillingness to improve the justice system to ensure that all Albertans receive a fair trial, which is our right under sections 7 through 14 of the Charter. The problem is not that property rights are not being protected – on paper they are – but the problem is that we have a government that fundamentally does not respect the rights of its own citizens. Some specific issues include that there is no accepted definition of property in Canadian law or what the enjoyment of property might entail.

Passing a motion like this tangles up the courts and our governments in inconsistent applications of the law and creates uncertainty throughout the system. Most lawyers are taught that property is a bundle of rights and that it is therefore not a distinct right in and of itself. This makes it quite distinct from the kinds of fundamental rights that the Charter is designed to protect, rights that are universal, interdependent, and inherent in all people and needed for their ability to participate in society.

To equate property rights with fundamental civil and political rights that belong to everyone is the definition of overreaching, I would venture to say, Mr. Speaker. Yes, they do deserve protection, and they are protected. But the rights currently included in the Charter are there because they apply equally to everyone. If you don't believe that, then alongside equality rights and freedom of speech and the freedom of association there should stand a protection that benefits wealthier people more so than ordinary people and vastly more so than disadvantaged people. By definition, this is not something that belongs in the Charter.

Not to mention as well, Mr. Speaker, that including property rights in the Charter creates confusion and uncertainty in other areas of law. It affects such things as municipal zoning laws, indigenous land claims, pollution regulations, and a spouse's right to property on the dissolution of a marriage. Enshrining property rights in the Charter in this manner will also interfere with the ability of the provincial government to legislate and regulate for

the needs and the good of Albertans in many areas of its jurisdiction; for example, land-use planning and municipal laws, real and personal property laws, environmental laws, and health and safety laws.

5:30

An entrenched right to property might affect the ability of provinces to enact laws to protect the environment or to control uses of private lands for legitimate reasons. Some of the recent legislation from this PC government has attempted to control private lands for illegitimate reasons, to be sure. This motion, I think, oversteps the necessary solution and response to those issues, which should be to repeal or amend the offending legislation and elect a government that would respect constitutional obligations and the constitutional rights of all Albertans.

Both the Supreme Court of Canada and the Alberta Court of Appeal have stated that laws must be written to balance the legitimate aims of planned, orderly development and land conservation within the rights of property owners. The courts have been clear that landowners have important property rights, which must be protected in all but the most pressing and substantial of government plans.

In 2002 Alberta Court of Appeal Chief Justice Catherine Fraser said that the respect for individual property rights was a principle firmly entrenched in the Legislature planning scheme in effect in Alberta and that it follows that encroachments on individual rights, especially by private parties, should be strictly construed. It's clear that property rights are well protected in law and that Alberta courts do understand their purpose.

So, Mr. Speaker, certainly, I appreciate the sentiment of the member who did bring forward this motion, and certainly watching the history of this government overstepping the boundaries of the government and interfering with individual rights, it does bring cause that we should react and find some way to counteract. But, certainly, the motion, as it's described here, is difficult, and though I respect the sentiment that had bred the motion in the first place, I must say that I can't vote for it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I support the premise of some sort of constitutional right of property. I support the idea that we need to position ourselves to make sure bad laws don't deprive us of property. I fully understand that. Property rights are not in the Charter although they are in the Canadian Bill of Rights. But when I look at this amendment and I hear the Wildrose minimize Bill 19 as not being in effect or proclaimed and a moot point, as some members have said, it tells me, then, that they don't understand the issue.

The issue here is: how do we protect property rights? When I look at this motion, it falls way short of the work that individuals put into Grassroots Alberta in dealing with the issue of property rights, where they talked about tangible and intangible in the statutory consents that are embedded in property rights. This motion only speaks of real property, so it limits it right there. But, more than that, this motion from the Wildrose is duplicitous in pretending to give a right when they include the ability of the government to take that right away and by including the clause, "except in accordance with the law."

As you pass a bill like Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, or the Land Stewardship Act – by the way, that's law – you would have met the provisions of this amendment, and your right

is now removed. What this amendment to the Constitution states is: we're going to give you a right, but as long as you pass a law, bad law or good law – it doesn't matter – you can take that right away. Basically, this motion is nothing more than a Trojan Horse.

Under the Charter of Rights, rights as generally set out in sections 2 to 23, they do not speak about the law except perhaps in section 15, which in 15(2) allows for affirmative action programs. They are all about rights. The law which is able to override the rights is usually dealt with in section 1 of the Charter. In section 1 of the Charter, in order to override a right, the law has to "be demonstrably justified."

To show that the law is justified, the Legislature will have to show that there is a pressing and substantial objective for the law, which means that the Legislature has to have a proportional objective that is balanced between the legislative benefits and the reduced benefits to the public or the effect that it has on the property rights itself. By putting this in section 7, where it says, "except in accordance with the law," the question now posed is: do the section 1 rights now apply, where it has to be demonstrable? This motion doesn't say that it has to be demonstrable, so already we're going to have a constitutional challenge.

Now, the problem is that if you take out "except in accordance with the law," every time a community wants to raise taxes, every time the ERCB, the Surface Rights Board wants to deal with something or property, they will have to demonstrate a constitutional reason, which would basically make constitutional lawyers very happy but doesn't accomplish anything. The question for constitutional lawyers now is: if this amendment were to pass, does that override your rights in section 1, where laws have to be demonstrably justifiable? The answer I'm hearing is that that's a valid argument. So this was not well thought out at all on the federal level.

I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it is an issue that I support in principle, but I cannot support this motion. It falls way short of dealing with the idea of how we're going to protect property rights. When the members from the Wildrose stand up and say that it would prevent something like the Alberta Land Stewardship Act or that it would prevent something like Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, from coming forward – no, it does not. It doesn't prevent that at all. There's a clause in there that says, "except in accordance with the law".

I have sat in the appeals court of Alberta. One of the best judgments I've ever witnessed was a judgment, actually, against our side of the case. The way it worked was very simple. The judge looked across the lawyers in the appeals court and said: "I know what you want, but your remedy is not here. Your remedy is in the Legislature." I understood exactly what that justice was saying. I knew we were right in principle, but we didn't have a law to support us. What we had was a bad law that needed to be changed. This motion still allows for that to happen. It does not protect property rights as intended. It misses the target. As much as I really have a high regard for the Charter of Rights, as I think everyone does, it is not something we should ever propose to change lightly. It has to be changed with a lot of thought.

The idea that provinces can have separate rights within the Charter has always bothered me. At what point do we now have: we're not going to go by that Charter right; we will make our own. That is something that I think would really obstruct our freedoms across this country, if we start dicing up the Charter of Rights specifically for various provinces. I know there are exceptions that we deal with, but the fact is that to rely on rights and to force laws to be demonstrably justified is important. To go into section 7 and

to miss that point, to usurp the rights in section 1 is dangerous, and it should never be taken that lightly.

So I support the principle of protecting property rights. I have always demonstrated that in my actions, but I realize, looking at this, that it missed the target. I wish the members had listened more to the Grassroots Alberta people who made a proposal. Hopefully, this government has this proposal. We'll bring it up, I think, in committee, how we can possibly best protect the rights of Albertans, particularly with regard to property.

I cannot support this. It doesn't give a right to protect property. It actually lessens those rights when I look at the full context of the Charter of Rights, and I will not subscribe to or support this motion.

Thank you very much.

5:40

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

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with very great exuberance that I stand to address this Motion 501, the amendment to the Constitution Act, and I'd like to start by thanking the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka for putting this motion forward.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of property rights in Alberta is one that elicits a lot of attention. People feel passionate about it, and they approach it with great veracity. Because of this Alberta is the only province in Canada that has included property rights in our Bill of Rights, through the Bill of Rights act, and the act enshrines "the right of the individual to liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property, and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law." Improving on property rights underrecognized under common law was a priority for Albertans, and this is why we are the only province to enact additional property rights legislations.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes there are clear, necessary reasons as to why the Crown must expropriate land belonging to an Albertan, rural or urban, and in those cases it's of importance to provide a transparent process and fair and just value. These rules governing expropriation are laid out in our Expropriation Act, and if a landowner doesn't agree with the compensation or the reasons, then they are able to appeal the decision.

As well, Mr. Speaker, the province's first Property Rights Advocate, established in 2012, has a mandate to provide detailed, impartial advice to parties looking for independent information about their options. Cases can be settled by an impartial, quasi-judicial Land Compensation Board or in some cases by the courts. Landowners are given opportunities to voice their opinions and objections and pursue fair value.

Mr. Speaker, this government and every MLA in this room knows what property rights mean to Albertans, and as a Calgary-based urban MLA I must clearly state that this is not just an issue for rural Albertans, nor is it an issue that only rural MLAs care about. As I've shared with this House before, I grew up on a farm, a beef feedlot operation in southwestern Ontario. My parents, my siblings, and my extended family continue to farm in that area today, just as our grandparents had. As many hon. members know, for families like ours, a farm is not just a piece of land, a livelihood, or an economic asset; it's a legacy that passes down from one generation to the next. It's a very real part of our family's history and our identity.

While I was in law school, many years ago, our family farm was expropriated by then Ontario Hydro to construct a 500-kV power line from the Bruce Peninsula to southern Ontario. Yes, there was consultation, access to courts, and, ultimately, fair

compensation, but the impact of losing that barn with the family name on it still lingers. I share this with you, Mr. Speaker, so that hon. members here will understand that when I speak of property rights, it's not theoretical or legal. I'm speaking as someone who has lived through the experience of expropriation, as someone who understands the emotional value land has far beyond its value on a balance sheet.

What I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, is that I care as much as any Albertan about the value of property rights. I care that landowners and property rights holders have effective notice, genuine consultation, and fair compensation. I know at a cellular level that expropriation of property should never be done lightly and only when it's absolutely necessary.

But, Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding all those feelings and that experience, there are times when expropriation is essential for the benefit of all Albertans, and I must reject this motion on the basis that it would inappropriately distort that essential balance and would distort how these decisions were made here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I was in law school when the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was declared. In fact, I actually did a lot of research on section 15, the equality clause, and as I recall with vivid clarity, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms purposefully omitted any mention of property rights. Why is that, Mr. Speaker? Part of the reason is because authority for property rights was given to the provinces in the Constitution Act, 1867, as my colleague from Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill has already pointed out. Giving authority for property rights to the provinces was part of the system of checks and balances between the provinces and the federal government upon which our country was created. If that power and authority over property rights was to be handed over by Albertans to the federal government and enshrined in our Constitution, this decision would not only be difficult; it would trigger outcomes that would not necessarily serve Albertans.

Let's look at the process. First, a constitutional amendment requires adherence to a very specific process. We would need three resolutions calling for the amendment: resolution of the House of Commons, resolution of the Senate, and resolution of the provincial Legislative Assembly. Before we could pass a resolution here as a Legislative Assembly, we'd need a referendum. To constitutionally enshrine property rights in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is no simple matter. Significant issues would require thorough discussion by Albertans, and the practical consequences of such a decision would have to be fully understood. For example, moving property rights into the Charter would shift some aspects of decision-making with respect to Alberta's economic matters from elected officials to appointed judiciary. To many that would simply be undemocratic. Most Albertans I know do not want property rights determined by judges.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't the first time this issue has raised its head in Canada. In 1972 who was concerned about the inclusion of property rights in our Constitution? Women's groups, aboriginal groups, environmental organizations, and the provincial governments: a pretty fundamental list of stakeholders. Then, as my colleague has mentioned, in the 1980s the Lougheed and Getty governments from the province of Alberta opposed the constitutional entrenchment of property rights because of Albertans' concerns about loss of provincial control, erosion of our property rights, judicial activism, and on the basis that the protections were already provided in our Alberta Bill of Rights.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans command the respect of their government, and we are responsible to provide a government that can make responsive and timely decisions on issues most important to them. This motion is asking us to give up that mandate and

capacity and offer it up instead to the federal government and to the courts. Giving up provincial authority and transferring power to the federal government, we would be failing the citizens of Alberta and future Albertans. We need to be able to work with Albertans in Alberta on the issues that matter to them most. Based on the implications for Albertans we must deny this motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to tell you, honestly, that I'm quite appalled, shocked, in fact. The arguments that have been made against this motion have been based on false premises. Nobody is saying, certainly not our party or this motion, that bills like 50, 36, 24, 19, 2 couldn't be passed. What it's saying, of course, is that they couldn't be passed with clauses or covenants within those acts that would make it possible for cabinet to take away the right to appeal to the court for valuations or for being deprived of the use and enjoyment of your property.

Sure. Naturally, we acknowledge – my esteemed colleague did so in his opening remarks when he introduced the motion – that there are occasions when properties need to be expropriated, and there is an act that governs that. But it's currently overruled in terms of its effectiveness as a protection to property owners by the clauses that are in those very bills that are so objectionable. In fact, they are just completely wrong. Those bills in terms of property rights make Alberta have more in common with eastern European countries than with democratically constituted governments like we supposedly have.

5:50

We need to have access to the courts. We can't just merely have access to some quasi-judicial body. We need the full protection of the courts. There have been judges already who have said to people who have come appealing decisions of the cabinet to deprive them through a regulatory taking in some form or other: you don't have the right to redress through the court for that issue because that bill specifically allows the government to do that and without you having that right.

When you can put clauses into bills that take away the use and enjoyment of your property – in the case that was mentioned, the very personal case, heartfelt, for sure, by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, of the feelings that she still has for the farm that's no longer theirs, she was careful to mention the fact that her family was able to make sure that they got market value by being able to appeal that decision or go to the courts for redress. Under the bills that we specifically have talked about, the good parts of those bills could still remain. We understand that for good government and the greater good of the population you sometimes have to take property away from the rightful owners, but they need to be justly compensated based on market evaluations, not based on some arbitrary decision by a cabinet minister or a bureaucrat under his or her direction. That's just not right.

Democracy is not a convenient form of government, but as Churchill said: democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried. We're trying to circumvent democracy in its truest and purest form by denying Albertans the opportunity to have complete and full access to the courts when they are wrongly deprived of the use and enjoyment of their property. It's just unconscionable. It's unbelievable to me that people as intelligent as the group that is here, with the legal minds that you have to not just win a case and make your point by selectively choosing certain aspects to emphasize, deny the reality

that those bills contain clauses that give the government the right to deprive people of redress for wrong-headed actions by the government in the name of the greater good. It's just not fair, and it's not right.

There's a saying that good fences make good neighbours. Well, I am here to say that good covenants and clauses consistent with universal laws and truths make good laws. We need to come together on this, folks. You don't want to abandon rural Alberta, and you are. It's these bills that are the reason we have this loyal opposition. These bills have produced in the PC government a shift closer to the right instead of to the left as you've historically been going. It's true that all ruling parties end up moving towards the loudest voices in opposition. Historically that's been those of left persuasion, those that favour central government in control. We can see the result. You folks are here, having won four by-elections, because you've moved back to the right, kind of harkening to the loudest voice in this House in opposition to the wrong-headedness of some of your actions.

To deny this motion, to defeat this motion, you'll be putting yourselves on notice as being the party that is, in fact, against property rights and be, really, conceding to us the rest of the province of Alberta. Now, we know that your actions are focused on Calgary and Edmonton. That's been made abundantly clear. Those are important cities, and the citizens of those communities are an important part of Alberta, but their rights can't take priority over other people's rights, universal rights, logically recognized. We need to recognize that all people need to have equal rights. Without them, it's just a travesty.

Please let's put partisan politics aside and do what's right. Support this motion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to join debate on Motion 501, the amendment to the Constitution. The motion discusses property rights in Alberta and proposes that the Legislative Assembly authorize His Excellency the Governor General to issue a proclamation amending the Canadian Constitution. I'd like to begin by thanking my colleague the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka for bringing forward this motion.

Mr. Speaker, as it stands today, Alberta is the only jurisdiction within Canada that has passed specific property rights protection. Property rights can be a contentious and highly debated issue as we have seen here today. It is one we want to see stay in the jurisdiction of Alberta so we can quickly. . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I regret having to interrupt, but the mover has the floor now for the five minutes of closing debate because we must stop at 6:00.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka to close debate.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all who stood to speak to this motion here in the Legislature today. It's been a wonderful debate with you.

Now, let's think about where some of this came from. This came from a few offending pieces of legislation, specifically those that override the Alberta – what was it? Oh, I can't remember the name of the piece of legislation.

An Hon. Member: The Land Stewardship Act?

Mr. Fox: No, not the Land Stewardship Act. The one in 1972. I guess it doesn't matter that much. The Alberta Bill of Rights, when it was enacted in 1972. The Alberta Land Stewardship Act actually overrides that piece of legislation, which is rather unfortunate that the government fails to realize that since they

wrote the legislation under Bill 36. That particular piece of legislation is actually what is offending so many Albertans here in the province.

Now, with that piece of legislation what happened was that section 11 outlined the right of cabinet to rescind Albertans' rights. Section 19 of that particular piece of legislation restricts the right to compensation for landowners. Section 13 withholds a landowner's right to the courts unless cabinet allows it. Section 15 of that particular piece of legislation binds municipalities, regulators, and all Albertans to that bill. Again, section 15 of the Land Stewardship Act withholds a landowner's right to make claim against the government. Section 15 limits the role of the courts. Section 17 stipulates that the bill trumps all other acts legislated by the Legislature of Alberta.

This is why this motion has come forward. This motion has come forward to give Albertans back access to the courts, to make sure they are getting full, fair, and timely compensation when land is expropriated. It doesn't take away the right of expropriation.

With that, I would strenuously – strenuously – ask you to vote in favour of Motion 501.

The Speaker: The hon. House leader for the Official Opposition.

Mr. Anderson: Just a quick point. I would ask for unanimous consent of the House, since we all want to get to our supper and so forth, that we could shorten the bells if there is a division vote. Would that be okay with the opposite side, or do you want to stay here an extra ten minutes?

The Speaker: Our common interpretation of what's just been enunciated is to shorten the interval between bells to one minute. That's our common interpretation. If anyone objects to that, please say so now.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: I hear no objections, so in the event that the division bell should ring, that will be our procedure.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka has moved closure of debate on this particular motion.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 501 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 6 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Fox	Smith
Barnes	Hale	Stier
Bikman	Rowe	Strankman

Against the motion:

Allen	Fenske	Luan
Bhardwaj	Fraser	Lukaszuk
Bhullar	Fritz	Mandel
Brown	Griffiths	Oberle
Cao	Horne	Quadri
Casey	Horner	Quest
Cusanelli	Jablonski	Rodney
Dallas	Jansen	Sarich
DeLong	Jeneroux	Starke
Dirks	Johnson, L.	VanderBurg
Dorward	Kennedy-Glans	Woo-Paw

Drysdale
Ellis
Fawcett

Khan
Klimchuk

Xiao
Young

Totals:

For – 9

Against – 40

[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 lost]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

According to our standing orders the House now stands adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:06 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, November 24, 2014

Issue 6e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, November 24, 2014

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Good evening, everyone. Please be seated.

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate November 20: Mr. Denis]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne.

I want to start out by talking just a little bit about how amazing I think this province is and about what incredible opportunity we have. I know I often end up speaking – mind you, you give me so many opportunities – critically of the government, and that seems like I'm speaking critically of the province, and I'm not. I just cannot speak highly enough of the people that live here, of their integrity, their work ethic, their commitment to family and to the land and to community. A pretty cool place to be born and a pretty cool place to choose to move to or to immigrate to.

Okay. That was it. [interjections] Well, you give me so much to go on. [interjections] You know, the government has just been in too long, Madam Speaker.

You know, people asked me to describe this throne speech, and I said that it was really reflective of the new Premier. It was very suave, very dignified, very reserved, very secretive. [interjections] Yeah, playing those cards so close to his chest, they were somewhere incised into his skin. Just this afternoon I asked some really simple questions: no, no, no, all the way down the line. He wouldn't even give me a teeny little bit of information.

What really frustrates me about this government is that you've got too much money, and it takes away your drive to be innovative, your drive to need to find other solutions. That makes me crazy because this is a creative, innovative province, and I know we can do better.

An Hon. Member: But the Liberals want to raise taxes.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, I do want to raise taxes. That's exactly right. I want to see fair, progressive taxes in this province because that 10 per cent flat tax has killed us.

This government chooses to spend 30 cents out of every dollar from nonrenewable resource revenue. You took it out of the ground yesterday, and today you're spending it on operational budgets. That is wrong in so many ways. That's like selling the back 40 to pay your Visa. It has no horizon to it, no clear thinking to it, no planning to it whatsoever. It's incredibly insulting to the people that live here. So, yeah, you make me crazy. You made my hair go red. You see? It got more red over the weekend.

What I want to talk about is what's not in the throne speech. You know, I'm not a mushy kind of person. I'm not a children, family, social services kind of gal. I just am not. Has anybody noticed the portfolios I have not been critic for? Agriculture and children's services and Human Services. I'm just not a gushy kind of gal. But this throne speech had no reference to the social policy framework, and that is a policy that is worked on so hard by so many people in the not-for-profit area, by municipalities. It had buy-in from stakeholders all over the place.

I don't know how many ministers they went through, and every time that committee came back and presented it all over again. Not a g.d. word in here about that. Did you dump it? Is it gone forever? Why would you abandon something that so many people have worked on so hard, that was such a buy-in from so many people? A lot of other people have talked about poverty and children; I'm not a mushy kind of gal. But it is about those social determinants of health, and it is about the fact: how can we possibly have over 140,000 children living in poverty in this province, where we have had multibillion-dollar surpluses in my time in this Assembly, \$6 billion, \$8 billion, \$9 billion in surpluses? Where is it? Where is that money?

Today we have over 140,000 people in poverty, children in poverty. Remember, folks, that children are not Cabbage Patch dolls. They don't sprout out of the ground by themselves. Poor children are coming from poor families, and what are you doing about it? Where is the social policy framework? Pfft. Gone. I'm so angry with you for that. It's such a waste of everybody's resource, and it's such a waste of taxpayer money. Like, how many times do you guys have to be given the studies and the facts and the numbers that show you that an investment in social policy pays off over and over and over again? But, no, you guys want to have more police and more ambulance workers and more prisons, because that's where everybody ends up, when you could be investing on the front end: in children, in Success by 6, in hot lunch programs.

You know, some of the city of Edmonton councillors, God bless them, went and did the hunger thing, where you didn't get anything to eat or you had to live on \$1.25 a day or something. They were having, like, dry oatmeal for breakfast and all kinds of weird stuff. But I'll tell you that every one of those people came back and complained that by midmorning they could not concentrate. They were cranky and argumentative, and they could not hang on to the information that was in front of them. That is what we do in this province with so much money every day. How could that be?

Okay. Social policy framework: I'm a little ticked about that. Poverty and children: I'm a little ticked about that. I'm a little ticked that you've walked away from the housing, the affordable housing, that housing commission that members of this Assembly were participating in. You know, there were 72-some recommendations. If we had implemented those recommendations when they did it, we wouldn't be where we are today, which is once again going: "Oh, gee. Yeah, it's bad. We'll do something." Why did you have people spend all that time going around the province doing stakeholder consultations if you weren't going to do it? Why? Is this a make-work project so that people don't get into – what? – trouble somewhere? I don't know.

Okay. Social determinants of health: poverty, housing, family and peer support, access to education, access to food and food security. You know, I just don't get it. We are not going to change this stuff in 10 years. This is not going to happen in 10 years. This is a generational change. We need to understand that it's a generational change and that we're going to have to work on this. If we want to be in a different place, we're going to have to try

and be in this different place 25 years from now, but it means we're going to have to go through that generational change to get there in 25 years. To be completely different in that generational change, we've got to start now and follow those pegs down the road to get there. But all I see is, "Oh, gee, you know," and nothing happens.

Okay. Environment. All hat, no cattle. Sorry, folks. All talk, no action. Once upon a time we had one of you – unless you're gone now? One of you was talking about a 40 per cent reduction with a \$40 levy. Well, that went nowhere. We're still sitting there with a \$15 levy, which everybody on that side likes to pump and say: "Aren't we wonderful? We were first." You guys, that's embarrassing. We were first 15 years ago. This is embarrassing. B.C. is, like, way ahead of us, and they're doing it at the pump, so everyone is involved, and everyone feels they've got a piece of this. Here we put it on intensity of emissions. Oh, come on. Only when they're allowed to pollute so much and only when they pollute above and beyond that are we going to assign them a levy? Really? You can do better than that. You can. We can in this province.

There's too much to say about environment. You know, there's monitoring, AEMERA. We've got oil spills that continue to pump out of the ground. The environment minister was upset when I called it gunk. Well, what do you want me to call it? Oil-induced crap? What is it? It's sludge that is pouring across our land and kills everything in front of it, including the wildlife. So, yeah, I want pictures because I want to show you the pictures so that you understand that the choices you're making have resulted in this.

7:40

We've got the AG talking about – oh, I love this; I can't read my own writing – old versus new records. I think you're abandoning things because we can't even keep track of what we're doing. He was saying that we don't know how we're doing on climate change because we've never measured it appropriately, and we didn't know what we were measuring it against. So we can't tell how we're doing on any of the climate change measurements we've made, and now we're speaking so far ahead in climate change that it's incomprehensible. When we start talking 2040, I mean, a number of us in here will be dead, and a lot more of us will be really old. So why are we thinking about making changes that far ahead in what we're doing? Crazy.

Fear, intimidation, and loathing in Alberta. You know, one of the things that I'm noticing in the environment sector is that there's a chill on people that even come forward with diagnostics and results about reporting what's happening from people that are being tested, that are turning up with strange things in their blood, or they're finding things in the soil or cumulative effects. They don't even want to talk about it because they're afraid of what's going to happen to them.

Urban drilling policy: you have to be kidding me. If we can't understand about an urban drilling policy and how close we're going to allow people to drill to people's homes – that's not in here.

Water is a public good. I'm very keen on that, and you'll continue to hear from me about that because I think it positions water where it should be, where we understand that this is a public good, and it has to be handled that way. It can't be sold or divvied out or given to people or rented in the way that's being considered by the government.

The way we're treating animals: caribou and wolverines and grizzlies. You know, we know that the way we're going to save those caribou herds is by having undisturbed habitat, and what do we do? Give out more leases to go and do drilling. You cannot fool around with Mother Nature. You cannot. Yet what are we

doing? Well, we're not doing well with the caribou, and we won't give them more habitat, so, great, let's shoot the wolves that are going to prey on the caribou. Make that one work for me.

Or – wait – don't work with the trappers. Don't work with the guys that actually could do this in a way they know how to do it and maybe make a little bit of money on the side. No. Let's have helicopters and shoot them from helicopters. Great idea. Or let's take fresh kill and poison the carcass, and – oh, yeah – only the wolves will eat that poisoned food, right? Everybody knows that. There won't be any wolverines or any crows or anything else eat that poison. Yes, of course they do.

What else wasn't in here? Well, things like mental health. I'm still waiting for the children's mental health strategy, which I've heard announced three times. I think they were different strategies, but I could be wrong. I'm still not seeing it. I'm still not seeing the mental health supports in the community. I'm still not seeing the support for the municipalities, who are increasingly taking over the burden of the work. Now you have a number of experts because I know that the previous mayor of Edmonton is not the only municipal person with experience that's sitting in government that could be giving the government some really good advice on what kind of assistance the municipalities have.

I heard somebody here complaining about the reverse, the government complaining that they weren't getting the federal government's fair share on legal aid. It's supposed to be 80-20: 80 for the feds, 20 for the province. Well, suck it up, Sunshine, because that's exactly what you're doing to FCSS. The municipalities have been shouldering the burden of 80 per cent of the cost of those programs for I don't know how long. You know, not that I would wish that back upon you, because I don't think that's what should be happening, but understand that that's what you're doing to the municipalities, and it shows every day.

Municipalities are the ones that are supplying the front-line services. In most cases they're picking up where you guys are leaving off and where you have dropped the ball on things. Think about a new way to give them some revenue sources, think about some way to give them some autonomy, and, for God's sake, give them their own bloody charter. Quit treating the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary like the blessed places of Claresholm and Camrose and Tofield. They are not the same thing. They need their own piece of legislation to work by.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This has been such a joy.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We now have five minutes of question and comment under Standing Order 29(2)(a). Are there any members that would like to question or comment?

Seeing none, we will move on to our next speaker to the throne speech, and that is the hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to address the motion and reply to the speech from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. I'd like to say that I've been a resident of this wonderful city and this province for 40 years, which makes me a transplant, which makes me part of the tens of thousands of people that have moved here from around this country to make Edmonton their home. My wife, Lynn, and I have raised our two children, Rachel and Adam, in this wonderful city, this wonderful province. Two years ago we were graced by our grandson, Chase, who really is the light of my life, like all grandchildren are to their grandparents.

After 30 years in business I entered politics. I spent 12 years in elected office prior to my election as the MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud. I'm honoured to have been elected. I'd like to speak

about why I entered provincial politics. This is not an easy job. As all of you know, you work long hours. You take on the concerns of the people you represent, and you work with them and for them to make an idea, an initiative, a goal, a policy come to fruition. In no other line of work do you have the opportunity to impact so much and so many people.

If you ask Canadians what defines their country, most will say one thing that defines us most, which is our public health care system. The public health care system has allowed Canadians peace of mind. It has given them a fundamental security that allows citizens to prosper and our economy to flourish. Without that publicly accessible system, in my opinion, that sense of security would be lost.

In my time as mayor of the city of Edmonton I became well acquainted with the socioeconomic factors that impact our health system: homelessness, poverty, addictions, mental health, family violence, plus so many others that drive people away from success and into the arms of health care and the social services system. As Health minister I am proud to take on the responsibility to ensure that those without a strong voice will be taken care of. Our most vulnerable must be treated with respect and compassion.

The delivery of our system rests in the hands of Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health plus untold individuals: physicians, nurses, pharmacists, optometrists, psychologists, front-line workers, maintenance people, and so many more. Their spirit and commitment make the system work. We all should thank them for the passion they have for the health care system.

Yes, our system has some challenges. Our costs are higher than other jurisdictions, but cost reduction is not the only way to improve our system. Better governance, increased accountability, more decentralization, listening to clinicians, and, yes, surprisingly enough, listening to Albertans: those together will make our system more responsive and, hopefully, more cost effective. To help with that process we brought together new leadership to investigate the board structure and cost analysis. We have worked with many rural communities to get their input so that our rural communities feel part of the solutions and the great opportunities for our province.

We also have challenges in emergency departments and acute-care beds, especially in our two largest cities. We must be proactive in dealing with the realities of these problems. Innovation and creativity will only take us so far. Capital investment is needed. Recent problems of overcrowding at the Rockyview, the challenge at the Misericordia hospital, the need for cancer facility upgrades in both Edmonton and Calgary, and the overcrowding situation at the Royal Alexandra hospital, the Peter Lougheed hospital, the Foothills, and the University hospital – we are such a growing province. We should make sure our cities are adequately prepared for that growth and our citizens taken care of in their facilities.

7:50

None of us would be here today without our electorate's support. I'm truly honoured to represent Edmonton-Whitemud. The community is out in force when it comes to supporting a number of events from community projects to fun runs, to playground design, to construction, to recs and advocacy, to arts and culture. This is a cosmopolitan, multicultural, dynamic community. I'm truly blessed and lucky and thrilled to represent such a wonderful, passionate community.

I'm proud to represent the people of Alberta as Health minister. Albertans have high expectations because we've been taught that our health care system should be the best and nothing less, and they see their health care system as fundamental to their quality of life. We want Albertans to live not only a healthy life but with a

focus on wellness in their lives so that they can have the kind of life that makes it such a good place to live.

Most of all, I'm proud to represent Alberta, this government, and be part of leaving a positive legacy for our children and our grandchildren.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Are there any members who would like to comment or question the Minister of Health? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do appreciate the opportunity. Congratulations to the member on his election as the representative from Edmonton-Whitemud.

I would like to ask the hon. member if he would care to comment on his time as the mayor of Edmonton and his relationship with some of the rural counties around the city of Edmonton, how his role now as the representative for Edmonton-Whitemud is going to be impacted by some of that history and how he'd like to see the government of Alberta move forward with some of the rural counties who neighbour this capital city.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Madam Speaker. That's a great question. During my tenure as mayor of Edmonton there were two substantial groups of people that we interacted with. There were northern mayors and reeves, which was a group of people from all over northern Alberta. There were counties and cities that came together quarterly. We got together to discuss opportunities and options for their communities and how we could work together. It was a wonderful group of people that brought to the table a tremendous perspective on all different issues of northern Alberta: the challenge of growth, the challenge of needing more physicians, the challenge of the problems of just dealing with growth in a community that has not the kinds of facilities they should have to meet those needs.

In the city of Edmonton in our capital region I was also part of a capital region caucus. We felt that that was a vitally important part of how we could grow and how we could come together. You know something? It was a great experience. There were 26 of us who were estranged from each other in the beginning but over a period of time began to work together. Yes, we had some differences, and we didn't always see eye to eye, but at the end of the day, for the most part, our region was moving forward, moving forward together because collectively we saw that as a region we were much stronger together. Weakness came when we started fighting and arguing over issues that really no one cared about. So as a result of our Capital Region Board and the commitment of the provincial government working with us, we created ties together that will allow us to move forward as a region in a much more effective way.

As the Minister of Health I believe I understand many of the challenges that are faced within our region and within northern Alberta as well as the other parts of Alberta that I've had an opportunity to visit in the last several weeks. We have a lot of challenges in our province because of growth. We have a lot of needs in our province. We do have restrictions on how much money we can spend on any one issue. We need to work hard to meet the needs of our province, to meet the needs of each of our counties and smaller municipalities in our region, but by working together, we can find solutions. I'm very excited that my experience in both northern Alberta and with our capital region will serve me well in dealing with the issues that I'm being faced with as the Minister of Health.

I hope that answers your question.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

There are still two minutes left. Is there anyone else that would like to ask a question?

Seeing none, we'll move on to our next response to the throne speech. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my honour and privilege today to rise and give my response to the Speech from the Throne. I'm going to go through and highlight several of the issues that were raised in the Speech from the Throne, but I just wanted to comment briefly on my constituency of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

This has really been a landmark year for the constituency. As members might recall, in the spring I brought in guests from the Beverly historical society because this year Beverly celebrated its centennial year, celebrating 100 years of being an incorporated community, which is quite significant. The community really came together around a number of events, Madam Speaker. I mean, there was an incredible street parade with over 54 entries. I can tell you that I participated in that parade, and it was incredible to see the streets packed several rows deep with people all out to celebrate the community and its history. There was a street concert, a family picnic, educational activities, and an interpretive centre, all empowered by volunteers, which is fantastic. I've been a huge advocate of the community and working toward revitalizing our community and showing that Beverly is an incredible place to live, to work, to raise your family. So I'm quite honoured to represent that community.

I just want to mention briefly the fact that Beverly was selected this year as the community to receive a replacement school. Now, you know, unfortunately, the deal was to trade three schools for a replacement school, which, with a heavy heart, means letting go of community schools. I'm a very big fan of children having the ability to walk to school, getting to know their neighbours, living and participating in their community.

I do want to say, Madam Speaker, that this is the first new school since about 1967 that the community of Beverly is getting. I think it's only fair that not only do our new, flourishing communities receive new facilities but that we also remember and respect our mature neighbourhoods. I'm very happy to have played a small role in that as far as promoting the public meetings and community participation. You know, I am quite thrilled that the community was selected, and I look forward to working with Infrastructure, with Edmonton public schools, and all the community partners. I must say, though, that the one tiny concern, that's already been raised, is that the original timeline of fall of 2016 has already been bumped to January of 2017, but we'll keep watching that with a diligent eye.

The second part of that, Madam Speaker, is the fact that we will have three empty schools in the community, or three empty facilities, and I've had a number of constituents, community groups, cultural groups all in desperate need of space. So I am going to take a second just to lobby on behalf of my constituents. The fact is that we have these buildings that exist. They may need some repurposing, but I would very much like to see them serve the community in the best way possible. I had a meeting with the Minister of Infrastructure, which I'm very grateful for, and raised those points in really ensuring that our facilities serve the needs of our communities and how to best do that. I'm looking forward to that discussion and those discussions moving forward.

I do want to raise one of the concerns, and I'm glad to see the Minister of Education here to relay the point that, unfortunately, right now in some of the Catholic schools they're still waiting on modulars, modulars that were promised back in September, which

have yet to be delivered. I can tell the minister first-hand that one school at least, Anne Fitzgerald, has been having to have classes held in makeshift classrooms. They've had to use the gym and other places to teach because there simply isn't enough space. To reiterate, these modulars were promised to be delivered in September, and they are still not delivered, so something to be aware of.

8:00

The last issue within my constituency at the moment, again quite exciting. The Clareview rec centre has been getting an addition put on and some renovations, which is fantastic to see. But I do need to share some of the concern I'm hearing from my constituents, and that is accessibility and affordability to this revitalized facility. That's because at the moment the Clareview rec centre is designated as a tier 1 facility because of its size. Now, the concern and the challenge, Madam Speaker, is that means that the user fee is at the top tier to be able to access this facility. I will urge members on the other side to be aware of the different incomes that many of the families have who live in the area. Charging top tier to access this community facility will quite simply be out of reach for some families. So although I'm thrilled the government has invested in Clareview, I would like to bring that issue forward and hope that they will be aware that this may be a barrier for some families.

Madam Speaker, moving on to the Speech from the Throne. You know, something that my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona brought up, which is a point that I think needs to be reiterated, is the fact that the Premier was elected through a by-election – on that note, I do wish to pass my congratulations on to the Premier, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Education, and the Member for Calgary-West on their victories in the by-elections – and the reason the Premier is the Premier and not the leader of an opposition party is because of a platform that his party put forward in 2012. Unfortunately, as many Albertans have seen, most of the promises that were made in 2012 have in fact been broken. Those of us on this side of the House are still waiting for some of those commitments to come forward. I mean, really, there's a laundry list from full-day K to, I believe, 140 family care clinics, which were promised but have been squashed, along with we're still waiting for the deliverables when it comes to education.

I appreciate the Premier and the Minister of Education promising new schools and more schools. Albertans are eagerly anticipating them. I do want to remind members of the House that part of the reason, and a large part of the reason, we're in the predicament we're in is because of a failure to invest in new schools for many, many years and the fact that our population continued to grow and this government dragged its feet on investing in infrastructure.

You know, a reminder is what just occurred at the Misericordia, which is a hospital that is ready to fall down for numerous reasons. Opposition members, including my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Calder, who has been a tireless advocate, were calling on the government to act before some kind of catastrophe happened. That did in fact happen, and there have been numerous examples of issues with the Misericordia and other hospitals and infrastructures around the province.

It just needs to be stated that the Premier has a mandate that was given to him or passed down to him from Albertans in the 2012 election. That cannot be ignored, Madam Speaker, and there are many promises that need to be fulfilled. Our leader, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, has been at the forefront, advocating on behalf of children, on children in care, on holding this government's

feet to the fire when it comes to acting on reducing child poverty. We saw a report that came out today that was quite disheartening, quite frankly. You know what? For too long Albertans have heard promises of action and seen committees struck and consultation yet little action.

Something just to segue into the Speech from the Throne: nothing to address the fact that there is a shortage of affordable housing. When this government struck the plan to end homelessness, they played a shell game with dollars that got moved from housing to the initiative for homelessness. Because of it, there has not been enough housing that's been built. Again, the population of Edmonton, the population of Alberta is swelling. You know, we have numbers passed around of around a hundred thousand people moving to the province. We need to invest in infrastructure. We needed to invest in infrastructure 20 years ago, so we're playing the game of catch-up. The irony is that when you put it off for 20 years, your costs continue to go up, where schools, roads, and hospitals would have been much cheaper 20 years ago because of inflation, wages, and the cost of materials. But according to this government that's neither here nor there.

Something that I find interesting out of the Speech from the Throne – I've kind of broken mine into five different categories, and I'm going to have to move a little quicker here. The first one was a commitment that the Premier made to maximizing the value of our natural resources. Now, that sounds really great, and I love the phraseology of that. But when we actually dissect it, you know, it's the Alberta NDP who have been the most vocal advocates of adding value to our resources. We're talking about upgrading and refining much of the bitumen that's extracted in this province, and that is a way to ensure that the quality jobs stay in this province. Building pipelines provides short-term, temporary jobs and ships all the quality jobs down to the refineries and upgraders elsewhere. I would think that the government of Alberta should be acting in the best interests of Albertans, but clearly this PC government is not, so shipping jobs is the way to go. This is where I disagree with the Premier.

I can say that, you know, in the Alberta NDP we aren't opposed to diversifying our markets. We recognize that when you have one buyer, you don't set the price; the buyer does. What we would do as government is ensure that we're upgrading more of our unprocessed bitumen here in Alberta. I completely recognize that we don't have the capacity to upgrade everything that is extracted, and that's not where we're going. But, again, we're looking at extremes right now. We're upgrading a pittance and shipping more raw bitumen than any other jurisdiction in North America. Madam Speaker, quite simply, we are selling ourselves out. Clearly, this government seems unconcerned by it or is just too far into the pockets of the industry that benefits the most from upgrading in other jurisdictions.

I do want to mention as well that the NDP recognizes that small business is the largest economic driver in our province. We were the only party in the last election who proposed a small-business tax cut, proposing a tax cut by one-third. Again, we realize the value that small businesses contribute to our economy.

When we talk about some of the ways that we would fund some of the social programs, infrastructure, etc., where I get frustrated, Madam Speaker, is the fact that this government absolutely refuses to have a discussion on the second half of the coin. We've got spending on one side of the coin; we have revenue on the other side of the coin. Many Albertans that I've talked to – and I'm not talking about just my constituency but around the province – understand why they pay taxes, understand the value of taxes.

Infrastructure doesn't fall from the sky. Hospitals don't poof into existence, and neither do schools. They cost dollars. But

Albertans want to see their dollars working for them. So the issue of a progressive income tax is not something that the majority of Albertans are opposed to. Again, a progressive income tax can be scaled so that, you know, whether you're looking at a small tax increase for households earning over \$200,000 a year, for example, we're actually talking about saving dollars for middle-income families, where in Alberta they actually pay more than other jurisdictions when you do comparables.

We're looking, again, at having a competitive royalty regime and a competitive corporate tax rate. Right now Alberta undercuts itself so much. You could adjust our corporate tax rate and our royalty rate modestly so that we are still a competitive jurisdiction with other parts of Canada yet the government would bring in a few billion more.

I see I am running out of time shortly. I do want to touch on education, our cities, and health, so if I do get cut off, we'll see if I have opportunity to pop up again.

As far as education, again, like I mentioned, I'm glad to see we're starting to make promises to build schools. We still haven't fulfilled Premier Stelmach's promises from 2011. We are far from fulfilling former Premier Redford's promises in 2013.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

8:10

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to ask the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview a quick question. I'm wondering, regarding the modulars in your constituency that you brought up earlier on in your speech, if you've told the parents impacted by the lack of action on those modulars that perhaps they should write a letter or two to the Minister of Education to perhaps get some action.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw for that question. Yeah, it's something that we've been, you know, advocating on behalf of. Quite frankly – and it may shock many members of this House – up until maybe two months ago there were actually 54 fully built modulars sitting in a field waiting to get shipped to schools. When asked – it wasn't on the company; they fulfilled their contract with Alberta Infrastructure – the government played the blame game on the school boards: "Well, that's their fault. They need to transport this to their own schools."

I found that very disingenuous. I found that quite frustrating, that we have classrooms and teachers teaching in broom closets, on stages, in libraries, in staff rooms because there is simply not enough space, and here you had 54 modulars built, and very well built – I toured them myself – and sitting in a field and not being delivered because the government passed the buck and said: well, that's not our responsibility to deliver. It's shameful. The buck stops with the province of Alberta. They are responsible for education in this province.

Keeping on the theme of education, a message to the members on the other side. Again, I'm happy to hear promises of infrastructure, of buildings being built, but please recognize that school boards will need the dollars to staff these schools. There is a shortage of staffing. We're talking about, you know, classrooms that are more diverse than they've ever been. We've got English language learners. We've got new immigrants, new Canadians, kids coming over whose command of the English language is not at the same level as their colleagues at the same age, in the same grade. We have children with special needs. We have lots of different challenges

that teachers and other students face, and if we do not adequately resource our classrooms, we are doing a disservice to our students and they will not be able to compete in our global context.

As I've said before, you know, the people of this province are our greatest asset, and we need to invest in them. The best way to do that is ensuring that our children have the best education possible. I would argue – and I've said this to teachers before – that the reason that Alberta has the best education system is because of the teachers and the workers who work in our system. It is not because of this government. They work despite the barriers and obstacles that are put up in front of them. You want to talk about teacher workload? You want to talk about class sizes? It is unbelievable, hon. members, that 25 per cent of teachers in the first five years leave the profession. I hope that number causes some of you to raise an alarm and to ask: why is it that one-quarter of teachers in the first five years leave the profession? It's an alarming statistic, and that shouldn't be the case.

In my last couple of minutes I want to talk about the fact that, you know, the Alberta NDP has a vision for our cities to be vibrant cities and vibrant communities. Time and time again Edmonton and Calgary have asked for a specific big-city charter. All that they've gotten in this document, this Speech from the Throne, is a framework agreement. We need to recognize that the issues and challenges facing Edmonton and Calgary are very different from those of a hamlet somewhere or a summer village, yet at the moment all 349 municipalities have the same tools at their disposal to provide for differing needs of service. That is shameful, especially on the other side with the former mayor of Edmonton being in the front bench, and this should be acknowledged. We're past the time for talking, and action is here.

We talk about stable, predictable funding, the fact that MSI should be expanded and continued. Transportation: cities are looking for new dollars. I would love to see a GreenTRIP 2.0 come out from this government. Again, I talked about housing. We look at child care. The fact that Albertans pay more than most other provinces for child care is shameful. That would encourage people to get into the workforce. Now you have more income being made, which means that the government gets more revenue from taxes. The fact that we need to acknowledge... [Mr. Bilous's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to reply to the throne speech? The hon. member for...

Mr. Dorward: Just a quick question: what else...

The Acting Speaker: I'm sorry; 29(2)(a) is done. He used up his five minutes, sir.

I'm looking for any other members who wish to respond to the throne speech. The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would now move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1 Respecting Property Rights Act

[Adjourned debate November 19: Mr. Denis]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members who wish to speak to Bill 1 in second reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 1, Respecting Property Rights Act. Bill 1 would repeal the Land Assembly Project Area Act, which was never proclaimed and came to the House in 2009, as many will remember. It's interesting that this would automatically be repealed next year if it hadn't been proclaimed, by virtue of a previous enactment, as will the Land Stewardship Act if we do not see that altered as well.

The original Bill 19 aimed to designate corridors for infrastructure projects such as transportation utility corridors – and who could argue with that? – but protecting property rights has become the central theme of a major debate in Alberta since Bill 19 was brought forward. The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre has become famous and infamous for his rallying around Bill 19 and the constituents who stood up against what was felt to be a draconian and unresponsive bill with respect to compensation appeal mechanisms for land confiscation. It would have placed unlimited and indefinite restrictions on landowners' rights, with serious fines and potential prison time as penalties for failing to comply.

At the same time, however, the Liberal caucus has concerns around another bill that relates to this, and that is the Responsible Energy Development Act, which created the Alberta Energy Regulator. Although the Responsible Energy Development Act is outside the scope of Bill 1, the Liberal caucus's concerns could have been incorporated into the Premier's premier bill.

The Liberal caucus is concerned about who is granted standing in hearings on proposed development projects, where only those "directly and adversely affected" get to participate. This is specifically sections 32, 34, and 36. If the regulator determines that no one filing a statement of concern is directly and adversely affected, there is no hearing. This ignores the property rights of landowners who are indirectly and adversely affected, and it ignores, obviously, the concerns around public lands and groups such as the Alberta Wilderness Association and their concerns about developments on public lands, whether in the north or in the south. Restriction also creates First Nations consultation issues, particularly if traditional land is at issue. The Premier could have addressed the Responsible Energy Development Act in terms of property rights and First Nations, but so far he has chosen not to.

Starting in 2016, the Statutes Repeal Act, as I mentioned, will start a process of repeal with any unproclaimed legislation, and we're concerned that that may affect what was a very positive direction in terms of the Land Stewardship Act, which we almost unanimously supported in this House and still is not in full force.

8:20

Our position hasn't really changed on Bill 19. We're pleased to see it being repealed since it failed to address some of those key concerns around compensation and appeal process. Clearly, there must be a guarantee that a landowner get fully compensated and that the appellant – there should be appellants – can take the government to court to get full compensation in the event that it appears and is in reality unfair.

With respect to the Responsible Energy Development Act what the minister failed to do is to recognize that individuals and groups don't necessarily live in direct proximity to developments and can still be significantly impacted. We find it short sighted when environmental issues are confined to an artificial neighbourhood

boundary where the impact of an oil spill not only affects that community but downstream communities as well.

It appears that the government again is working in favour of development and in favour of an expedited application process and denying meaningful public participation in this way, which is part of our international and national loss of reputation. It's absolutely essential for Alberta to improve its credibility on the environment if our primary energy industry is going to develop the credibility and marketability beyond our borders. We're seeing the results of that failure today.

The Alberta Energy Regulator has already denied public hearings on an application by CNRL and its Kirby expansion based on statements of concern filed by nine different parties, including First Nations groups. Clearly, this cannot go on. Alberta Liberals are therefore calling on the government to amend section 32 of the act to make these hearings truly open and accessible to all Albertans.

Again, that relates to the opportunity that's before us, Madam Speaker, in addressing the repeal of Bill 19, and I look forward to this government taking on a real leadership role in terms of property rights and environmental rights, ensuring respect for not only those indirectly affected but also, obviously, including our First Nations.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) doesn't kick in at this point in time. We wait till the third speaker. So if you have a 29(2)(a), you'll have to wait till the next speaker to address that issue.

Are there any other members who wish to speak? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Since 2010 the erosion of property rights under various bills passed by the PC government has been a major issue in rural Alberta. We talked about that earlier today. After promising during his leadership race to resolve this in his first piece of legislation, Bill 1 came forward. It repeals Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, in its entirety. This act, amended under political pressure in 2011, allowed the government to plan for future expropriations by placing restrictions on development of land it might want to expropriate in the future. It was controversial because of the potential to radically undermine the value and use of large tracts of land without any guarantees that the land would ever be used for public purposes. Additionally, it granted significant discretion to cabinet, which was only partially ameliorated in the 2011 amendment act.

Bill 1 says nothing about any of the other controversial bills, in particular Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. This act, like others, did not offer adequate compensation options to affected landowners. The bill was never proclaimed, never mind used. As with Bill 50, while it may take significant political damage before repealing a bad law, eventually the PC government sometimes does the right thing. Surprising, I know, but we're grateful. We always encourage the government to take our lead. Evidence once again that Wildrose is where real leadership is in Alberta. The cons of this are that by only repealing this act that the government has never used and not amending the far more significant ALSA, this act is actually a bit of an insult to property rights.

At least the government could have repealed the other offensive act that they never used, Bill 24, by which the government claimed ownership of pore spaces and gave itself powers to control when and who had access to pump CO₂ under the land of rural Albertans. ALSA has numerous amendments that it needs.

The Responsible Energy Development Act has a couple of amendments that it also needs.

This act, Bill 1, addresses virtually none of the property rights concerns of Grassroots Alberta, that thought they were making some progress by the comments that the Premier had made and by his receiving their suggestions.

The government really hasn't fixed the Land Stewardship Act in response to property rights concerns, just partially but only after a long grassroots political campaign. Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, in particular still gives cabinet the power to rescind water licences, grazing leases, oil leases, and many more rights and permissions without guarantees of compensation or the right to appeal the compensation offered. The bill stipulates that if a designated minister determines a particular action necessary, the bureaucracy must initiate a management response. This is referred to as a Henry VIII clause, which effectively shifts the law-making power from the Assembly to the cabinet.

My colleague that moved Motion 501 earlier today outlined some of the specific clauses that still remain that really do undermine property rights. Do we support it? Of course, because it's a step in the right direction. It's the beginning of repealing the first of the draconian bills that have been referred to numerous times in here. We can only hope for more.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Now we have Standing Order 29(2)(a). Are there any members interested in asking a question or making a comment?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the second reading of Bill 1, Respecting Property Rights Act. I'd like to say at the onset that the Alberta NDP and myself, obviously, support Bill 1 and its repeal of the Land Assembly Project Area Act.

Now, when this act was first introduced, the NDP opposed it because initially, you know, the act was a very heavy-handed approach to land assembly. Although we recognize that large amounts of land are, obviously, necessary for infrastructure projects, the bill put government convenience over the rights of landowners. It also allowed the government to limit the development that was allowed on someone's land without a timeline for when the project the land was being saved for would begin or without requirements for compensation for the prohibition of the development of the land which the owner owned.

Now, though it was amended in 2011, Madam Speaker, it wasn't sufficient to address all the concerns that were raised. The amendments improved on areas of concern such as compensation and access to the courts; however, there remained concerns about the consultation process, and many of those details were left to the regulations. The bill still concentrated power within the hands of the government, which, as you know, has been a major concern of my caucus ever since I was elected in 2012. Many of the bills that we've seen in the last two and a half years are moving power into the hands of cabinet, the ministry to make sweeping decisions without consulting the very stakeholders that are involved in these decisions. The Land Assembly Project Area Act is an example of the arrogance of this current government as they prioritized their own convenience and blatantly disregarded the property rights of Albertans. Today Bill 1 attempts to remedy some of the previous PC government's problems or the problems that this PC government created.

Now, we support this bill as we opposed the Land Assembly Project Area Act when it passed in 2009. Madam Speaker, I just want to make a point here that although we're supporting this current piece of legislation, it is clear that Bill 1 is another example of PC broken promises. I'll remind members of the House that throughout his campaign for leadership the Premier committed himself and his party to addressing the limits on property rights that have been put in place by previous PC governments.

8:30

On the leadership campaign trail the Premier appealed to his background as a property rights lawyer, saying that he had negotiated fair settlements and respected property rights. He promised to restore balance between the rights of landowners and the interests of industry. In the Speech from the Throne, Madam Speaker, the Premier highlighted private ownership of land as a fundamental and essential principle of our democracy. These are the very promises Bill 1 fails to meet.

It does not adequately address the problems with property rights created by previous PC governments. It only addresses one of three controversial pieces of legislation, which some of my colleagues on this side of House have raised and which we'll raise again so that members on the other side of the House will fully understand the issues and the challenges that we have with the current piece of legislation. Three pieces of legislation that it does not address: the first is Bill 19, Land Assembly Project Area Act; the second is Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, which created seven regional plans that trumped all other legislation and concentrated the power to do this in the hands of the cabinet; and Bill 50, Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, which allowed the cabinet to define what was considered essential infrastructure.

Now, we don't believe that this bill goes far enough. Many of the commitments our party made regarding land rights five years ago remain unaddressed. We're especially disappointed that the Electric Statutes Act, amended by the controversial Bill 50 in 2009, has not been addressed. By failing to address this bill, the government continues to prioritize the interests of industry, in this example electricity, over the rights of Alberta landowners. Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, allowed cabinet to define what was considered essential transmission infrastructure. This cut out the Alberta Utilities Commission, which, along with other organizations, developed a process for project assessment decisions in order to ensure they were done in a fair and scientific manner. These processes have now been bypassed, and the power to make a decision rests with cabinet.

We sounded the alarm bells years ago, Madam Speaker, of the dangers of putting this much power into the hands of a few. Again, to this day we see that the power doesn't rest in the masses, in Albertans, which is where it should be. The fact is that you have a cabinet, a handful of individuals, that is making decisions that affect millions of Albertans but hundreds if not thousands of landowners.

When introduced, we opposed this bill because it failed to protect consumers from the overbuilding of unnecessary transmission lines, the cost of which would be passed on to Albertans. We also opposed this decision because it resulted in a reduced voice for consumers and for Albertans, consumers who, as a result of massive overbuilding of transmission lines, would be paying for the very decisions they had no say in.

In response to Bill 50 we made the following commitments: all utility projects would be subject to full public scrutiny and a full regulatory process, power customers must not be required to fund

utility projects by for-profit companies, and the protection of power consumers' interests and an end to electricity deregulation.

This government many years ago promised that deregulation would pass savings on to Albertans. Well, that's quite funny, Madam Speaker, because the opposite happened, where Alberta went from one of the most competitive jurisdictions for electricity rates to one of the most expensive through privatization and decentralizing our electricity.

Since the passage of Bill 50 it's become clear that many of the issues we feared would occur as a result of the legislation are coming to fruition. Again, as I said, costs have been rising in Alberta. Between 2002 and 2011 there was a 384 per cent increase in transmission prices for consumers. Over a two-month period in 2011, between September and November, transmission prices rose by a whopping 42 per cent. In 2011 Edmonton and Calgary had the highest electricity bills of all major Canadian cities. In April 2011 a monthly bill for 1,000 kilowatts a month was over \$250 before tax. In Edmonton it was approximately \$240. In 2011 Albertans paid \$60 more for 659 kilowatts in 30 days than people in Saskatchewan and Ontario and almost \$100 more than in B.C. As you can see from these examples, we've yet to see the advantage to the deregulation and privatization of our electrical grid.

On March 20, 2012, the NDP tabled a document recounting the struggles of Albertan families to pay their mounting and in many cases extremely high electricity bills. Well, here's something interesting, Madam Speaker, just a nice little juxtaposition. While Albertan families struggled to pay for their electricity bills, the CEOs of Enbridge and EPCOR made millions. Here's an example. In 2012 Enbridge's CEO made over \$12 million, in 2012 TransAlta's CEO made \$5.6 million, and in 2009 EPCOR's CEO made \$2.6 million.

In 2012 two companies applied for approval to export energy to the U.S. Alberta was already planning on spending over \$16 billion on transmission, \$11 billion more than Ontario and \$12 billion more than B.C., despite having a smaller population and lower electricity generation.

So, Madam Speaker, there's evidence that overbuilding of transmission lines is occurring, and this can be tied directly to Bill 50, which this PC government has continued to fail to address. We've seen the effects of the deregulation of electricity and the overbuilding of transmission lines done through this act and many others on electricity bills in Alberta.

The bill represents more broken PC promises. Despite considerable commitments made by the Premier during his leadership campaign and the Speech from the Throne, Bill 1 only begins to scratch the surface of issues pertaining to property rights that previous PC governments created. By failing to address other property rights issues like Bill 50, this PC government's new management continues to put their corporate friends ahead of Albertan families. For us, again, Madam Speaker, this bill, although a step in the right direction, is far from adequate in addressing some of the failed pieces of legislation which, to be honest, have an enormous impact on Albertan families, on the cost of electricity on their monthly bills.

It's for those reasons that very reluctantly will I support Bill 1. I believe that there will be amendments coming forward to try to strengthen this and address some of the other bills that, quite honestly, Madam Speaker, have utterly failed Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We have Standing Order 29(2)(a). Are there any members interested in questioning or commenting?

Seeing none, I'll move to our next speaker, the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in support of this bill. I'm not going to marginalize the necessity and the importance of this bill and how thrilled I am that this government now has brought this bill forward. This is a good bill. It is a just bill.

I want to make it absolutely clear that probably 15 out of the 17 Wildrose Party MLAs that were elected in 2012 were elected on a kill Bill 19, kill Bill 36, kill Bill 50 platform. You can still go out in some of those ridings today and see the signs: kill Bill 19, 36, and 50. You can go down to Medicine Hat and see those signs in the rural areas. You can go out into the various corners of this province, and you will see those signs. So to stand up here and say, "that's not good": I can't agree with that. That, to me, is disingenuous. I travelled this province on "kill Bill 19," and I'm going to explain in a minute what it means.

The other members have been bringing up a number of different bills, particularly the Member for Calgary-Shaw. I'm going to tell you something. When that member voted for Bill 2, that member voted to remove a landowner's right to notification. He voted to remove the landowners' right to be informed and have an opportunity to get the relevant information from an applicant doing oil and gas drilling on their property. He also voted in that same bill to remove a landowner's right to cross-examine and to remove a landowner's right to a hearing, never mind that the public interest test had been removed from legislation in that bill. Thank you very much. So when that member stands up and says that he stands up for property rights, I don't agree. I think you missed the boat.

8:40

But I will tell you that these members who say that somehow Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, overrides this don't understand how these bills work or what these bills were designed to do. Let me explain. There were two bills that actually caused some harm. Maybe only one bill. That would be the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, when we overbuilt the electricity system. All consumers are now paying more. That's an issue unto itself.

The other bill is Bill 24, the carbon capture and sequestration. That is an interesting bill because it categorically just removed all the pore space below the surface of all lands and gave that ownership to government. Now, did that cause harm to any property owners? That's a debatable issue. The fact is that what should happen is that if we are going to go through with carbon capture and storage, which I disagree with, then we should take issue with how we're going to do it and take it case by case versus this arbitrary bill that just took ownership of all the pore space below everybody's land.

I'll talk about that bill later if somebody asks me questions, but what I want to talk about is why Bill 19 is important. This idea that it was not proclaimed is moot, is a ridiculous argument. This government has no record right now of abusing anybody with these bills other than the overcharging for Bill 50. Even the Land Stewardship Act. What we know about the Land Stewardship Act is that the government cancelled some oil leases. But what we don't know and what we don't have any evidence of is: were those companies justly paid for losing those leases? We don't know. What we do know when we look at Bill 19 and Bill 36 is that they gave the government the power to abuse. The fact that the bill had not been proclaimed is a moot point in the sense that that bill is law. Just because the government had not put it into force yet doesn't change anything. It had to go.

This bill, Bill 1, makes that now a moot point. It is gone. That is a good thing for landowners, and landowners can take some sort of comfort that that bill now is gone.

Now, let's explain what was actually in that bill. What did Bill 19 do? Well, actually, what it was creating was utility corridors. I'm actually in favour of utility corridors, but that bill went so far overboard as far as I was concerned. I went around this province. I debated the Minister of Energy. I debated the Minister of Transportation. I debated the Minister of Municipal Affairs and many other ministers who are not here today on this very bill. Kill Bill 19.

So what did it do? Why should the public have been concerned about it? Well, what it did is that Bill 19 usurped or overrode section 5 of the Government Organization Act, something that dealt with restricted development areas. It was already in law. They were called RDAs. What those RDAs did is that they took land in the public interest. When the government took responsibility for those restricted development areas, there was a mandate – and it still is in law right now – that the government had to protect the aquifer, that the government had to protect the natural state of the land, that the government had to protect deterioration of the property. So there were all these protections built into this section 5 of the Government Organization Act when the government implemented restricted development areas.

Bill 19 was introduced, and what it did is basically say that for the purpose of this act – and this is in interesting definition, Madam Speaker – a project is a public project if the project is "designated by the Lieutenant Governor in Council as a public project." That thing just goes around in a circle, around and around and around. It's like: what the heck are we talking about?

Basically, what happened is that they took the various sections of that restricted development area in the Government Organization Act, and no longer did the government have a mandate to protect the land. What the government actually did by twisting a few words around was that it said that it could control, restrict, prohibit, or approve any kind of use on a land. It said that it could control, restrict, prohibit, or exercise any kind of power referred to in regulations. It said that it could control, restrict, prohibit, or approve the dumping, deposit, or emission of any substance, a complete change over the language of the restricted development areas. That is significant on landowner rights and protecting their land if their property is taken for a utility corridor.

More importantly, what happened in that bill is that property owners lost the ability to be notified. That got removed from the act under Bill 19, and more importantly the government gave themselves the authority to act as if it was the Queen's Bench. Where it once had to take an enforcement order to court, it no longer had to do that. It could issue an enforcement order as if it were a judgment of the Queen's Bench, and that enforcement order could carry with it a \$100,000 fine and two years in jail. The interesting thing about the act is that it specifically stated initially that the Expropriation Act will not apply.

Now, all these various sections are very similar to the various sections you would find in the Land Stewardship Act, but as the government has stated, when we go to committee, we are going to be able now to address some of these issues because that is what the Property Rights Advocate has asked the government to do in its report. So hopefully, we are actually on the right track. I've got no evidence to suggest that we are not at this very moment in time. The best thing that can happen for property owners is that Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, is finally killed. Bill 1 kills it. That is a good thing, and the thousands of Wildrose Party members that signed up to the Wildrose Party for this very reason need to know that, that this new Premier has finally listened, has

finally heard, and has finally acted. I have to tell you that after so many years up there arguing against Bill 19, after just two years in here arguing about Bill 19 and these many other acts, I do not marginalize this. This is a good thing for property rights. I'm going to support this bill, and I'm going to vote yes for this bill each time it comes up for a reading, and I'm not going to be hypocritical about it whatsoever.

When we get down into talking about the Electric Statutes Amendments Act and what that has done, I will tell you something here right now. They know nothing about it like most people in this Assembly know nothing about it. It is an act that caused us serious pain as far as the rates we're paying, but it is a complicated piece of legislation in what it did technically.

With that, I fully hope that when we get into committee, we deal with Bill 24 and the carbon sequestration. I think it is absolutely possible for the minister and for the Premier to actually kill that bill also because, one, I really don't think carbon capture is going to get off the ground. When you actually take a look at the amount of money we're going to spend on that, I just don't think that's worth half the money that we're going to spend. What we need to do is actually reduce our CO₂ emissions, verifiable reductions to make some sort of statement to the world, and when we do that, what we should do is take a look at this overreaching project and say: "You know what? That is really not worth it." There are other ways that are far more effective, that are cheaper, that cost a whole lot less, that can do what we need to do, and if we can have a policy that gets us into renewable energies, we don't need that act whatsoever. That is one act that can be removed.

Unfortunately, the Land Stewardship Act cannot be repealed without causing great harm to the public, I believe, right now. Just like we repealed Bill 50, but the lines are built. Unfortunately, we're going to pay for that. The money has been spent. So to tear down those towers today would just be adding on to the waste. To repeal Bill 36, the Land Stewardship Act, today would cause tremendous complications because we have created the land-use framework and we have applied the Land Stewardship Act to bring that into force, and there are so many factors and so many other bills that have been amended as a result. The only possible, feasible thing to do with the Land Stewardship Act is to revisit the various sections of the act that absolutely need to be changed to give something very simple that the public wants, due process. This is all about process.

8:50

Landowners understand that property will be taken for various public interest projects. Nobody wants to give up their property to a power line. Nobody wants to give up their property to a road. But people with common sense – and a whole bunch of Albertans have common sense – understand the necessity in the public interest. What they want is a fair and just process, that they are treated and compensated in a just manner. That's it. They need that process.

If we have the opportunity to look at Bill 36 and amend section 9(2), to amend section 11(1), to basically repeal section 13, to amend sections 15(1), 15(3), 15(4), 17(4), 19, and 26 of that bill, that party will have taken the wind out of that party and taken back the rural areas. That's something that I hope you will pay attention to because the Premier has said that he wants to take property rights and make that a fundamental shift and a fundamental change. This is

the map on how to do it. Address these bills, address the inconsistency in these bills. Give property owners due process. Give them a fair process. Make them whole if their property is taken. That's all they want. They want to see it in law. If you give that to them, you will have them supporting you. That's how it works. Killing Bill 19 starts that process right now, today.

I am going to stand up, and I am going to vote loud for this bill. I will tell you this. There can be giggles in here, but I've spoken to thousands of Albertans – and I mean thousands of Albertans, Madam Speaker – and I have seen the halls line up with people buying Wildrose Party memberships as a direct result of talking about this bill. Now this is going to be gone when we finally get done third reading, and these people and all Albertans need to know that this is a major step forward in turning this government around. I'd like to think the opposition had a lot to do with it. I think we did have a lot to do with it. But it's absolutely clear to me that when this new Premier came in, this new Premier was listening to Albertans. He did hear Albertans talk about this, and he's acting about this.

An Hon. Member: They're not going to take you.

Mr. Anglin: You know, I can take the jiving from the Wildrose, but I will tell you something . . . [interjections]. Thank you very much. Well, nobody recorded my meetings out there, I don't think. Otherwise I'd be showing them.

The fact is that this bill is not a small step. It is a major step. I understand how the process works. I know members over there supported this bill, and they voted for it. But I also know that two Wildrose Party members were over there when they voted on this and supported it. I also know the history of who voted for what and who actually stood up for property rights. There were many nights out there that we discussed this bill.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Anglin: How much? I'll tell you how much. In the two years prior to the Wildrose getting elected, I spoke in 91 communities and I did 266 town hall meetings, and that doesn't even count the years before that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We now have Standing Order 29(2)(a). Are there any other members who wish to make a comment or ask questions to the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre?

Seeing none, are there any other members who wish to speak to Bill 1 in second reading?

Mr. Oberle: I call the question, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In consideration of the hour and the progress made this evening, I'm happy to move that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 8:55 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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



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The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 25, 2014

Issue 6a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (AL),
 Leader of the Liberal Opposition
Smith, Danielle, Highwood (W),
 Leader of the Official Opposition
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Towle, Kerry, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC),
 Government Whip
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W),
 Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 63 Wildrose: 14 Alberta Liberal: 5 New Democrat: 4 Independent: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

W.J. David McNeil, Clerk	Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and Legal Research Officer	Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms
Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Law Clerk/ Director of Interparliamentary Relations	Nancy Robert, Research Officer	Chris Caughell, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Shannon Dean, Senior Parliamentary Counsel/Director of House Services	Philip Massolin, Manager of Research Services	Gordon H. Munk, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
		Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Executive Council

Jim Prentice	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Naresh Bhardwaj	Associate Minister of Persons with Disabilities
Manmeet Singh Bhullar	Minister of Infrastructure
Robin Campbell	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Jonathan Denis	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Gordon Dirks	Minister of Education
David Dorward	Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Wayne Drysdale	Minister of Transportation
Kyle Fawcett	Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development
Jeff Johnson	Minister of Seniors
Stephen Khan	Minister of Service Alberta
Heather Klimchuk	Minister of Human Services
Maureen Kubinec	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Stephen Mandel	Minister of Health
Ric McIver	Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour
Diana McQueen	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Frank Oberle	Minister of Energy
Verlyn Olson	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Donald Scott	Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education
Teresa Woo-Paw	Associate Minister of Asia Pacific Relations

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Amery

Deputy Chair: Mr. Fox

Dallas	McDonald
Eggen	Quadri
Hehr	Rogers
Horne	Rowe
Kennedy-Glans	Sarich
Lemke	Stier
Luan	

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Casey

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

Amery	Lukaszuk
Barnes	Mason
Ellis	Sherman
Horner	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Olesen

Deputy Chair: Mr. Pedersen

Cusanelli	McAllister
Eggen	Quest
Fenske	Rodney
Fox	Sandhu
Fritz	Swann
Jablonski	Weadick
Leskiw	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Jeneroux

Deputy Chair: Mr. Starke

Bikman	Leskiw
Blakeman	Quadri
Brown	Wilson
DeLong	Young
Eggen	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Zwozdesky

Deputy Chair: Mr. VanderBurg

Forsyth	Mason
Fritz	McDonald
Griffiths	Sherman
Johnson, L.	Towle
Lukaszuk	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Mrs. Leskiw

Deputy Chair: Ms Cusanelli

Allen	Olesen
Bilous	Rowe
Brown	Stier
DeLong	Strankman
Fenske	Swann
Fritz	Xiao
Jablonski	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Luan

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rogers

Bilous	Pastoor
Calahasen	Pedersen
Cao	Rodney
Casey	Saskiw
Ellis	Starke
Kang	Wilson
Olesen	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Anderson

Deputy Chair: Mr. Young

Allen	Jansen
Amery	Jeneroux
Barnes	Luan
Bilous	Pastoor
Donovan	Sandhu
Hehr	Sarich
Horne	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Goudreau

Deputy Chair: Mr. Hale

Allen	Casey
Anglin	Fraser
Bikman	Johnson, L.
Blakeman	Mason
Brown	Xiao
Calahasen	Young
Cao	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 25, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Dear Lord, help us to always do the right thing as we journey through this maze of life for we are but servants chosen by others to bear the duties, the challenges, and the burdens of public life. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three special visitors from the vibrant Ukrainian community of our great province. They are in Edmonton at the Legislature to commemorate the Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day Act. Seated in the Speaker's gallery is Dr. Walter Zaryckyj, executive director for the Center for US-Ukrainian Relations, who is here from New York and our guest from the ceremony this afternoon. Also here are Olesia Luci-Andryjowycz, president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council, and Slavka Shulakewych, the provincial co-ordinator of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. I would ask them all to rise now and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much. It's an honour for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you members of the Punjabi Media Association of Alberta. Sitting in your gallery are Mr. Gursharan Buttar, newly minted president of the association; Rajwinder Klair, member; Kulmit Sangha, vice-president of the association; Gurbhinder Sandhu, general secretary of the association; Parduman Gill, member of the association; Navtej Bains, member; Ranjit Power, also a member. I would also like to applaud them for raising \$65,000 and tons of food for Edmonton's Food Bank. This was done as part of the birthday celebration of our first Sikh guru, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, and his teachings of work, worship, and donating to charities. I would like to send a huge thank you to the Sikh community for their generous support. To witness this celebration, Mr. Speaker, were yourself and the members for Edmonton-Manning and Edmonton-Mill Woods. They have all risen. Please give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Let us go on with school groups, starting with the hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to welcome from St. Theresa Catholic middle school in my constituency of Sherwood Park 55 visitors in both galleries, and they are accompanied today by their teachers, Luba Eshenko, Cynthia Metzger, Mike Miskiw, Theresa Walker, and their helpers, Mr. Curtis Danilak, Mr. Brent McEwan, Ms Kelsey Tucker. Our good friend from Bonnyville-Cold Lake's baby sister teaches at this

school as well, which should be noted. Anyway, if you could please rise, and the Assembly will give you the warm traditional welcome. Thanks for being here today.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you 15 students from NAIT, including Ms Lamya Asiff, Dylan Wolfinger, Mike Gough, Cayla Ellsworth, Kennedy Pawluk, Jeff Elkerbout, Chris Mullen, Joel Barlund, Jayson Shermack, Taylor Braat, Alyssa Petryshyn, Kalie MacIntosh, Brett Bohl, and Marika Friesen. If they could all stand, please, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 15 members of the Lung Association of Alberta and Northwest Territories. November is Lung Awareness Month, and 2014 marks the 75th anniversary of the Lung Association of Alberta and Northwest Territories. Representing the association, they are here today to bring awareness to respiratory illness and lung disease. Earlier today they demonstrated a spirometry test here in the Legislature, which I think I failed, for the benefit of educating me and others present about the Lung Association. I ask that each individual rise when I call their name and receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly: Leigh Allard, Gina Ibach, Nina Snyder, Jeff Cummings, Kristin Matthews, Dr. Marc Bibeau, Dr. Mohit Bhutani, Dr. Mark Anselmo, Dr. Mike Stickland, Darlene Gallant, Joan Branscombe, Alfred Branscombe, Tim Penstone, Susan Penstone, and Katelyn Penstone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Health, your second introduction.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of visitors from the strategic policy branch of Alberta Health. The strategic policy branch creates strategic policy capacity within the department through policy development, policy co-ordination, and other corporate functions to support department priorities and activities and drive out work under the department's strategic directions. The branch also co-ordinates and facilitates Alberta Health's activities and engagements with intergovernmental partners to advance strategic priorities and influence pan-Canadian discussions on health care issues. Please give them the customary Assembly warm welcome as I call out their names. Joining us here today are Meghann Eagle, Jeanie Casault, Sue Gadag, Brenna Smith, Rhianne McKay, Karen Lamminen, and James Biggs.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce 18 individuals who this morning graduated from peace officer training. These new occupational health and safety peace officers will join their colleagues in enforcing this province's workplace safety rules. Their work helps to ensure that Albertans return home safely at the end of every workday. Five officers from today's graduating class have joined us, and I ask that they rise and remain standing as I introduce them to you and through you to all members of this Assembly: Mitch Bourgeault, Shirley Green, Carol Southwood, Randy Gauthier, Rob LeRouzic. I'm pleased to

introduce them to you, and I ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Scott: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly some Albertans making a difference in the fight against multiple sclerosis in Alberta. Today I am pleased to introduce Mrs. Julie Kelndorfer, her son Joshua, and Mr. Neil Pierce, representing the MS Society, Alberta and Northwest Territories division. Mrs. Kelndorfer is an Albertan living with MS, and on November 5 I was honoured to share the podium with her and announce our government's support for a \$1.4 million MS research fund. At that announcement Julie spoke with passion not about how MS affects her but about how it impacts her loved ones, especially her son Joshua. She is the director of government and community relations for the MS Society of Canada. With her today is Mr. Neil Pierce, president of the MS Society, Alberta and Northwest Territories division. He played an important role in contributing to our government's Way Forward plan for addressing MS in Alberta. I ask my guests to rise and for all the members of this Assembly to give them the traditional warm greeting.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Mark Scholz. Mark is president of the Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors, an association that represents all of the land-based drilling operations in Canada and 98 per cent of the service rig operations. Their mission is to be the unified voice of the Canadian drilling and service rig industry, promoting safer and more efficient operations through advocacy, communications, products, and services. I look forward to meeting with the association later today to discuss the 2015 drilling forecast and how together we can move this critical industry forward. Mr. Scholz is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that he rise and that we give him the warm traditional welcome of this House.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Young: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly five passionate advocates for seniors in our province and members of the Elder Advocates of Alberta. I would like to thank Ruth Adria, founder of Elder Advocates, as well as four other members of her organization – Mary Pelech, Kerry Modin, Barry Snell, and Shauna McHarg – for all the work they do for seniors in this province. I'd ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you. It's a privilege to introduce an extraordinary and gutsy constituent of Edmonton-South West, probably one of the most positive girls I've ever met. Now, Mr. Speaker, she's overcome a lot to have this positive attitude. When she was five years old she started having symptoms of Crohn's disease. However, she wasn't diagnosed until her family took her to the Stollery hospital emergency room on Christmas Eve of 2012. This

began a year of blood work, vitamins, trying different medications, and steroids.

This may stop many girls in their tracks; however, not this girl. She has incredible determination and spirit. She has since done everything from raising money for Crohn's with a lemonade stand with her brother to being honorary chair of the Gutsy Walk, which took place June 8 in Rundle park and raised close to \$160,000. She is aware of the struggles ahead of her and asks questions about her disease daily, but she's been able to bounce back into activities like soccer and swimming with the same vigour she once had, and nothing makes her happier. Mr. Speaker, this girl is Grace Whitfield, and it is my absolute honour to call her a fighter and a friend. I ask her and her father, Wade; mother, Christa; and brother Tyler to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, did you have another introduction? Perhaps later? Okay. Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my guests from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees pay and social equity committee. This committee focuses on the crucial task of lobbying the government to enact legislation which will force employers to pay equal salaries for equal work. Many of the classifications that are undervalued and underpaid are traditionally women's work – for example, house-keeping, secretarial, and child care – leading to an ever-growing pay gap in Alberta. Pay inequality leads to social inequality, as we have seen. I would like to ask my guests to rise as I call their names: LeeAnn Boudreau, Rhonda Chatman, Phyllis Faulkner, Terry Nicholson-Knudson, Val Whelen, and Ginger Woeppel. I'd like my colleagues in the Assembly to join me in welcoming them to our Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

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

Holodomor Memorial Day

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta and Ukraine have ties that are held firm by blood, history, and culture. There are communities throughout our great province that have a proud Ukrainian heritage, and Alberta has a large Ukrainian population that is proud to share their culture with us as they embrace their Albertan identity.

I myself am a Ukrainian-Albertan, and it is a true honour for me to acknowledge the sixth anniversary of the Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day Act. Passed unanimously in 2008, the act commemorates and remembers the millions of Ukrainian men, women, and children who were forced into starvation and death between 1932 and 1933 by the barbaric and brutal man-made famine of Joseph Stalin's Soviet regime.

Known as Holodomor, which means extermination by means of starvation in Ukrainian, this forced famine cannot be called anything but an act of genocide. The stories are horrifying. Farmers, citizens of villages and towns were forced to fill unrealistic and exorbitant government quotas, that left them without food to feed themselves and their families. Those who refused saw their crops, livestock, food, and homes confiscated.

Those that attempted to hold anything back, whether it was a handful of grain or a stalk of wheat, were arrested, exiled, or even executed. People starved to death, dying in the streets and in their homes. Through it all soldiers patrolled the borders, ensuring that no one could search for food elsewhere. A little-known chapter of human history, this dark and evil act must never be repeated and must always be remembered.

In Alberta the fourth Saturday of every November is known as Ukrainian Famine and Genocide Memorial Day. On this day we remember the fallen victims and those who survived. I urge every member here and all Albertans to remember this important day. Doing so will remind us of our great fortune to be granted such freedom in Canada, with a powerful respect for human rights and multiculturalism. In remembering this tragedy, we can ensure a bright and fully accepting future for all Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Misericordia Community Hospital

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A chicken sandwich, a warm bowl of soup, a bag of chips, a chance to feel normal: this is what a visit to the cafeteria means for patients either strung to a hospital bed for days or weeks or filled with anxiety awaiting treatment in the emergency room. I've seen it first-hand. On more than one instance I've stared into the eyes of a friend or a loved one, their eyes exhausted from all the checkups, the pokes, the prodding, and all the questions. Having the opportunity to escape the sounds of a busy hospital floor and retreat to the normalcy of the cafeteria room, fondly referred to as the kitchen table, where they can order food and see families gather around them, has proven to be nothing more than therapeutic.

That's why when the ceiling was literally falling in on the cafeteria at the Misericordia hospital, it meant more than just a day free of comfort food. The third floor in over a year did more than just close off sections of the hospital and impact the emergency room; it pulled away a critical resource for family members, patients, and front-line workers. While doctors and nurses were pushed to the brink, patients were forced to stay away, and families were stuck in the hospital watching a building literally bursting at the seams.

With a billion dollars spent on sole-source contracts and \$250 million spent on consultants for things like executive coaching, the fact that this government has left almost \$50 million on the table in deferred maintenance costs at the Misericordia is nothing more than disgraceful, and it's hurting patients. Alberta Health Services has listed this as a priority, but for some reason it still hasn't been addressed. Mr. Speaker, more inaction on the Misericordia is nothing short of irresponsible. The patients are exhausted, scared, and looking for relief, and they deserve more than this.

The Speaker: I understand we're going to Calgary-West next, followed by Calgary-Currie.

Moosehide Campaign

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women we mark the start of an initiative to address and prevent violence against aboriginal women and children in Alberta. Today the Alberta government in partnership with the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association announced the Alberta launch of the Moosehide campaign.

The campaign asks aboriginal and nonaboriginal men alike to wear swatches of moosehide as a demonstration of their commitment to end violence toward aboriginal women and children. As a father of a Métis daughter I am moved and proud to stand here today and see my colleagues wearing these swatches. These swatches pledge to make Alberta a safer place for not only aboriginal women and children but for women and children in every community.

Our government has announced a \$75,000 grant to support the Moosehide campaign. This will expand Ontario's I Am a Kind Man project into our local communities. I Am a Kind Man is a First Nations run program that works with community members to help instill traditional aboriginal values among men and boys. The vast majority of offenders who commit acts of violence on women are men. We as men need to emphasize our positive and active role in both addressing this important issue and how we are working hard to eliminate violence against women. Aboriginal women are three times more likely to experience violence than other women. Stats provided by the Native Women's Association of Canada show that although these women make up 4 per cent of the population, they make up 16 per cent of all murdered women on record, and this is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

Today our government has asked Alberta to take action and join the Moosehide campaign. Together we can make Alberta a safer place, where aboriginal women and children can thrive and live fulfilling lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

1:50

Sonshine House

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sonshine house in Calgary-Currie is a second-stage shelter that provides a one-year residential and counselling program for women and children that are fleeing domestic violence and abuse. Sonshine house ensures that women and their children are kept safe from life-threatening, abusive situations. A second-stage shelter differs from our province's emergency shelters and transitional shelters in that a second-stage shelter provides long-term residence and counselling that aims at assisting women end that cycle of violence and reintegrate into their communities before becoming a domestic homicide statistic.

Unlike emergency shelters, Sonshine is funded independent of government. In 2004 donors came forward and helped Sonshine purchase and renovate a residential shelter. In 2007 a 24-unit, fully furnished suite facility was opened. Sonshine is currently working diligently to raise the remaining \$200,000 in order to complete a child therapy program, the only program in our province that deals solely with trauma associated with children who experience violence in the home.

Mr. Speaker, the only way we will break the inheritance of the cycle of violence is to treat the psychological consequences that mark our children. We know that children who have been exposed to family violence are more vulnerable to delinquency and social, emotional, psychological, and cognitive problems that have long-term effects on not only our children but on our society, which leads me to an important point. Second-stage shelters are an important part of ending domestic violence in our province because they not only remove women and children from dangerous and violent situations; they allow them to move past these situations completely. So I am committing myself to encouraging a shift in prioritizing second-stage shelters and wholeheartedly join those at Sonshine in this quest.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank them for the work that they do.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Let us begin with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Health System Administration

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has asked Albertans to judge his government on its progress. Well, Alberta Health Services was in front of the Public Accounts Committee today. What they said was enough to make Albertans queasy. There has been no progress at AHS. Wildrose has for years pointed out that the senior layers of management at AHS are bloated with executives. AHS said that they'd fix it. They announced that 70 VPs were being let go. Well, today we learned that they were just retitled. It seems that management has spent more time in the last year dreaming up new job titles than fixing the system. Does the Premier think that's progress?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to a patient-focused health care system. It's for that reason that we have a new minister who is very hands on, who has the courage and the vision to move forward to deal with some of the issues that we face and the challenges that we face in terms of the existing health care delivery system. I have full confidence in this minister. He's on top of his portfolio, he knows exactly what he's doing, and he'll deal with these issues.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've never heard that before.

The senior management layers at AHS are a mess. Former CEOs Chris Eagle and Duncan Campbell were paid as advisers, but there's no evidence that they did any work. Former CFO Allaudin Merali was the proverbial fox looking after the financial henhouse. Between them these failed execs took home almost \$2.3 million this year. Today we also learned that Covenant Health is restructuring and laying off five front-line long-term care workers. Is the Premier proud that the health system is better at paying executives to do nothing than looking after our seniors?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, it's very important to understand that Covenant Health is an independent organization that delivers tremendous health care to Albertans, whether it's in continued care or acute care. They're doing all they can to make sure they run an efficient, effective operation. I think they're allowed to operate their business the way they think they should. We support that.

Thank you.

Ms Smith: I think the Health minister misses the point. AHS management is a mess. We were promised efficiency; we've gotten everything but. There's been a revolving door at the top, and a lack of progress shows it. In its 2013 business plan AHS promised that they would keep staff growth to an absolute minimum, zero, in fact. Well, the 2014 AHS annual report shows that this year AHS managed to add a thousand new employees. Does the Health minister have any idea how many of these new workers were doctors and nurses and how many were just more bureaucrats?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health Services is committed to delivering the best health service in this country. Our province is growing by a hundred thousand people per year. We need to make sure that we have adequate service in all our various facilities across the province. This is a very difficult task as it's hard to find a variety of new people to do those jobs as our province is growing so quickly. We will do all we can to ensure that every Albertan is taken care of in an effective way. Our health care system is the best.

The Speaker: Second set of main questions.

Long-term Care for Seniors

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this Premier asked Albertans to judge its government on its progress, once again, so it's now time for some progress questions on seniors' care. Wildrose has repeatedly called this government to account for its divorce by nursing home policy. This government takes married seniors in long-term care and forces them into separate nursing homes up to a hundred kilometres away from their home. This is devastating for seniors and for their families. The government keeps promising to end this callous practice. Has there been any actual progress made?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, what I can tell you is that Albertans have been very clear that they want a stronger emphasis on seniors and seniors' care in this province, and we've got a Premier and a government that's listening. [interjection] If anyone is paying attention, they would see that even at the time that the Premier was reducing the size of cabinet by 30 per cent, he created a stand-alone Seniors ministry and gave that Seniors ministry purview over the housing portfolio from Municipal Affairs and from the affordable supportive living initiative. [interjections] Through the work that we're going to do with those entities and with Health Services, we're going to be able to do some great things on this file.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's customary to give the person who has the floor your full attention without interruptions. I didn't hear any interruptions when the hon. leader was asking the question. It would be very nice if we had no interruptions when someone is trying to answer it.

First supplemental.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's like it's the first time we ever asked this question. We keep hearing the government say that they've made progress on the divorce by nursing home issue, but we get letters that show that this is clearly not the case. All over Alberta there is either a 100-kilometre rule or an 80-kilometre rule. Surely, one of our several hundred AHS bureaucrats can figure out how to keep couples together. This isn't rocket science. Why hasn't the government made any progress on this simple management task?

Mr. J. Johnson: My understanding is that there is progress being made. There is more progress to be made, no question about that. AHS has eliminated the 100-mile rule with respect to allocation of seniors. Mr. Speaker, if you look at some of the things we've accomplished just in the last two months, including the \$180 million for 1,500 ASLI beds and long-term care beds; the \$70 million for safety with respect to our seniors' facilities; Willow Square, the \$20 million announcement that we just made; the \$160 million announcement for rural lodge renewals – this is exactly one of the issues that the Premier has asked us to try to tackle. We're doing exactly that.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, he's not answering the question because they haven't changed the policy.

Wildrose also first pointed out that our seniors in long-term care only get one bath a week. Convicted murderers are treated better than that. The government has promised to change this. Apparently the new standard is supposed to be two times a week, but it's not enforced, Mr. Speaker. Can someone over there tell us how many seniors are actually getting their second bath or shower in a week? Has there been any progress?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of things with respect to progress.

You know, back to the previous question, one of the main issues that we need to tackle is the space. We need more supply. We need more places so that seniors can age with their spouses in the community that they helped build and with the families that they've raised. That's one of the reasons we're making such great investments in seniors' space, and I'd hope that the opposition would join us in helping move that forward.

With respect to the other issue, obviously, it's one that we want to tackle, and we'll tackle that with the space.

The Speaker: Hon. leader, third and final set of main questions.

Ms Smith: The question was on baths, Mr. Speaker, where you get washed with water.

Long-term and Continuing Care

Ms Smith: This government is long on talk but short on progress. The Premier and the Health minister promised 194 new continuing care spaces in the middle of the by-elections. The problem is that almost three-quarters of those spaces weren't actually new. It was all election posturing. The government has now promised that in three years there will be 6,400 more seniors' beds than there were in 2010. Now, I find this very hard to believe. Can the Premier tell us how he will achieve this, when his team so far has failed so miserably?

2:00

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the hon. member to consider the facts as opposed to the rhetoric surrounding this. I mean, there is a new Seniors minister.

In addition, in the time since I've become the Premier, we have put out a proposal call for 1,500 new continuing care beds under the ASLI program. In the time since I have become the Premier, we have invested an additional \$160 million in rural lodges. In the same time there have been investments in the rural lodges, to ensure that they're safe and meet fire code, of an additional \$70 million dollars. This government is acting on the priorities of seniors.

Ms Smith: Speaking of confusing rhetoric, Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the Health minister have been using the terms "long-term care" nursing beds and "continuing care" beds interchangeably, but they must know that these terms have very different meanings under the law. Long-term care nursing beds require round-the-clock nursing care provided by LPNs and RNs; continuing care beds don't. Are they using these terms interchangeably to hide the fact that they know they won't make any progress on building long-term care spaces?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that the Premier has us doing is planning for the future. As we allocate funding, and as we announce these beds, and as we invite proposals to

build these beds, all these beds and these units are being built to the B2 standards so that that room, that physical room, can be used as a long-term care room. [interjections] It's the care that will change over time depending on what the client needs. So we are in effect building long-term care beds, although Health will decide how the beds get funded and what health care actually gets delivered in that room. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Hon. members, especially over here, do you find it so necessary to interject all the time? I thought we were setting a new example and a new tone. I see it happening on this side of the House, which is very refreshing – thank you – and I don't see it happening over there. If you want, I'll name names and I'll take further actions. [interjections]

Please. Please, Edmonton-Calder. If you persist, I'm going to invite you to do it outside. [interjection]

Hon. Member for Airdrie, any more out of you, and you'll be out too. [interjection] You're darn right you will.

Now, let's return this to some semblance of decorum like we have had in the past several days. We got lots of business done. Let's continue on.

Final supplemental, hon. leader.

Long-term and Continuing Care (continued)

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sounds to me like the minister needs to look up the definitions in the legislation. These issues matter because having long-term care nursing patients in acute-care hospitals costs our health system \$400 million a year. The Canadian Institute for Health Information has pointed out that Alberta has underinvested in long-term nursing care and that that has caused us to have the highest acute-care costs in Canada. Getting this right would be good for our seniors, for their families, and for our fiscal situation. Why isn't the Premier making any progress at all on this?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, our Premier took action immediately upon noticing and finding out that there were so many people in acute-care beds that should be in long-term care. We have put in place a program to move 740 people from acute care into long-term care. We're investing, as the minister said, \$180 million. We are committed to ensuring that people are in the right kind of care, and we're also ensuring that we meet all standards of care for everyone in long-term care with proper RN and LPN care. This government is committed to making sure our seniors are taken care of in the proper way.

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

Public Appointment Process

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The new PC Premier isn't the first to appoint his buddies to plum patronage positions, but he could do the right thing and be the last if he answers the Liberal call for the establishment of an independent appointments commission. The Premier should be familiar with this concept as he was a cabinet minister when the Conservatives brought it in federally in 2006. To the Premier: will you do the right thing and support the creation of an independent appointments commission as you did before, or will you keep the power to yourself with your inner-circle PC cabinet?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a Public Service Commissioner that fulfills a very important role in terms of the quality of appointments that we have at the government.

But I would take issue with the intimation by my hon. friend about the quality of people. People that we have appointed to positions are absolute high-quality people. I refer, for example, to the government's senior representative in the Asia-Pacific, someone who has been a distinguished Canadian diplomat who has served this country with distinction and is now serving the people of Alberta, fulfilling the responsibility to govern our offices across the Asia-Pacific. Those are the kind of people that we're looking for, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Premier should listen better. Nobody talked about the quality of the people, just the quality of the appointment process.

As part of his plan to erase all traces of the sins and excesses of the previous PC administration, the Premier said that all future public appointments – that's after the three political ones he made – will be made based on merit. That's a nice sentiment. The PCs have a long history of making these types of promises publicly and then doing whatever they want in private. To the Premier: will you take real steps to prevent patronage by letting an independent commission manage the public appointments process in Alberta? Yes or no?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I say, we have a Public Service Commissioner, who is an excellent person, that fills that role with real dignity.

I would point out to the hon. member that I've also struck a Premier's advisory committee on the civil service. There are two very well-respected Albertans, Mr. Ian Brodie and Oryssia Lennie, who have agreed to co-chair that. Discussions are under way now about the other panel members, and they will be focused on the quality of our civil service, renewal of the civil service, and making sure that here in Alberta we have an absolute top-flight civil service serving Albertans.

Dr. Sherman: I guess the answer is no.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier's former boss, Prime Minister Harper, said that a public appointments commission was an important step towards a more open, honest, and accountable government for Canadians. True to form, the Tories made nice speeches about accountability, but when it came time to keep their promises, they scrapped the whole thing. To the Premier: Actions speak louder than words. Do you still believe in the importance of an independent appointments commission? If so, will you adopt it as part of your much-delayed accountability act?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe in a high-quality public service. I believe in renewal of that service. It is for this reason that we have struck a Premier's advisory council on the civil service. Also, it's for this reason that Mr. Richard Dicerri was recruited to be the most senior civil servant in the province of Alberta, someone with more than five years' experience as a federal deputy minister, more than five years' experience as a deputy minister in other provinces, someone who has distinguished himself in the professionalism of the civil service that he has led. That's why he has been brought to bring leadership to our province.

Sexual Orientation and Human Rights

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this morning the Member for Little Bow explained to CBC listeners that he'd crossed the floor to the PC caucus because they are more socially conservative than the

Wildrose. In the last provincial election the PC caucus ran on a platform of defending Alberta's LGBTQ community from the lake-of-fire Wildrosers. My question is to the Premier. For the sake of clarification for those Albertans concerned with protecting human rights, does this mean the Premier's new management is now pro lake of fire?

The Speaker: Does anyone care to try and answer?

Hon. ND leader, would you like to move on to your next question, please?

Ms Notley: All righty, then. I see the responsiveness commitment is going the way of the dodo bird, but anyway.

The Premier's record will only be defined by his actions. His cabinet selection is one such action. Now, the labour ministry deals with human rights in Alberta workplaces every day, but the Premier decided to appoint a minister who was recently forced to apologize for association with a group that describes sexual minority Albertans and their supporters as servants of Satan. To assure Albertans that this troubling record is not relevant to the Premier's willingness to defend LGBTQ rights, will he today commit to his support for Bill 202?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, for the most part those seem to be gratuitous attacks on the character of ministers of the Crown, which I don't think are warranted and befitting this Chamber. My record as somebody who has stood for the rights of gay and lesbian people in this country is very clear, and it is long standing. It is of 10 years' duration. It goes back many years, and I don't think I need to defend that in this Chamber.

2:10

Ms Notley: Albertans need to hear about your record here, not your record from a decade ago.

The Premier also had to decide who would be in charge of ensuring the education of Alberta's kids. In that case, he's appointed an Education minister who led a private college with a morality clause that discriminates against homosexuals and who was a leader within a church which equates bestiality with being in a same-sex relationship. So the welcoming home the Premier is providing to many extreme social Conservatives is troubling to many Albertans committed to protecting LGBTQ rights. Back again to the Premier: will you or will you not support Bill 202?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've been very clear that we do not believe in intolerance in our education system and that we are supportive of the gay and lesbian community. We support safe, dignified, and respectful educational settings.

Once again, I think that the personal attacks which the member has offered are unfortunate. I don't think they're befitting of this province and of this Chamber, certainly. The Minister of Education has a long and distinguished career as someone who has been committed to public education in this province, Mr. Speaker, and I stand by him.

The Speaker: Thank you.

We're going to move on to Question 6, so please curtail and/or avoid totally any preambles to your supplementals. Let's go with Calgary-Fish Creek.

Alberta Health Services Executive Compensation

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last year Alberta Health Services awarded over \$7 million in severances, and it's not just severances we have to worry about. Today we

learned that when Dr. Chris Eagle left his post as CEO in October 2013, he was retitled as a special adviser, at the same bloated salary of \$650,000. He didn't leave this position until last month, but according to health officials this morning, Dr. Eagle produced – and I'm going to quote – no deliverables that we could find his handprints on. To the minister: is the severance workaround an appropriate use of health care dollars?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I need to reiterate that the new CEO of Alberta Health Services has been very clear that dealing with severances will be done in the normal course of business, done properly in a way that she feels is effective, following along the model that this government and our Premier have set. Severance will be something that is done in a way that is done in other organizations, in a way that's respectful to Alberta Health Services and the citizens of Alberta.

Mrs. Forsyth: Given that another former CEO of AHS, Mr. Duncan Campbell, was employed in that role for just one month before he was given a paid leave for the rest of the year, collecting a whopping \$1 million in pay and severance for his one month at the helm of AHS, does this minister think this is an appropriate use of taxpayers' dollars?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to reiterate that our new head of Alberta Health Services has put in place programs to ensure that Albertans get full value for all the people that work for us. We want to make sure that people are treated properly and effectively and Alberta citizens are taken care of the way they need to be taken care of.

Mrs. Forsyth: Will the minister commit today, along with the new CEO of Alberta Health Services, that there will be no more \$1 million severances, no more sabbaticals, and no more golden handshakes?

Mr. Mandel: Yes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by Airdrie.

Violence against Aboriginal Women

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Violence has threatened the lives of our most vulnerable members of our communities: our mothers, our daughters, our aunts, our grandmothers, your wives. Alberta has the second-highest rate of self-reported spousal violence among the provinces, and aboriginal women are three times more likely to have acts of violence committed against them than other women. My question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. Why is this government not moving beyond reporting statistics so that we can help stop the violence and actually show we care for my sisters?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her distinguished career and for her advocacy on behalf of her people. I wear the moosehide swatch today because of my passion and my concern as well for these issues, which are long standing. We are focused on what we can do to improve the circumstances of aboriginal women. We are aware of the higher rates of poverty, the difficulties in terms of addiction and mental illness, the challenges of the lack of vocational opportunities, the lack of educational opportunities. These are matters which we can have

an influence on, and this government is focused on doing exactly that.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so glad that everybody has a swatch on today. I know it smells, but it'll disappear in a while.

My first supplemental, then, is to the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations. Awareness is great, but what other supports are there for women to get themselves out of the cycle of violence and, of course, the cycle of poverty?

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud as well to stand against violence that is perpetrated towards aboriginal women today, and I thank the Member for Lesser Slave Lake for that question. Maskwacis, for example, has a violence unit that is dealing with families that have had violence in their families. Ka Goola' in the Dene Tha' First Nation is a domestic violence program that's happening. Second Chance for Young Moms is in Enoch Cree Nation, just very close to Edmonton. There are many programs. There will be more as we get this awareness going.

Thank you.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's so great to see that the Aboriginal Relations department is doing a great job.

My second supplemental, then, is for the Minister of Human Services. What is your ministry doing to support aboriginal women who really, actually need help?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that immediate outreach is vital to women and children to keep them safe. The family violence information line is available any time, toll-free, province-wide in more than a 170 languages, including Blackfoot and Cree. There are also resources in Cree as well. We also have the safety net shelters in place that provide safe accommodations for women and children, and we have agreements in place with five First Nations on-reserve emergency shelters to serve off-reserve women and children.

Bethany Airdrie Care Centre Funding

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, while this government is running around pretending like the last five years just never happened, there are seniors across this province that are suffering and dying, in some cases, because of gross mismanagement. In Airdrie a series of draconian cuts to staffing for dementia and Alzheimer's patients at the Bethany care centre has resulted in many seniors not receiving regular baths and developing life-threatening bedsores because of it. This is third-world stuff, Premier. Third-world stuff. When are you going to restore the funding for staff back to the Bethany?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, Airdrie is a very important community. The facility itself needs to have some supports. We understand that there are some issues. We've asked Alberta Health Services to look into it, and we'll be able to report back in due time.

Mr. Anderson: Alberta seniors and their families, Mr. Speaker, don't want to hear any more empty rhetoric on this. We can't just sit idly by and watch seniors suffer and get sick and die prematurely because of some ridiculous new bureaucratic funding formula. I want a commitment, and I want it now. Are you going

to restore the funding that was cut to the Bethany in Airdrie for these vulnerable seniors? Yes or no?

Mr. Mandel: As I've said before, Mr. Speaker, we'll keep that under advisement and will get back to the hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: Minister, I have pictures of seniors with festering, open bedsores sitting on my desk right now. I don't want to, but with their families' permission I will table them in here. It is not pleasant to look at, and it is happening over and over and over again. They deserve an answer now, Mr. Speaker. Will you or will you not restore funding for the staffing cuts at Bethany, or are we going to have to do this the hard way?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I have great empathy and sympathy for the people that the hon. member has described. We believe that we'll do all we can to ensure that everyone in that facility will be taken care of properly. We've indicated that we will look into it and will under advisement find out the answer for him. We'll find out very quickly. We'll get back to the hon. member right away.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Country of Origin Labelling

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. COOL is a requirement by which all fresh meat entering the U.S. must indicate its country of origin. This subjects our products to unfair competition within that market as regulatory costs increase. This barrier has cost our livestock producers, including those from my constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, hundreds of millions of dollars. Recently the WTO again ruled that COOL is inconsistent with U.S. trade obligations. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: despite this ruling, what can we expect from the U.S. which will serve to further stall an already . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

2:20

Mr. Olson: Thank you to the hon. member for the question, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important question for our producers. We are becoming frustrated. We have now won three times at the World Trade Organization, and we're now waiting for the American trade representative to say whether they're going to appeal. They have till the end of this week to do that. Based on past experience, we're expecting that they will appeal, and that'll take us into yet another round of the process before we get to the endgame, which would be retaliation.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that for the third time, as you indicated, the World Trade Organization has sided with Canada on COOL and that things seem to be stalled, what are we doing as a province in order to move this forward?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, we've been very active on this for the last several years. We've made numerous trips to the United States. We've been working with people on the American side because there are interests there who are also very frustrated; in fact, some are suing the U.S. Department of Agriculture over these rules. So we've been very active, and we continue to do that advocacy. This is now costing Canadian beef and pork producers over a billion dollars a year, and as I said, they are becoming very

frustrated. Our representative in Washington, Rob Merrifield, is doing excellent advocacy work for us down there as well, and we're just going to continue with that.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the U.S. track record for complying with the World Trade Organization's rulings on this matter has been incredibly poor, what actions are we prepared to take in order to ensure that Alberta has a fair trade relationship?

Mr. Olson: Well, obviously, Mr. Speaker, this is an arrangement between countries, so Mexico and Canada are both working together on this. We're working very closely with our federal government, and we are nearing the point where we will be talking about retaliation. The Americans have been put on notice that this is what we will do. Some would say that they don't really believe that Canadians would do that, but we're telling them in no uncertain terms that we are encouraging our federal government to take retaliatory measures if this isn't resolved very soon.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Hehr: The more things change; the more things stay the same. I say this because despite this government's recognition that there was an affordable housing crisis in 2006, little has happened on the file. Homelessness is up in Edmonton, youth homelessness up 17 per cent. There are no places to rent. Fifty per cent of people in our shelters have full-time jobs. To the Minister of Seniors: why has there been so little progress on affordable housing? Please do not use the excuse that people keep moving here. They've been doing that since 1905.

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, there have been some good developments happen within the affordable housing file. I can tell you that since 2003 we've developed 17,000 units, at a cost of about 1 and a half billion dollars. Beyond that, we continue to work with all of the stakeholders and with the Ministry of Human Services on the homelessness file. One thing I would point out, which is in my mandate letter and should be encouraging to those that are interested and to all our municipalities, is that the Premier has set out as a priority for this province to develop a provincial housing strategy. That's one thing that is needed. We recognize that, and we're going to set forward on doing just that.

Mr. Hehr: Yet more people are homeless today than in 2006.

On March 19, 2007, the province released a report, completed by an all-party committee, titled *Housing First*, and 72 recommendations were included, like establishing a homeless and eviction prevention fund, increasing rent supplement programs, establishing an Alberta home ownership program, and ensuring adequate release of Crown land to municipalities. To the same minister: why has this government ignored the good work of the committee and failed to take reasonable measures to get a handle on this issue?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad he brought those up because some of those things have been done, and there has been progress made on that. In particular, you could take the Crown land release in Fort McMurray, and you could point to the announcement that we made here just this week, with the great leadership of the Premier and the Prime Minister, with respect to affordable housing and seniors' affordable housing in Fort McMurray in co-operation with CMHC and the Willow Square

project there. There have been great efforts made in this area. We recognize that we have more to do, but in co-operation with our stakeholders on the ground, with Human Services, and under the direction of the Premier we're going to do it.

Mr. Hehr: Other measures included implementing a principle of inclusionary zoning to allow a broader mix of Albertans to the live in a neighbourhood and working with municipalities to legalize secondary suites. Instead of implementing this report, the government sat on its hands and failed to act, and we're at the same place, if not worse, that we were at in 2006. Will this minister commit to implementing the 72 recommendations in the report so that we can finally get a handle on the affordable housing issues facing this province?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, Mr. Speaker, we want to make sure that every Albertan has an opportunity to be in safe affordable housing right across the province, whether they're seniors or not. I'm happy to have another look at that report, but I can assure you that as part of the provincial housing strategy that we will be building under the mandate and the direction of the Premier, that will be one of the things that we'll look at along with many others. I think that coming forward in the new year, you'll see some plans to develop that provincial housing strategy, and I hope this member will support us in building that.

Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, today is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. There have been repeated calls from Alberta's indigenous leaders for the Premier to support a national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women. The inquiry would investigate the disproportionate number of indigenous women who are missing or murdered and provide recommendations to deal with the problem. To the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations: will you stand with Alberta's indigenous leaders and support a national inquiry?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are focused on what we can do here in Alberta to deal with the plight of aboriginal women, with the matters that we referred to earlier in this House: poverty, the lack of educational opportunity, the lack of vocational advancement, educational outcomes, and, as well, addiction issues. These are the matters that we can control within our province, that we can work on in a collaborative way along with First Nations. That should be our focus, and that is exactly what we are doing.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no reason you can't call for it, Mr. Premier.

Given that the RCMP has stated that the number of missing and murdered indigenous women is indicative of a much broader societal challenge and given that a national inquiry would place recommendations for solutions to this issue as well as allow indigenous communities to tell their stories and perhaps find closure in the losses of their loved ones, to the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations: how can you continue to say that there is no value in supporting indigenous communities across Canada in their call for an inquiry?

Mr. Prentice: No one has said any such thing, Mr. Speaker. Today represents an important step forward in terms of the Moosehide campaign, the swatch which I wear. We should all personally take

a stand against violence against aboriginal women in our society. This is a problem in Alberta that we need to address. That's why we are supporting this grassroots campaign, something that we are doing in conjunction with the friendship centres, which began the campaign. It's important that we all take stands individually and that men and women stand up against violence against aboriginal women.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wearing a swatch is not enough.

Given that this government has claimed – claimed – to be committed to working with indigenous groups and listening to their chiefs and leaders and given that all 48 of Alberta's chiefs supported a motion that calls for a national inquiry and that all 48 have asked the Premier to reconsider his position, do you really believe that you know better than Alberta's First Nations leaders on First Nations issues?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, no one would suggest that wearing a swatch is all that any one of us should do, and the hon. member should know, if he looks at my past history working on these issues over the course of a lifetime, that I have beliefs about what needs to be done. We will continue to work together. I am haunted always by a statistic that I learned when I was Canada's aboriginal affairs minister, and that is that an aboriginal woman, a First Nation woman who does not complete high school will make less than \$100,000 in her entire lifetime. That's what we need to address. It's poverty; it's educational advancement for aboriginal women.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Edmonton-Rutherford.

Calgary Ring Road Completion

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The southwest portion of the Calgary ring road is a very important piece of infrastructure for my constituents in Calgary-Shaw and remains top of mind for many. I understand that the next step towards the completion is finalizing the land transfer agreement with the Tsuu T'ina Nation. One of the questions I often receive about the land transfer, which is expected to take place early next year, is about the timing and why it is taking so long for that agreement to be put into place. To the Minister of Transportation: what is the delay?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're working on the completion of the Calgary ring road. We signed a major agreement just over a year ago with the Tsuu T'ina Nation. We're working with the Tsuu T'ina Nation and the federal government to get the land transferred to the Alberta government. Until that happens, we can't begin building the road.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ministry has suggested it will start the RFQ and RFP process only after the land transfer agreement has been finalized. To the same minister: given that the majority of the design work is complete, can you explain why the RFQ, RFP process cannot begin now so that we do not lose the 2015 construction season?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, we continue to consult with the people, and we continue to move forward with the design and, you know, working with the people and consulting with them on our project there. The design is almost complete, but we can't put out the RFP or bid it till we own the land. That will happen in due course. Any time you're dealing with the federal government, there's a process to go through, and we have to do that.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the spring the minister was adamant that the ring road would be completed using a P3 funding model and last week stated in this House, "We have yet to determine if the project will be delivered using a P3 model or through a more traditional tendering model. This will affect the overall cost." Well, it seems like quite a departure and a clear adoption of the Wildrose position on building infrastructure. So, Minister, what changed?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if I could say that we were ever adamant. We always look at procuring the project for the best value for taxpayers' money. All the rest of the ring roads have been completed using the P3 model, and we've shown tremendous savings for the taxpayers of Alberta in doing that, so of course we're going to look at that going forward. But to say at this point that that's exactly what we're going to do would be premature. We need to weigh and look at all options.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mental Health Services for Postsecondary Students

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I think most members of the House know, 1 in 4 Canadians will experience a mental health issue in their lifetime. Many of these people are postsecondary students, including the 273,000 in our own province. My questions today are for the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. I'd specifically like to ask the minister what his ministry is doing to ensure that we get to students early and that we get to them effectively when they present with mental health needs.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. He has been a tremendous advocate for postsecondary students. I recognize the need to address post-secondary mental health. The Alberta government has provided \$13 million a year directly to the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge to expand mental health services and develop models of care that can be used on campuses across Alberta. Another \$2 million has been provided to the Alberta Students' Executive Council to focus on mental health. I will be working with the Minister of Health to develop a strategy to deal with these very real challenges across campus.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the minister: given that we know it is very important to get to students or anyone with a mental health need early and that not all students will come forward to ask for help directly, what is the minister doing

specifically to ensure that students who do not ask for help get the help that they need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, I'm very concerned about mental health throughout Campus Alberta. Student leaders raised this issue with me whenever I have talked to them. Funding has been provided to the Alberta Students' Executive Council to let student associations run outreach activities that they know will work. Twelve student associations have run awareness campaigns. Several of them brought in guest speakers and offered peer support, and many organized activities to allow students to learn about the resources that are available. I'm pleased to say that these activities have reached 60,000 students across Campus Alberta.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the leadership that we've seen from postsecondary student leaders across the province and given that the government has in the last few years just begun to invest targeted dollars in supporting mental health services in postsecondary institutions, how can this House know that government will continue to stand by these students with more than just words?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that I'm going to continue to stand by the students on this issue. I spent a substantial amount of time in postsecondary education, and I understand the stresses that can accompany a postsecondary education. Students should know that I will continue to support them on this issue going forward. Likewise, I know the Minister of Health is of the same mind and is making the same commitment. I will be working closely with my colleague to tackle mental health issues for students. In my last answer I mentioned that our investment levels are for a three-year commitment; we aren't walking away from anything.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Stony Plain.

Suffield Elk Herd

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recent years the Suffield elk herd has grown exponentially. Fifteen years ago 200 elk were introduced to the Canadian Forces base by the province of Alberta. Now its population is at least 8,000, with a reproduction rate of 35 per cent per year. To the environment minister: what is the government doing to control this growing herd at a time when its impacts are being felt more and more by local ranchers, local residents, and travellers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a significant problem. It is our objective to ensure that we get that elk population to a number that's sustainable and manageable in that area. There are a number of complicating factors, including having to work with a federal agency there, the CFB Suffield. I've tasked my department to come back to me with a plan with some clear targets of what a manageable population is and over what period of time, with some key strategies working with stakeholders in the area to achieve that.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the main problem is getting this department to act. The hunting licence issue this year resulted in

fewer than 500 elk being harvested. Mathematically this is not the level of control that we need to responsibly protect and manage the Suffield elk herd. Again to the same minister: does the government have a real plan in place that will monitor the environmental impact of this herd and bring its size back to something that's manageable?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, we have put some strategies in place that are attempting to make sure that the problem doesn't get any worse before we come up with a long-term solution. So we have increased the number of licences that hunters are allowed, and I believe the CFB Suffield has tried to work with hunters to allow access onto the base for hunting. We do know that we need to come up with a better long-term plan to make sure that we reduce the population to a number that is manageable.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The original target was 800. Well, we're way, way past that. I'm not sure that this government understands the damage an invasive elk herd can cause to a fragile ecosystem, landowners, and highway traffic. Again to the same minister: what is this government's strategy if disease appears and spreads to neighbouring cattle ranches, causing ecosystem contamination, loss of livestock, and loss of tens of millions of dollars of financial impact?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, we clearly understand that this is a significant problem and one that we are taking action to deal with. Like I said, we have provided some short-term measures to ensure that the problem doesn't grow while we work with the stakeholders in the area, including property owners, farmers, ranchers, and the federal agency there, to come up with a plan that deals with this problem over the long term. I have taken action. I've asked my department to provide a strategy to us that will include clear timelines and clear targets of numbers and the strategies to achieve them.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Municipal Sustainability Initiative Funding

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past few years Alberta has been growing faster than any province in Canada. The benefits of that growth have been immense, but so have the challenges. This is particularly evident for our municipal partners, who are seeing greater use and wear on the roads, water systems, sewer networks, and recreational infrastructure. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: with over a hundred thousand new people coming into municipalities like Parkland county, the town of Stony Plain, and the village of Wabamun every year, what is the government doing to ensure that Alberta's infrastructure has accessible and sustainable funding to meet these new challenges?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for the question. I know that as a former mayor of Stony Plain he understands these issues very well. The government of Alberta is very committed to supporting municipalities. Currently we support almost \$1 billion in MSI funding every year and in

addition to that \$350 million in the basic municipal transportation grant and \$40 million in the Alberta community partnership funding. In addition to that, we have just signed with the federal government the gas tax fund, which is \$2.7 billion over the next 10 years.

2:40

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Some Alberta municipalities have found it difficult to obtain MSI funding. What strings are attached that inhibit municipalities from accessing them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This funding, hon. member, has very open criteria and funds many different kinds of projects, from roads to water/waste-water to transit projects to recreation. We have this so that municipalities and their communities can pick the priorities that are important to them. But there are some reporting requirements, as with any granting of monies, because we want to also be accountable for taxpayers' dollars.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Some of the smaller municipalities have expressed concern that operating dollars for their municipalities through MSI are being eliminated. What are you doing to address the concerns of smaller municipalities specifically?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you very much. That is a great question, Mr. Speaker. I have met with the members at both AUMA and AAMD and C, and smaller communities have raised this issue to me. I have told them we will look at the MSI operating to make sure that we're meeting their needs. It's also very important for them that they also want the Alberta community partnership. What I've told them is that we will review MSI operating and ACP to make sure that it works for our small communities and, indeed, all communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Government Policies

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2012 Wildrose was elected to hold this out-of-touch government to account. Over 440,000 Albertans picked principled MLAs committed to ending waste, restoring real property rights, and stopping gross overpayment with golden severance packages to all public servants. We've made a heck of a start, but new PC management may only be cosmetic surgery, a smooth talker borrowing good ideas. Mr. Premier, is our work done? If Bill 1 is just the start of property rights protection, what's next: more silver-tongued oration or real restoration?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member sitting where he is should not be talking about cosmetic surgery. From my perspective, dealing very specifically with the issue of property rights, the appeal of the land assembly legislation will effectively ensure that we do not have situations of constructive expropriation and de

facto expropriation in this province, and that's why it's important that the hon. members support it.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we see no indication that government employees, both political as well as within organizations like AHS, are really going to be paid and severed at market rates, will the Premier tell us when a truly complete sunshine list will be released and when all pay packages will be brought in line with the private sector? Albertans deserve to know this.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll take that one. The sunshine list is a list that came out last year. It releases all of the information on our public services, public servants. The hon. member raises a good issue. We'll continue to work on this issue and make sure that we release that information when it's available.

Mr. Bikman: We'll look forward to that.

Mr. Speaker, given that Albertans expect the government to end political interference in infrastructure decisions, like putting school portables where votes are sought rather than where locally elected boards say that they're more critical, and provide honest answers regarding tax increases, when can we expect to see substantive changes and get those answers?

Mr. Bhullar: We're building on the very critical infrastructure that's needed in this province, Mr. Speaker. Our Premier has made a commitment to it and will ensure that we build the schools, the road infrastructure, and the hospitals that are needed.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we continue on with private members' statements, could we have your unanimous consent to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (continued)

The Speaker: Let's go to the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some individuals who have played very important roles in developing Bill 7, which I hope to introduce later today.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that representatives from all three existing organizations as well as the unification agency are here, and I'd ask that they rise and remain standing as I introduce them: John Carpenter, CEO of the unification agency; Rachel Miller, CEO of ICAA; Curtis Palichuk, FCA, co-chair of the unification agency; Darrell Jones, FCMA, co-chair of the unification agency; Barth Bradley, chair of ICAA; and Derrek Wong, chair of CMA Alberta. Many other members, who I unfortunately do not have the time to introduce by name, nonetheless have put a lot of time and effort into this process. I'm very pleased to introduce them to you today and have them here to witness the introduction of Bill 7, and I ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: Continuing with Members' Statements, let's go to Edmonton-South West, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Lung Disease Awareness

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Across Canada November is recognized as lung awareness month. Today patients living with lung disease, their supporters, representatives of the Lung Association, Alberta and Northwest Territories, and pulmonary specialists are here to raise awareness about the prevalence of lung disease in Alberta.

Approximately 600,000 Albertans are living with lung disease, and that number is continuing to grow. There are over 40 lung diseases, including asthma, COPD, lung cancer, TB, cystic fibrosis, and idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. These and numerous other diseases impact the lives of Albertans of all ages, cultures, and backgrounds and are fatal for 1 in 7. This number is continuing to grow as many respiratory diseases are tied to an aging population. In addition to the human costs, respiratory diseases exert a significant economic impact on the Canadian health care system as a whole.

Celebrating a remarkable 75 years, the Lung Association, Alberta and Northwest Territories' goal is to create a world free of lung disease. Today, along with Leigh Allard, president of the Lung Association, Alberta and Northwest Territories and also a constituent of mine, pulmonary specialists, and patient advocates suffering from lung disease are here at the Alberta Legislature to educate MLAs about lung disease and continue to build on the positive partnership the association has had with the government to date.

I'd like to welcome all members of the Lung Association's delegation to the Alberta Legislature and thank them for their tireless work and continued leadership on this important issue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Official Opposition Achievements

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thirty-one months ago over 440,000 Albertans asked Wildrose MLAs to battle for truth, justice, and the Alberta way. Among other things, they were fed up with an entrenched sense of entitlement, bloated pay and severance packages, erosion of property rights, projects coming in late and at multiples of cost estimates – our Premier didn't even pretend to care what they cost – bloated bureaucracy, over-regulation, red-tape, broken promises, politically motivated infrastructure, health care wait times.

Since then we've exposed the most corrupt, entitled, wasteful, out-of-touch, arrogant Premier in the history of the province. All Albertans were relieved, including 59 across the floor. You're welcome. Got the abused, misused air fleet sold. You're welcome. Advocated for property rights; Bill 1 is just a start. You're welcome. Removed a draconian clause in the MGA that threatened locally elected municipal leaders with \$10,000 fines and up to a year in jail. You're welcome. Prevented bills 45 and 46 from removing rights contained in legal contracts. You're welcome. Got a partial sunshine list passed that lets Albertans know who's earning over \$100,000 a year. You're welcome. Challenged the government to cut overhead expenses but maintain and improve resources to the front lines in health care and education, a work-

in-progress, we hope. You're welcome. Brought instances of red tape to the attention of this government, resulting in the Premier forming a group to help businesses navigate the halls of bureaucracy. You're welcome. Continue advocating for prioritized infrastructure lists so that everyone knows where their project is on it and when it's scheduled to start. This would make it harder for government to jump portable classrooms up the queue to help candidates get elected. Clearly, that battle isn't over; is it, Education minister? You're welcome.

As you can see, Albertans, there's still a lot left for us to do for you. Don't fool yourself into thinking it'll happen without pressure from us. We'll not abandon your cause or our principles.

The Speaker: Thank you. I'm sorry; the time has lapsed, hon. member.

2:50

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Bill 7

Chartered Professional Accountants Act

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, Bill 7, being the Chartered Professional Accountants Act.

Mr. Speaker, it's an act to basically bring three organizations together: the CMAs, the CGAs, and the CAs. It's a bill that we brought forward in co-operation with and as a result of the request of the three organizations. The intent is to make sure that accountants in Alberta have labour mobility, that they are up to date with the national and world standards, and that we can continue to attract the best and the brightest not only from across Canada but from around the world to come here to live, work, and be accountants in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

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

Bill 8

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce first reading of Bill 8, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's justice system needs to be continually evolving, and it's imperative that our laws reflect those changes. Bill 8 proposes amendments to update several justice-related acts to ensure that the provincial legislation is clear and that it's consistent. These amendments will also help to make the province's justice system more efficient so that it can serve Albertans better.

The bill includes amendments to a very long list of acts, including the Court of Queen's Bench Act, the Estate Administration Act, the Family Law Act, the Limitations Act, the Notaries and Commissioners Act, the Oaths of Office Act, the Perpetuities Act, the Provincial Court Act, the Wills and Succession Act, and minor housekeeping changes to several other acts.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments in Bill 8 follow consultation with judiciary, Alberta's legal community, and members of the public, and these stakeholders support the changes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 75 I move that Bill 8, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Are we on tablings? Then I have something to table. Absolutely. It is a letter from the Farmworkers Union of Alberta. They are identifying the lack of effort to deal with injuries and deaths in the agricultural industry. They've included a copy of a *Calgary Herald* editorial from November 13 dealing with the failure of the new Premier and his government to deal with this issue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is the Q1 Monitoring Measurement report 2014-15, prepared by data integration, measurement and reporting, on health measures.

The second one is Alberta Health Services' deferred maintenance project list, the maintenance projects originally planned to be implemented prior to 2013-14 that have not commenced.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, do you have a tabling?

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In order to augment my question from this afternoon, I'm tabling the Housing First report done by the all-party committee back in 2007. I think that if we had implemented the recommendations from that report, we'd be a long way to ending homelessness instead of the place where we are today. I'd encourage all members to take a look at that and get serious about ending this problem before it continues to exacerbate.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Mandel, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors 2013-14 annual report; the College and Association of Respiratory Therapists of Alberta annual report 2014; the College of Alberta Psychologists annual report April 1, 2013, to March 31, 2014; the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta annual report 2014; the College of Hearing Aid Practitioners of Alberta annual report 2013-14.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Kubinec, Minister of Culture and Tourism, pursuant to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Act the Alberta Foundation for the Arts 2013-14 annual report; pursuant to the Historical Resources Act the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation 2013-14 annual report; pursuant to the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation Act the Alberta Sport,

Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation annual report 2013-14; pursuant to the Wild Rose Foundation Act the Wild Rose Foundation annual report 2013-14.

The Speaker: Thank you.

There are no points of order, so let us move on.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate November 20: Mrs. Klimchuk]

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Human Services, did you wish to continue?

Then I'd be happy to recognize the hon. Premier.

Mr. Prentice: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for allowing me to respond to the Speech from the Throne, which was delivered last week by the Honourable Donald Ethell, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta. I'd also like to thank my hon. colleagues on both sides of the Legislature for attending today as I deliver this which would be my maiden speech in this legislative Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, before getting into much detail, let me take a few moments to congratulate the Calgary Stampeders on their victory on Sunday in the CFL western final. It is, of course, always fraught with political risk for a Premier of this province to take sides in any battle of Alberta, especially one in which the stakes are so high, so in the interests of provincial unity, let me say that while I was in attendance in the stands at McMahon Stadium on Sunday, I'd like to reassure members that I was passionate about my neutrality and, in fact, took a great deal of ribbing for wearing my neutral Premier of Alberta jersey. Now that that's behind us, I hope that we can come together as a Legislative Assembly, as a House, and in a rare show of unanimity go on to support the Alberta team in the Grey Cup this coming weekend.

Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour not just for me but I think for every single one of us in this Chamber to be asked to represent our constituents in the Chamber. This is the first time I rise on behalf of the citizens of Calgary-Foothills, who put their faith and trust in me in the recent by-election to work on their behalf on the issues that matter to them in our free and democratic society. As I begin, I would like to thank them for their support and assure them that I will at all times work diligently on their behalf to advocate for their interests in this Chamber. I know there are several other hon. members in a similar circumstance, and none of us take those obligations lightly.

3:00

Let me say that as a newly elected Member of the Legislative Assembly and as Premier of the province I intend to uphold the standards that Albertans expect of us in the conduct of our legislative work. Albertans rightly expect that we conduct business

in this place in a respectful way, in a professional way, in a businesslike way. Certainly, debates in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, can be emotional. They can strike directly at political values and principles that each of us holds dearly, often in different ways, or matters which intersect with our personal beliefs or matters of conscience. But regardless of the levels of emotion or passion our debates can and should remain civil in this place. They should, I hope, reflect the mutual respect that we have as colleagues amongst ourselves.

Although we may slip from time to time, it will remain my goal as Premier to set the appropriate tone in this Assembly, which is the tone that our constituents asked for and deserve and which I think all of us, perhaps on all sides of the Chamber, who door-knocked in the recent by-elections would have heard loudly and clearly from Albertans in their own words.

Our debates in this place are passionate because each of us is guided by a set of principles that guide our decision-making. Throughout our history Alberta legislators and leaders have come to this Assembly to transform these principles into action, really, Mr. Speaker, to build a province which is second to none, literally the best place in the world, I would submit, to live, to work, and to raise a family. So, yes, we are fortunate.

For more than 100 years, Mr. Speaker, we have taken advantage of the natural resources that we possess as Albertans, that dot our landscape and rest beneath our soil, to create economic opportunity and prosperity. But I would in this speech make the point today that good fortune is never enough. The Alberta we live in and enjoy today is the result not just of being lucky but the result of ingenuity and our work ethic, our openness to trade, our embrace of sound economic policies as well as our embrace of sound fiscal policies, and, of course, our embrace of a society that values tolerance and diversity and which welcomes newcomers to this province and to this country.

It is for these things that Alberta is truly world-renowned. These are the traits that attract newcomers, that drive investment, and that elevate our quality of life in every corner of the province. In addition, Mr. Speaker, these are the same values that drive us to ensure, as we heard today in question period, the social advancement of First Nations and aboriginal people in this province, who were here long before others arrived, to ensure that they are equal and meaningful partners in the advancement of this province.

Mr. Speaker, these values and the people who live here that reflect them keep Alberta growing, and our challenge, really, in the circumstances that we are in today is to ensure that as we grow as a province, we preserve what we have built, and that we build upon it to construct a brighter future for those who will come after. I think all of us in this House are mindful of our obligations to our children and our grandchildren to leave this place better than we found it and to do work in this House which will accomplish that.

Mr. Speaker, in that respect, I do hope that the throne speech has provided a useful roadmap in terms of the best way forward. It reflects the commitments that I personally have made to the people of the province, initially over the course of this summer during the leadership campaign, during which time I campaigned the length and breadth of our province to become the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta, again hearing it at the same time over the course of this fall in the by-elections, certainly the by-election in Calgary-Foothills but also in Calgary-West, in Edmonton-Whitemud, and in Calgary-Elbow.

Our government is a government that is focused on the people's priorities in this province, Mr. Speaker and colleagues: a focused commitment, firstly, to sound, conservative fiscal principles; secondly, to ending entitlements and restoring public trust in this

province; thirdly, to maximizing the value of our natural resources and at the same time respecting and advancing and protecting property rights in Alberta; in addition, establishing our province as an environmental leader; and, finally, turning to enhancing and protecting the quality of life that we enjoy in this place we call Alberta, whether we speak of health, whether we speak of education, whether we speak of the care of our senior citizens. These are the matters that are the people's priorities in this province. They have spoken clearly, singularly actually, over the course of this fall and, I would suggest, over the summer.

So, Mr. Speaker, these are our priorities. They are our priorities because they are the priorities of Albertans. We did not select them because they fit on a bumper sticker. Frankly, they do not. But these are the priorities that Albertans have spoken to us about, that reflect their passion for this province and where we're going. Albertans have high expectations of their government. I think that is very clear and rightly so.

Firstly, dealing with our fiscal responsibilities, when it comes to the way government manages money, Albertans have told not just us but generations of politicians, generations of men and women who have been privileged to serve in this Chamber, that they have very high expectations. They expect us, frankly, to understand that every dollar that comes into the hands of the government of Alberta comes from their pockets, directly or indirectly, and every dollar that we borrow will need to be paid back, either by them, by their children, or by their grandchildren. There is probably no other jurisdiction in North America which is more mindful of those responsibilities and more articulate about them and more passionate about them than the people of our province.

So our duty is to spend those dollars wisely on the things that matter to the citizens of our province: roads; bridges; schools; senior citizens' facilities; hospitals; planning for emergencies; supporting our first responders; serving our children, our seniors, and our aboriginal population, Mr. Speaker. These are the front lines, the bread and butter of government, where Albertans expect to see results and where they expect progress from this government in the days ahead. Our government will deliver on the people's priorities over the course of the coming months and years.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to emphasize that none of that means that money is unlimited. As was noted in the Speech from the Throne, our province was built on sound, conservative fiscal principles, and the government will carry on with that tradition, demonstrating fiscal prudence and caution in the management of Alberta's public finances.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important today. Let me discuss a little bit about what that means in today's context. Last week – this has attracted some attention and has been mentioned in this House – Moody's delivered an authoritative message about the state of Alberta's finances. They concluded that despite recent drops in world energy prices and even if we face depressed prices for as much as a year to come, our province is strong enough to weather this storm and manage to maintain our sterling, triple-A credit rating, and we will. That is something that we are proud of and that every Albertan should be proud of.

There is no jurisdiction in North America that is in as strong a fiscal position as the province of Alberta. There is arguably no jurisdiction in North America which is in a net asset position in the manner in which the province of Alberta is. This is something that people in Alberta value and respect, and it is something that they do not take for granted and which they do not want their government to ever take for granted. Any government that takes this for granted, Mr. Speaker, will not long be the government of this province.

3:10

The challenges of oil prices that are hovering in the mid-70 dollar per barrel range are very real, and they cannot be ignored. Earlier in question period the Minister of Finance passed me a note reflecting that oil prices today, the WTI price, was, in fact, lower than \$75 per barrel. So there will be effects on our provincial revenues in the form of reduced royalties. These are very significant impacts. The resource industry, despite its entrepreneurial spirit, despite its fiscal strength, its financial strength and resilience, will also be forced to adjust, and this will have a bearing on investment decisions that are made in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I make the point – and I've said it repeatedly before – that this is distinctly not business as usual. For this government that means it cannot be business as usual, and it comes to how we will carry out our fiscal planning. Tomorrow my colleague the hon. Minister of Finance will provide Albertans with an update on our second-quarter financial results, and it will be a thorough update, a transparent update on exactly where we are as a province. They will show that we remain on track for a surplus this fiscal year even in the face of falling oil prices this quarter.

As we enter the next fiscal year, we must, however, recognize that it will be incumbent upon us to continue to safeguard our hard-earned financial strength, and I will let the Minister of Finance deal more specifically with what he's going to cover tomorrow. But if we are going to be fiscally prudent as we move forward in a low-price environment, we must rethink our assumptions and plan with more modest, more conservative revenue forecasts in our provincial budget, Mr. Speaker. This is the only safe way forward.

Lower revenues, of course, will mean that our spending must be restrained to ensure continued operating surpluses, but restraint will not come, Mr. Speaker, at the expense of results, so we must redouble our efforts to ensure services are delivered efficiently and that they are delivered effectively and that we are a province that is characterized by innovation in the delivery of government services. Albertans rely on those services, and we owe it to them to meet the standards that they expect.

We owe it to Albertans to meet the standards that they have set for themselves managing their own family finances, managing their own business finances, growing our savings, paying down debt, and setting aside money for emergencies, which will inevitably arise. This is the manner in which Albertans conduct themselves. That is why we are such an entrepreneurial province, that leads North America in terms of economic growth and that leads, frankly, the world in terms of many of the things that we do in this province and excel at. But we must be fiscally responsible if we're going to continue to preserve our capacity to be innovative and to be world leading, Mr. Speaker. We'll do this in a way that is clear and transparent and easy for Albertans to understand.

Accountability is, of course, the second element of the throne speech. Mr. Speaker, when governments and politics are at their best, when citizens are engaged, when debates are lively and meaningful, it's when those that we elect to positions of trust and people that we represent conduct themselves in an accountable manner. We refer to one another in this Chamber as hon. members. We do that for a reason, a very clear reason that has tradition in our democracy. We do it because our very democracy depends on the will of the people being faithfully carried out by those who are elected, working for their interests and only for their interests.

I have said before and I will say in this Chamber that to engage in public service is to be a servant of the people of Alberta. That is

what it means, and that must be the responsibility that each of us carries with us into office. We are assumed to be honourable, assumed to be committed to upholding the trust our constituents have placed in us. Serious harm can be done to our democratic institutions when that trust is seen to be violated. I can tell the House that under this government and as Premier the trust of the public is paramount, and I will endeavour at all times to uphold those responsibilities and show Albertans that when they look to their Premier, they will see the kind of conduct that they expect, which displays accountability and shows the values of public service, Mr. Speaker.

This, Mr. Speaker, is one of the reasons that I made a commitment and our government has made a commitment to bring forward sensible accountability legislation early in this session of the Assembly.

The bill is now on the notice paper, and it will be introduced over the next several days. In it we will take several concrete steps to rebuild public trust in government and in those who are serving within it. These will not be mere guidelines; these will be the law of the land. We will strengthen the rules regarding lobbying and conflict of interest. We will restrain severance provisions for political staff. We will ensure that government contracts are awarded on a more open, a more competitive, and a more transparent basis. Mr. Speaker, legislation like this is important, not only to strengthen the rules but also to send a signal to those who have elected us that we are here always on their behalf, reflecting their values, working in their best interests, and meeting the standards that they expect from us each and every day.

Dealing with our resources, Mr. Speaker, as we move forward upon a rebuilt foundation of trust, this Assembly and this government have a great deal of other important work to do, particularly as we look to our economic future. Albertans are looking to the government to continue to do what government is responsible for, not to be in business but to create the conditions necessary for good, high-paying jobs across all sectors of our economy.

Alberta has stepped, I would submit, comfortably into the role of being not only a driver of national economic growth but also an international player, a province that has international aspirations in terms of our connection to the global economy, bringing our world-class goods and world-class services – our energy, our forest products, our agricultural products – to countries in every corner of the globe. We are a free-trading country, and no province displays that value more clearly and credibly than the province of Alberta. But our leadership position in that respect is not a given, especially when forces outside of our border threaten to stifle our continued growth and diversification of markets for our products.

So, Mr. Speaker, working to maintain our position of national and international economic leadership will be a hallmark of this government in the days ahead. We will take to heart the entrepreneurial spirit and the creativity of Albertans and apply those ideals to our work in expanding access to markets for all of Alberta's products, in the resource industry and beyond.

Mr. Speaker, in that regard, I will personally be doing everything that I can to ensure that Alberta's voice is heard amongst those who, at least in part, hold the keys to unlocking markets where products must be allowed to flow more freely. We are, as I have cautioned people from time to time, the largest producer of energy in the world that is landlocked, so our future, inextricably connected to international markets, involves pipelines. It involves other jurisdictions with whom we must partner. So, for instance, next week I will meet with New Jersey Governor Chris Christie as he pays a visit to our country and to our province. Governor

Christie is an ally in our battle for Canadian access to more global markets, with a public position in favour of greater pipeline growth across North America, in particular the Keystone XL pipeline.

I believe we must always engage with our allies and form united fronts in favour of projects such as the Keystone project that make economic sense, that make environmental sense, and which are good for Alberta, good for Canada, and indeed good for the entire continent. But it's equally important, I would say, Mr. Speaker, to engage with those who may for their own reasons act as road-blocks to our ambition. So government ministers, senior public officials, and myself will continue to press our case for market access with our counterparts south of the border, including state governments, the U.S. Congress, and the White House. We are ably assisted by Mr. Merrifield, who is working with us as our envoy in Washington.

As a Premier I've also spoken to members of the U.S. House of Representatives. I've spoken with members of the U.S. Senate to advocate for our energy industry. I will be making my first trip to Washington as Premier in the new year, and there I will meet with legislators from all parties to build further momentum. It is important that we embrace bipartisan support in the United States when it comes to the Keystone pipeline and other initiatives, Mr. Speaker, so we will be respectful of the U.S. democratic system, and we will work on a bipartisan basis with players in the U.S. political system.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, while our efforts and the headlines also tend to focus on the challenges of market access for our energy products, Alberta must also continue to be a leader in agriculture, in agrifood, and in the export of our protein and other products. Our government recognizes the invaluable contribution that agriculture makes to our economy and to the Alberta way of life. Our farmers and our ranchers, through good times and bad, have been the economic and the cultural bedrock of Alberta's rural communities since long before the discovery of oil in the Turner Valley field. They can count on this government to stand by them because agriculture and our rural communities will continue under this government to be a bedrock foundation of Alberta.

We will invest in smart-focus programs that help bring innovation to agriculture, and in the rural areas, where agriculture is the economic lifeblood, we will invest in the transportation infrastructure required to keep people and products moving. This is why, in addition, Mr. Speaker, recently, together with the Premier of Saskatchewan and the Premier of British Columbia, we, through the New West Partnership, agreed to advance the interests of building transportation infrastructure in partnership with the federal government that will allow us to get our agricultural products from the farm gate through into the Asia Pacific basin to the markets that want what we produce.

Here at home this will include not only the construction of new infrastructure but also working to eliminate the maintenance backlog, which concerns me. It fits, I think, with the fiscal discipline of which we speak, the importance of maintaining the assets that you have so that you maximize their economic life, Mr. Speaker. This applies to the transportation infrastructure that we have in this province and the need to make investments to maintain these assets so that they are of long duration. Our transportation infrastructure investments will also extend to our largest cities, Edmonton and Calgary, and to our smaller urban communities as well. As Alberta grows, our commitment remains steadfast to work with our municipal partners to build better, more efficient public infrastructure and transportation, which includes public transit.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to turn this House's attention to another subject which I know is fundamental to members of this Chamber and their constituents and which has been an important part of my career in terms of work that I've done, and that is the subject of property rights. In the Speech from the Throne this government recognized that the foundation of a thriving free-market economy must be the recognition and protection of private property rights, and that is why the protection of private properties is enshrined in our Alberta Bill of Rights, which it is not in every province. So we immediately followed through with a piece of legislation that takes an important first step – and it is a first step – the first step in rebuilding trust between the government and property owners in Alberta.

As we move forward, we will be respectful as a province of the letter and the spirit of the laws protecting property in this province, including the Alberta Bill of Rights. We will be respectful and will work together with the Property Rights Advocate, and I look forward to hearing back from the legislative committee on his specific recommendations as to the changes that are needed to the Expropriation Act and the Surface Rights Act, which are, in fact, Mr. Speaker, from a legal point of view, the engine by which property rights are protected in this province.

I know that this is a different approach than the Official Opposition advocates. They have put forward a property rights motion that would amend the federal Constitution, taking this critical responsibility out of the hands of Alberta and handing it over to federal jurisdiction. Now, Mr. Speaker, we agree on many things with the current federal government – perhaps we don't agree on everything, but we agree on many things – but that does not mean that we should abdicate our duty to protect property rights here in Alberta, because federal governments in the future may not be so friendly to this province.

A generation ago in this very Chamber in which we sit – I was a young man at the time, but I do remember the debate – Peter Lougheed fought against putting property rights in the Constitution in the 1980s. Pierre Trudeau's philosophy was that property rights should be the purview only of Ottawa and the courts, and the Premier at that time fought against this. Mr. Speaker, this will not be a government that sets back the cause of property rights in our province by over 30 years. Mr. Lougheed was right then, and he would be right today. So we will do the right thing in Alberta. We will be vigilant in protecting property rights. That is why we have repealed the land assembly act. It is why we will be vigilant in terms of protecting landowners from constructive and de facto expropriations.

Let me come to the subject of the environment, because Peter Lougheed was also thinking about the future when he introduced at that time some of the most advanced environmental legislation on behalf of Albertans. It's incumbent upon us as a government to, I think, adopt the same forward-looking approach in terms of all of the matters within our responsibility, and nowhere is this more critical, Mr. Speaker, I would submit, than in the work we do to ensure a clean, safe environment for our children and our grandchildren. We are all conservationists in this province. We all care about the heritage that we have inherited. We all care about the condition in which we leave it to our children and our grandchildren. I have never met a farmer or a rancher in this province that is not fundamentally conservation minded and passionate about this very topic.

The steps that we take now on behalf of Albertans to ensure clean air, clean water, and protection of our landscape will have a profound effect on future generations in this province. We owe it

to these future generations, the people that Teddy Roosevelt once called the citizens unborn, to pass on our pristine natural heritage.

Make no mistake, I would say, Mr. Speaker; the eyes of the world are also upon us because for Alberta, as we emerge as a wealthy jurisdiction that is producing in excess of 3 million barrels of oil per day, there is an expectation that we will be an energy leader and that we will be an environmental leader as well. So as we develop our energy sector, seek expanded markets, we must have unmistakable resolve to do our best in terms of protecting the environment and being a constructive partner in terms of the global effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

It is, of course, entirely fair to ask why we as a province have received scant credit for the excellent work which has been done to this point. Alberta has shown extraordinary environmental leadership in so many ways. This was the first jurisdiction in North America to regulate industrial greenhouse gas emissions and amongst the first to put a price on carbon, and while there are critics who would question whether the price of carbon is adequate or not, Mr. Speaker, the real test is that other jurisdictions, including the province of British Columbia, with their most recent framework for LNG, as well as the province of Saskatchewan, have adopted what is, substantially, the Alberta model in terms of the best way forward for those jurisdictions. What we are doing in Alberta has also attracted attention internationally in terms of the model that we've set for regulating emissions of industrial carbon.

The Speech from the Throne reminded us – and I look forward to reminding our potential customers of this as well – that we have been a leader, and when it comes to subjects like carbon capture and storage, the citizens of Alberta, the taxpayers of this province, have invested more in the science of carbon capture and storage than anyone on the planet, Mr. Speaker. There are initiatives such as COSIA, where there is significant progress being made in our province, where industrial players have come together, set aside their intellectual property rights, and fought to advance environmental causes.

3:30

True leadership builds on historical success, aims higher, and challenges others to do the same. As it was pledged in the Speech from the Throne, in the weeks ahead this government will bring forward a new climate change framework that will build on our past successes and show the way forward in the future. It will in particular work towards partnerships: partnerships within Canada, continentally, and internationally. Within it all stakeholders – industry, aboriginal and environmental groups, and others – will have a role to play in demonstrating that Alberta is serious about being in the environment business and that we are here to stay, Mr. Speaker.

A strong, growing economy generating good, high-paying jobs; a clean, healthy environment; sustainable public finances: together these form the basis of a high quality of life for our citizens. Mr. Speaker, to Albertans' immense credit as a rule we don't define our quality of life as a measure of what government does for us. That is not the Alberta way, it has never been the Alberta way, and I hope that it will never be the way that we define ourselves as Albertans. It is not what we take from government; it is, rather, a shared value as Albertans that leads us to not look to government first for the solutions to our challenges.

Self-reliance coupled with support from family, from friends, from our communities, and from our faith communities has throughout our history been our touchstone. It is what has made us strong as a province. Meanwhile our success as a province has drawn newcomers from across Canada and around the globe who

have been welcomed here with that same spirit, that same spirit of innovation, that same spirit that has drawn people here from all over the world.

But as Albertans have grown, so, too, have the needs that we must appropriately meet as a government. So our province has built a world-class education system. I don't think that that is seriously in dispute. We've established a publicly funded health care system that looks out for everyone in need of care regardless of their individual means. We ensure that the seniors, our parents and our grandparents who have helped build this province, receive the services they need as they age so that they are able to do so with dignity. We've helped put young people to work with skills training, matching people with jobs and jobs with people. All of this is the important job of government.

It is important that we focus the range and quality of social services on offer to Albertans, and the needs have never been greater. The needs of our society as our province heads toward 5 million people have never been more demanding. Pressures on the system remain. Our government has committed to address those pressures with smart planning and efficient and effective spending. But let it be said, Mr. Speaker, that no other jurisdiction in North America is facing the growth pressures that we are in this province at this point in time, illustrated perhaps most clearly by the fact that across Alberta there are over 230 school projects in various stages of design, preparation for construction, construction, and commissioning.

We do this because it is necessary that we do this. We do this because we need to open in excess of 78,000 new spaces for students because the children are here, Mr. Speaker, and they need schools. We make these investments where they are acutely needed, with an eye on the results that we are expected to deliver. We will work directly with those on the front lines of service delivery to ensure that the systems that are in place to do their jobs are working as well as they possibly can and reaching every person who needs them.

In our Alberta, Mr. Speaker, there are no second-class citizens. Whether you are urban or rural, our children, our seniors, First Nation and Métis, those on low income, and those who are homeless, all aspire to receive quality services from the province of Alberta.

While we improve our systems, we will also increase capacity in our services, working closely with our municipal partners to build more schools, to build more continuing care spaces, to create more spaces for senior citizen housing needs, to improve the condition of the existing stock of senior citizen housing that we need. At all times we will treat every dollar we spend or contemplate spending as a matter of trust between the government and the people who we serve and the taxpayers who provide those dollars to us.

As I conclude my comments, Mr. Speaker, Albertans do have high standards. They have high standards. They want to stand tall at home. They want to stand tall abroad, proud of what we've accomplished and hopeful about what is yet to come for our province. Albertans have a right to feel let down when we fall short of those standards.

Mr. Speaker, I'm incredibly optimistic about the future. Like so many Albertans, I've lived through the difficult times in this province, but I've also had the good fortune to see Alberta at its finest. I've seen our province put its immense talents on display and stack up with the best in the world. Economically, socially, culturally, environmentally: I've seen our province everywhere it goes as a leader, aspiring to be a leader.

We have so much to be proud of and so much more that we can achieve working together. Our government understands the role

that it can play in those achievements. We will be there to demonstrate accountability to Albertans when they demand it, and we will be there to support Albertans when they need it and to sing their praises across the country and around the world, indeed, as we often do, because we deserve it in many respects.

Mr. Speaker, this government and this Premier are getting to work. This is Alberta under new management. Thank you. [some applause]

I now move to adjourn the debate. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Premier, I believe I heard you move to adjourn debate. Did I hear that correctly?

Mr. Prentice: There was a bit of a clamour at the end, Mr. Speaker, for which I apologize. I now move to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: I couldn't tell – the applause started so quickly – but thank you for clarifying that.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, under 29(2)(a) are we allowed to ask questions?

The Speaker: The motion is to adjourn debate, and I just clarified that with the Premier. My understanding is that the motion should now be voted on, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Could we then come back to 29(2)(a)?

The Speaker: The Premier has 90 minutes within which to speak. He used about 47 or so. So he may choose to come back and speak, and then you'd be entitled to 29(2)(a) at that point.

Mr. Mason: Oh, at that point.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier has moved that we adjourn debate on the throne speech replies.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Alberta Property Rights Advocate

9. Mr. Denis moved:
Be it resolved that:
 1. The 2013 annual report of the Alberta Property Rights Advocate office be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship for the purpose of conducting a review of the recommendations outlined in the report;
 2. The committee also review the 2012 annual report of the Alberta Property Rights Advocate office;
 3. The committee may, without leave of the Assembly, sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
 4. In accordance with section 5(5) of the Property Rights Advocate Act the committee shall report back to the Legislative Assembly within 60 days of the report being referred to it if the Assembly is then sitting or, if it is not then sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess we could take a bit of an Alberta break here.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this motion is debatable. Is there anyone who wishes to speak?

If not, would you like to close debate, hon. Government House Leader?

Mr. Denis: I think we're concluded.

The Speaker: The question has been called, then.

[Government Motion 9 carried]

**3:40 Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 3
Personal Information Protection
Amendment Act, 2014**

[Adjourned debate November 20: Mr. Quadri]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, you have 17 minutes left to speak. Do you wish to take up that opportunity?

If not, are there others?

Seeing no others, then, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

**Bill 4
Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014**

[Adjourned debate November 20: Mr. Campbell]

The Speaker: We are going to resume with the hon. President of Treasury Board. Should he wish, he'd have 19 minutes left to speak.

If not, I'd like to recognize the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I have reasonable grounds to declare a conflict of interest, so I would like to ask to remove myself from any discussion or debate on this.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The member who has just spoken, from Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, wishes to recuse herself from the debate, which, if you want to know more about, you'd be wise to visit the Conflicts of Interest Act, obligations of members, part 2.

Thank you. You are excused, hon. member.

Let us carry on, then. The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and speak to Bill 4, the Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014. I do have the privilege of having a few horse breeders, some stables, and some training race tracks in my constituency. Growing up in an agricultural-based family, horses have been a huge part of our lives, chasing our cows around and, you know, trying to raise a few, sell a few, and make the odd buck.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

It's a great industry, the horse-racing industry. It employs a lot of people. It gives, you know, people who may not have had access to being around horses the opportunity to go and have some entertainment. Of course, with any type of gambling we want to make sure that people are gambling responsibly, and we don't like to see anybody have any gambling issues. That's always a concern.

Specifically with Bill 4, I have contacted many stakeholders, and they've had some questions. I have some questions for the hon. minister. I guess the first question I would like answered is: who brought about the changes to this bill? Why was this bill brought forward at this time to be changed? Was it brought forward by members of the horse-racing community, was it brought forward by the board, or was it specifically brought forward by the government? And, I guess, why did they want to see these changes?

I guess the biggest change that I see in this bill is that the government, the cabinet basically, will be appointing six members of the general public, and one of those will be the chair. Now, that brings some concern. Who are they going to appoint? We see with many of the bills that they've brought forward that cabinet gets to appoint board members. There have been quite a few issues with the appointing of board members. [interjection] I'm not sure what was going on there. I thought maybe the hon. Premier was coming to sit with the Wildrose. It's very nice to see you on this side, hon. Premier. I wasn't sure what was going on there. Back to the bill. You rattled me there for a minute.

Mr. Anderson: He can't sit here.

Mr. Hale: The Premier can sit where he wants. Let's get back to the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Please continue, hon. member.

Mr. Hale: Stay on the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, you do have the floor.

Mr. Hale: Yes, thank you. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I apologize for the distraction.

Mr. Hale: So, it is a concern, how cabinet is going to appoint these members of the board and who is going to be on the board. I would be interested to see whom they appoint. I know that there is, you know, only one person from the level-A race track when previously there were two. There is one person from the B track, which mainly is quarter horse racing, which pretty much stays the same.

The Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association of Alberta now does not have a person at the board. I would like to know why they have been left off as a specific member of the board. It's important that a board like this encompasses all the members of the horse-racing family, especially them. I think they're important.

Basically, overall, I will be supporting the intent of the bill. I will be providing one amendment when we get to Committee of the Whole, which I think will enhance the bill and will allow the Alberta public and this Chamber to ensure that the new board, appointed by cabinet through orders in council and through their various workings, I guess, are held accountable. There are millions and millions of dollars of public money put into Horse Racing Alberta through the lottery. We need to ensure that these board members are acting and using that money accordingly. But at this time I look forward to the hon. minister's answers to some of my questions and continued debate.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a couple of concerns on Bill 4, the Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014, and section 7, where the Fiscal Management Act doesn't apply to Horse Racing Alberta. The corporation will be permitted to continue to run operation deficits. It also doesn't fall under the Auditor General.

The proposed changes to the governance structure of Horse Racing Alberta would allow the board to be more accountable. Not applying the Fiscal Management Act to HRA would allow the corporation to continue running operational deficits. In addition to other horse racing commissions in other provinces across Canada, Mr. Speaker, they are subject to audits either by the Auditor General or an independent auditor appointed by the cabinet.

The horse-racing industry has been subsidized big time, and those subsidies could be better spent on the K to 12 education system or provide support for school nutrition programs, Mr. Speaker. That is my concern.

3:50

Horse racing in British Columbia is governed by the Horse Racing Act, 1993. Under the legislation the British Columbia Racing Commission is composed of not fewer than three members that are appointed by the cabinet. Appointment of the members by the cabinet is also a concern in Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority is responsible for licensing and regulating horse racing. In Manitoba, as well, the Horse Racing Commission Act stipulates that at least three members of the commission are appointed by the cabinet. The accounts of the commission are audited by the Auditor General or another auditor as appointed by the cabinet. So there should be some checks and balances in place here.

Those are the concerns I have with the bill, and I think they should be addressed.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has questions or comments for the member.

Seeing none, I'll look for the next speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I want to indicate that the New Democratic Party does not support this bill. Some of the changes introduced were necessary in order to increase transparency. There still remain considerable issues with the act as it is proposed. We want to be clear, once again, of our continued opposition to the subsidization of the horse-racing industry in this province.

The changes made in this bill with regard to remuneration and payment of expenses to board members was necessary. We do agree that the ability of the board to determine their own rate of remuneration and payment of expenses needed to be changed; however, the proposed change isn't much better. It keeps the decisions regarding remuneration and payment of expenses behind closed doors, and this is not transparent, nor is it accountable to the people of Alberta. Not only is this secretive; I think it's out of touch with Albertans.

The bill does not end the subsidies given to the horse-racing industry. Now, industry insiders claim there are no subsidies for this industry. The Alberta Standardbred Horse Association states in a document about slot revenue and horse racing in Alberta: "Let's be very clear; horse racing in Alberta is not subsidized by the Provincial Government." Mr. Speaker, I was around at the time, just very early in my time here, when the Auditor General

found that the horse-racing industry was effectively receiving subsidies because they were getting considerably higher revenues on the slot machines and VLTs than were being allowed to private operators of, for example, hotels and so on. In order to make that okay, they had to change some legislation, change some rules, to allow that to occur, because it was a clear violation of the regulations around VLTs at the time.

The annual report shows that more than 50 per cent of revenue from slots goes to Horse Racing Alberta and not into the lottery fund. That's compared to 70 per cent of casino slot revenue and 85 per cent of VLT revenue which goes to the Alberta lottery fund. So we still have a situation where the horse-racing industry takes a bigger share of the revenues from VLTs than is allowed to other people who operate those machines. If a full 70 per cent of the revenue of the slots at racing tracks had gone to the Alberta lottery fund, it would have amounted to an increase of more than \$8 million in 2012 and more than seven and a half million dollars more in 2013. That's a pretty big subsidy, Mr. Speaker.

Now, not only is the industry benefiting from their ability to keep more of the revenue generated by slot machines than casinos do; they're also benefiting through the exception that allows them to have these slot machines in the first place. In 1996 the government allowed horse-racing tracks to have slot machines, going against previous government policy, which stated that casinos were the only place where slot machines were allowed. This program gave the same 15 per cent of revenue that they give to casino owners to the tracks. However, the rest of the profit, most of which normally goes to charity, in this industry is largely kept in the industry. This is by as much as 51.7 per cent. In 2008 \$35 million from slot revenue at Alberta's three tracks went to the horse-racing industry. In 2012 it was \$22 million, in 2013 it was \$21 million, and between 2001 and 2011 over \$260 million have gone to this industry through the sharing of slot revenue. So it's clear that the industry is indeed being subsidized.

Now, this is by a government that stands on the principle that the government shouldn't pick winners and losers, the government shouldn't be involved in business, the government should not be subsidizing one sector of the private economy over others. But notwithstanding this subsidy, Mr. Speaker, Horse Racing Alberta continues to struggle, consistently posting annual deficits. In '09 their deficit was almost three quarters of a million dollars, in 2012 their deficit was \$150,000, in 2013 their deficit was \$970,000, and in 2013 their cumulative deficit was over \$320,000 dollars. Despite these subsidies horse racing in Alberta continues to struggle, posting considerable deficits in the three years between 2009 and 2013. It is a struggling industry, and they are continuing to close tracks in the province.

We first raised concern about subsidies to this industry when this legislation was debated. When the Horse Racing Alberta Act was introduced in 2002 through Bill 16, the Racing Corporation Amendment Act, 2002, the MLA introducing it explained that it intended to assist the industry and Alberta's agricultural community in their efforts to revitalize this proud tradition. We raised questions about why this industry was being subsidized when the Klein government had built its reputation based on the respect of free-market principles, but I think that there are continuing questions about this. For example, every Alberta newspaper in the province has critiqued the government subsidies to this industry practically every year since it was passed, and it goes on. I don't think I need to read you the editorials and so on that have spoken out against this.

Since then, Mr. Speaker, since this policy was introduced, the world has gone through a major financial crisis. Governments, including this one, have instituted massive cuts, and in 2013 this very government instituted heavy cuts to postsecondary education, to PDD, and to seniors' care, and they have since broken their promise and cancelled plans for 131 of the promised 140 family care clinics. These cuts did not include an end to the subsidies to the horse-racing industry. So the government is clearly putting their friends raising thoroughbreds on those beautiful ranches with all those beautiful white wooden fences ahead of children, seniors, education, health care, and all of the things that are important to the vast majority of Albertans.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we're concerned about the amount of time the Assembly has spent discussing the size and composition of this board. In 2002 the Assembly debated the change of the size of the board from six to 12. Now it's being changed from 12 to 11. With the impending crisis regarding Alberta's crumbling hospitals, overflowing classrooms, and the terrible conditions in seniors' care, how much time do we have to spend debating this board while we fail to address the more serious issues affecting this province?

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate that while there are some modifications to the board and how it's composed, to the status of the corporation as a provincial agency and so on and various, I guess, lesser issues, the basic fact of the matter is that we don't believe that the provincial government should be continuing its subsidization of this industry. It is in many respects a dying industry, and there are fewer and fewer tracks simply because other forms of entertainment and other forms of gaming have emerged, that have cut very much into its market share. We believe that we need to respect the choice of the people who make their entertainment choices, their gaming choices, if that's what they want to do, and not be picking winners and losers and using a skewed formula for allocation of gambling revenues in order to continue subsidization of this industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, are there other speakers?

Hon. minister, would you like to close debate?

Mr. Campbell: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few quick words. First of all, we now understand why the member from the fourth party will never win a seat in rural Alberta; he doesn't understand rural Alberta. Horse racing provides jobs in rural Alberta, and it's something that we have to do to continue to make sure that we create those opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, I think, you know, that these are modest changes to the Horse Racing Alberta Act, but I think they're important changes. Number one, the proposed changes will bring into line more public representation on the board and are in line with Alberta's Public Agencies Governance Act. Our Premier has made it very clear that we'll have more transparency on our boards, and this will do that.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to make sure that people understand that public members will be selected from an open competition and screened for their relevant experience and expertise, and all board appointments, both public and industry nominated, will be made by order in council, and this will ensure consistency in the appointment process for all board members.

Mr. Speaker, also, as far as remuneration for board members, it's important to understand that that will be determined by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, and there is a schedule out so that all of us in the House know what board members are paid for, whether it's under four hours, under eight hours, eight hours a day. Again, that's nothing new.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to make it clear to this House that negotiations continue between the government of Alberta and Horse Racing Alberta for a renewed funding agreement. The current funding agreement expires on March 31, 2016, so I hope to bring forward a new agreement here sometime in the new year as to the agreement that we reached between Horse Racing Alberta and the government of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, again, these are part of the Premier's commitments to openness, transparency, and board accountability. The Premier has made it very clear that we will be putting people on boards based on their merit and their experience, and so far the Premier has lived up to his word. We will continue to move forward in a transparent manner.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members of the House to support the Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

Bill 5

Securities Amendment Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate November 20: Mr. Campbell]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Wildrose will be supporting Bill 5. It is a continued effort to harmonize general derivatives provisions with the federal government. It includes incorporation of representatives, registered brokers, and advisers. It enhances enforcement provisions, which is, obviously, important given what we've just gone through in the last several years in that market. It also gives recognition of oversight of the Canadian Public Accountability Board as an auditor oversight organization, and there are other issues. We have no issues with this bill, and we'll be supporting it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals will also be supporting Bill 5, Securities Amendment Act, 2014. It will permit the continued harmonization of regulation of derivatives across Canada in accordance with Alberta's ongoing commitment to harmonization, and it goes on to incorporation of individual representation, the Canadian Public Accountability Board, and enforcement and all that. Canada, unlike most countries, has a decentralized securities regulation regime, and as such, it must rely on its provincial governments to enact legislation supporting the ongoing reform of the Canadian regulatory system.

The changes proposed in Bill 5 are part of a national effort to harmonize securities rules and mirror those being made in many Canadian jurisdictions, Bill 5 and earlier regulatory changes that our caucus supported in the 2014 spring session. As a province and a country we need to be doing everything possible to protect investors and maintain the integrity of our capital markets. If the 2008 global financial crisis taught us anything, it is that to be complacent in the lack of regulatory vigilance could have

catastrophic effects, Mr. Speaker. No country or jurisdiction is immune to the effects of a market collapse. Therefore, it is important that we do our part to support the health and stability of the world financial system. Alberta Liberals acknowledge that the proposed changes are a necessity for Alberta to be able to honour its national and international commitments to improving securities regulation.

For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, we will be supporting the bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't realize the member from the NDP was trying to stand up.

The independent caucus will be supporting this bill also, and should the Premier ever come back on this side, he will need to bring his own chair. I have no chair for him.

Anyway, other than that, a lot has already been said about it. I don't need to repeat what has already been said.

Again, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, thank you, hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre from the independent caucus.

Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) for that independent member?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand up and speak to Bill 5, the Securities Amendment Act, 2014. The Constitution of Canada provides that the regulation of securities is a provincial jurisdiction. Of course, that document was formulated in the mid-19th century, the later middle of the 19th century, so a few things have changed since then.

I don't think leaving securities regulation in the hands of 10 different provincial governments serves the role of investment in the economy, nor does it well serve the investor. I think we need to move towards a more modern system, and I know that this has been a problem for the government, not wanting to cede this constitutional jurisdiction to the federal government, that is anxious to take it over, but at the same time trying to find some way forward, where we can have a more unified national standard for the regulation of stock trading and so on.

The problem is that 10 different jurisdictions in the modern world is a rather parochial solution that's no longer really tenable. What we've said in the past is that we shouldn't have the federal government impose its securities regulation but that we should have a national regulator and that the provinces need to come together to negotiate that so that we have a national regulator. I know that there are some provinces that don't agree with that. I think the federal government is proceeding to move unilaterally, and I think this bill is perhaps a response to that, Mr. Speaker, but it is clear to us that in this particular case, even though the Constitution hasn't been amended, it's been superseded by technology and the fast-paced movement.

4:10

This particular Securities Amendment Act focuses on the incorporation of individual representatives, and it allows individual representatives of registered dealers and advisers to provide services through a professional corporation. It provides

for the recognition of the Canadian Public Accountability Board as auditor oversight. It clarifies enforcement rules and creates a mechanism for issuing automatic reciprocal enforcement orders in Alberta against securities violators. It allows the Alberta Securities Commission to set its own fees, as Ontario and B.C. already do.

Now, there's a general derivatives harmonization, which was the main focus of Bill 3 in the last session, which was another Securities Amendment Act. It made the language clear around derivatives but leaves the exemptions in the hands of the commission.

Mr. Speaker, currently many derivatives are traded over the counter in private exchanges, not in the public exchanges like the Toronto Stock Exchange or the New York Stock Exchange, that we're all familiar with. Until recently they were unrecorded and unregulated. In October 2012 the Alberta Securities Commission brought in regulations around over-the-counter derivative trades.

I think that securities governance is an area of provincial jurisdiction, as I mentioned. The federal government is pushing forward with a federal regulator. So far it will only be Ontario and B.C., and we've been reluctant to join because of, as I mentioned, the concerns over a loss of jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, I think the act is perhaps a good step in many respects to harmonize our laws with the rest of the provinces and to provide some increased protection for investors, but just like these Securities Act amendment bills get repetitive, it also gets repetitive for us to point out that we wouldn't need to waste valuable time and resources amending the Securities Act every few months if we would just join the other provinces in supporting a national regulator. Now, it would be preferable, from our point of view, if the provinces could get together and agree on a common approach, but I think that that seems to be very, very unlikely.

I have a few questions that I was interested in asking. I know that our federal counterparts in Ottawa, the federal New Democrats, are saying that the Harper Conservatives should not be moving ahead with a national securities regulator without the support of all the provinces. I think that this is something we need to take into account. We know that the Wildrose wants a stronger provincial regulator and have called the current protections: breeding for the wild, wild west of securities laws. Did you guys really say that? Okay. I think that they'd be reluctant to hand over the keys to the federal regulator.

We have called for a national as opposed to a federal government regulator in the past, as I mentioned. You know, I would like some answers to a question, perhaps in the committee stage, for the bill sponsor. We'd like to know why the government is willing to see Alberta left behind as other provinces are joining the call for a national regulator. What is the end result of that going to be for our province?

Mr. Speaker, I await further debate with respect to this bill. I look forward to some of the questions and possibly amendments in the committee stage and thank members for their kind attention.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, are there other speakers?

Hon. Minister and President of Treasury Board, do you wish to close debate?

Mr. Campbell: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 1 Respecting Property Rights Act

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Yes, Mr. Chair. The Wildrose will be supporting the passage of this bill in order to repeal Bill 19, which was obviously not a very good act, as the Premier himself said. It is far overreaching with regard to property rights. That's something that we fought very hard in this Legislature for. I remember a lot of late nights in that regard as a member of the opposition defending the rights of property owners from that bill. We were told that we were fearmongering and overreaching and all that sort of stuff, and it turns out that their new leader agrees with us a hundred per cent on that. And that's good. That's obviously something that we can agree on.

I will take the Premier at his word although, I mean, I've got to be a little bit cynical – I wouldn't be doing my job if I wasn't – with regard to this being a first step. Given the record of this government over the last five years on property rights one is a little bit cynical that perhaps this is just window dressing. The fact is that Bill 19 was never actually proclaimed, never actually used, well, for several reasons. One of the biggest reasons, in my view, is that Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, already empowers the government to do essentially anything Bill 19 had in it.

You know, it's obviously a good overture, and our caucus will be supporting it, but we would like to see more. We would like to see more reforms to property rights legislation in this province. Obviously, the Premier's plan to look at what the Property Rights Advocate says and recommends is a good step as well. I've seen some of the recommendations of the advocate, and there are some good things in there for sure. So that's a good thing.

However, there's much more that needs to be done, particularly with regard to Bill 36. There are some issues with Bill 36. I still stand by the fact that I don't believe Bill 36 is a responsible piece of legislation. I believe we can do proper land planning, proper regional co-operation, and we can do that without the hammer of Bill 36. It's been done for years, and there's no reason why we can't do it without the help of a very, I think, harsh bill with regard to the tools that it employs and the lack of guarantees for fair, timely compensation for landowners who have their land designated in a certain zone that detracts from its value, et cetera.

So I think a lot of work needs to be done on Bill 36, and I would urge the Premier to have a review of Bill 36 both internally and perhaps, even better, a review by a standing committee to have some folks there see how we can improve Bill 36 to make it a bill that respects property rights. I don't feel that it does right now.

4:20

For example, section 11 in Bill 36 outlines the right of cabinet to rescind rights. Section 19 restricts the right to compensation for landowners. Section 13 withholds a landowner's right to the courts unless cabinet allows for it. Section 15 binds municipalities, regulators, and all Albertans to the bill. Section 15(3) withholds a landowner's right to make a claim against the government. Section 15(4) limits the role of the courts, and 17(4) stipulates that the bill trumps all other acts, including the Expropriation Act.

These are all troubling sections. They all need to be reviewed. They all go too far.

Also, I would encourage with regard to property rights going forward that we do not force communities. You know, this Premier again has talked a lot about respecting local autonomy. He talks about decentralizing health care. Of course, these are things the Wildrose has been talking about for six years, but that's what he is saying, and if he's sincere about that – and I certainly hope that he is – I think it's absolutely important that he respects the rights of communities to represent their constituents and grow their communities in the way they feel is best.

We have issues right now with the Calgary Regional Partnership and the Calgary metropolitan plan coming out of there, that are simmering underneath the surface. Airdrie in a lot of ways, frankly, is being extorted in saying that if they want water going forward, they need to absolutely sign on. It's not by this government. The provincial government isn't using that language of extortion and so forth, but some folks in the city are, and it is putting Airdrie in an extremely difficult position. I know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is aware of that, having talked with the mayor. But I think that it's something to really give pause, that when you force communities to do things and you give these plans binding legislative authority, you're really taking away from the autonomy of those communities.

What's happening, frankly, with regard to the CRP and the CMP and Airdrie right now is untoward and it's un-Albertan, and I support our council and our mayor a hundred per cent in any effort to secure our city's autonomy and it being able to grow. Our community is now 55,000 people. It's on its way to 100,000 in the next 10 to 15 years. We need to have autonomy to grow in the way that's best for our community members, and that may be slightly different from Calgary.

This goes to the argument that Bill 36, which has created the South Saskatchewan regional plan, is essentially and directly causing this hardship, because the folks that are pushing the CMP are, frankly, using the South Saskatchewan regional plan in Bill 36 and saying: "Look. If you don't sign on, we will use this as a hammer. We'll get it legislated, and you will have no other choice."

Not only can Bill 36 be strengthened to protect property rights, but it could be strengthened to protect the rights of local law-makers, locally elected officials. I hope that the provincial government, if they believe in local autonomy, believes in property rights and will take a long look to fix Bill 36. It's something I will always be pushing for.

There are other issues with property rights, of course. I have to respectfully disagree with the Premier on how constitutionally enshrining the amendment, that was produced by our Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, to the Constitution protecting property rights would somehow send authority for those property rights over to the federal government. That's actually legally incorrect. I don't know what advice or who is telling him that, but it's factually incorrect. That's not what it would do at all.

The Constitution is very clear. It sets out that property rights are the purview of the provincial government. It couldn't be clearer in our Constitution that that's the case. Simply making it a Charter right that landowners will not be deprived of their land unfairly without due compensation, timely compensation would in no way accede authority to the federal government from the provinces regarding property rights. It just wouldn't do it any more than, you know, the fact that the provincial government enforces criminal law somehow makes the provinces responsible for creating criminal law, which is clearly a federal power. Just because we have policing here and they do criminal law there – you can have the courts protect something and see them as a Charter right, and

that doesn't mean that you're ceding it to the federal government to look over.

We have many laws that guard rights and freedoms that are in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I mean, look at human rights commissions. There's an example. Those are all rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms – well, most of them are – yet they're enforced practically on the ground here. That doesn't mean that, you know, the federal government is ceding power to the province or vice versa. It just means that it's a Charter right, that a province or the federal government cannot pass a law that would take away from a landowner's right to fair and timely compensation. That's all that it would do. So I'm not sure why the use of that rhetoric. It's just not accurate. I hope that there will be reconsideration.

Premier Lougheed didn't ask for that to be in the Charter, but if you talk with Preston Manning, who also had a lot of insight into how that process unfolded, he will tell you that it had nothing to do with ceding rights in that regard. It's nonsensical to claim, frankly, that passing property rights into the Charter would somehow be the province giving up those rights to legislate over property rights. It's just not true. Hopefully, we can in the future come back to that. I really do hope so.

There are other issues. Bill 36, really, is the big one. Bill 50, of course, has been rescinded, but it already did its damage. You know, we've just had the lines go up over the highway over Crossfield. I was delayed for about an hour and a half as they put them up because they had a helicopter bringing the big lines over with the big power lines. It was quite something.

Mr. Hale: Yeah. We have a beautiful landscape in and around Brooks.

Mr. Anderson: There you go. A big moonscape. It's fantastic.

Anyway, those power lines were totally unnecessary. We could have been promoting local natural gas production in and around Calgary to service the Calgary area, to service local communities without the use of those power lines. We've got buckets of natural gas when we need it, yet we decided to run massive, expensive power lines down from coal-producing plants in the north down to Calgary and southern Alberta. We did not need those lines, and we're now all paying for it. If you've looked at your utility bills lately, we're all paying for it, and it's a whole lot more than what was claimed at the beginning.

Now, I hope that if this Premier had been in charge and not Mr. Stelmach at the time, he would not have passed or produced such a draconian piece of legislation, such a wasteful piece of legislation. But, you know, I don't know. I hope that's the case. I'll give him the benefit of the doubt on that.

It just shows how important property rights are not just to rural landowners but that they affect urban communities as well and people from urban communities. People in Calgary have to pay for those power lines that Bill 50 was used to build. They have to pay for them. We all have to pay for them no matter where we are. It does affect us. It is not just a rural issue. It is an urban issue. Property rights do matter, you know, and it's sad what's happened over the last few years.

But if this is a first step by the Premier, as he says, towards getting that balance back to where it should be, then we welcome it, and we support it. But we hope that it is just a first small step and that there are many, many more steps with regard to Bill 36, with regard to constitutionally enshrining property rights in the Charter. I think that would be just fantastic if we could leave here

at the end of this term with these property rights properly enforced for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. We do not have any amendments for this bill.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to this bill in Committee of the Whole. Of course, what this bill did not deal with was Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, which was the major bill that caused the vast majority of contention with rural landowners throughout the entire province.

4:30

There were three main issues with that bill. The first one was the idea of regional planning. That's where cabinet could pass regional plans that would supersede any local plans within a municipality. Of course, central planning hasn't worked in places like eastern Europe, and most people that I've talked to felt that we shouldn't be bringing that type of planning here to Alberta. Of course, the regional plans would deal with every single public and private use of every single piece of property throughout the province.

The second aspect was the idea of no compensation clauses in the bill. One example was when the lower Athabasca regional plan was passed, and there were a bunch of oil sands leases that were cancelled. There is no compensation mechanism for those companies that had their oil sands leases cancelled. Many question that if an oil sands company cannot obtain compensation when a regional plan extinguishes those rights, what chance does the average landowner, the average farmer have?

The third aspect is the lack of an appeal right to a court. What was placed in Bill 36 was the most all-encompassing privative clause that I've ever seen – essentially that's a clause that prevents an individual from seeking recourse in the courts – and this privative clause was widely discussed by constitutional experts across the province as exceptionally all-encompassing and essentially prohibiting any type of appeal right that someone otherwise would have had.

Of course, it's good that the government is repealing Bill 19, but it is important for there to be these types of amendments to actually repeal laws that have significantly affected landowners and property rights.

Of course, there was the opportunity to entrench property rights in our Constitution. My understanding is that under section 43 of the Constitution's amending formulas a motion passed by a simple majority in the Legislature would have then been conveyed to Parliament, and then thereby, if there was a simple majority vote in Parliament that wanted to entrench property rights, that would have been done, which would have entrenched property rights solely in the jurisdiction of Alberta. It's unfortunate that that was voted down because it would have been nice to see that equivalent motion debated and hopefully passed in Parliament.

We don't have any amendments on this bill. Thank you for the opportunity for speaking.

The Chair: Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair, and I will offer some amendments to Bill 1 later, but I would like to speak about a few points relative to this at the moment.

Now, the hon. Member for Airdrie talked about the opposition fighting Bill 19, and that was in 2009. My recollection is that at that time the hon. Member for Airdrie was still part of the government caucus – am I right? – because I know that it was the NDP that stood up and fought against this bill and defended the rights of property owners. We talked about the importance of basic principles, that needed to be protected, that this bill trampled on. They included a number of things. First of all, there has to be a pressing public need if you're going to take somebody's land away. Secondly, there has to be full and fair compensation. Thirdly, there has to be some sort of right of appeal. I think that those are the principles that we need to continue to operate by, and Bill 19 didn't do that.

I don't know if in the next little while we'll have a Wildrose Party standing up for rural property owners' rights, but if not, the NDP will do it. We'll continue to stand up to protect that. Now, it's not that we don't think there are sometimes good public reasons why the province or a municipality might need to acquire some land in order to do things, but it has to be done according to a set of principles.

Now, Airdrie has also talked about the effect of putting the protection of private property in the Constitution, and the Premier said: well, it would transfer the authority over this jurisdiction to the federal government. That's not what the province wants, that's not what Peter Lougheed wanted, and that's not been accepted by Airdrie, and I tend to agree with him. But what it does do is to transfer the jurisdiction to the courts, and it means then that any piece of legislation with respect to this that's introduced in the province of Alberta can be overridden by the courts because the protection is enshrined in the Constitution. So I think Airdrie has missed that point, and I think the Premier missed that point. The real point is whether or not you want to put that into the courts as a fundamental right.

Of course, we believe that it's an important right, but it needs to be carefully balanced with the public good and with the ability of various orders of government being able to proceed with important public projects. So finding the right balance, I think, is what we need to do. Needless to say, Mr. Chairman, we will support this.

There were some other bills, of course, that were very problematic, that were introduced at the time, and not just Bill 19.

I want to just mention that we think that while we're supporting the bill, it's clear that it's another example of PC broken promises. Throughout his leadership campaign the Premier committed himself and his party to addressing the limits on property rights that had been put in place by previous PC governments. He appealed to his background as a property rights lawyer, saying that he negotiated fair settlements with respect to people's property rights. He promised to restore the balance. He also highlighted that private ownership of land is a fundamental right.

I want to just talk a little bit about some of the other bills at the time. Now, Bill 36, the Land Stewardship Act, created seven regional plans that trumped other legislation and concentrated the power to do this in the hands of the cabinet, and that's why we were opposed to Bill 36. We still think that there's too much centralization of authority in terms of planning matters in the federal cabinet. Municipalities need to be able to make plans, and we can't tell them, you know, that they can't develop a plan and say that this type of land in this area will be used for a certain use and this land over here will be used for something else because it's important that we keep – for example, you don't want to have a chemical plant next to a residential area with schools, and so on. There is an important planning role that needs to be exercised, but it should be exercised not necessarily by the cabinet but by locally

elected and accountable municipalities. So that's a problem with Bill 36.

Now, Bill 50 was the third one in this troika of trampling of rights of property owners, and it was designed to put through these massive power lines that the province is building all over the place, which do nothing for the beautiful views along many of our roads and highways in the province right now. It allowed the cabinet to define essential transmission infrastructure, which cut out the Alberta Utilities Commission, and it cut out as well other organizations that were part of a process for project assessment decisions.

When this was introduced, we opposed the bill because it failed to protect consumers from the overbuilding of unnecessary transmission lines, the cost of which is going to be passed on to consumers. Now, we said a number of things about Bill 50: all utility projects should be subject to full public scrutiny and a full regulatory process, power customers must not be required to fund utility projects for for-profit companies, and the protection of consumers' interests was paramount. Since then, of course, we know that there have been big increases in power bills, and these costs are all going to be added to the bills of the consumers.

4:40

It's a very interesting thing, Bill 1, because I think it fits in very much with the government strategy that we're seeing unfold now, which is that the government is very much all about chasing Wildrose voters, and this was an issue that the Wildrose made considerable hay on.

I think that we need to make a number of steps to go further. I guess, for me, just removing Bill 19 is not enough. We need to be clear in a positive way what we're going to do with respect to the issue of the balance between the public requirement for land in order to build the province and to make sure that progress continues to happen on the one hand and the rights of landowners on the other.

So with that, Mr. Chair, I will take my seat, and if there are no other speakers, then maybe you can come back to me.

The Chair: I recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's also a great pleasure and honour to speak to Bill 1, Respecting Property Rights Act. In 2009 the Alberta Liberal caucus had rigorously opposed Bill 19, and we opposed bills 36 and 50, and we fought tooth and nail opposing those bills. Bill 1 is going to repeal the land assembly project act, which was never proclaimed. It came to the House in 2009. The Land Assembly Project Area Act, which never came into force, will be repealed with this bill.

Protecting property rights was in the Premier's leadership campaign all summer; however, the only legislative action within Bill 1 is to repeal the unproclaimed Land Assembly Project Area Act, Mr. Chair. When the Land Assembly Project Area Act was introduced and passed in the spring of 2009, it did so with much controversy from the property owners, and the Alberta Liberal caucus was fighting for the rights of the property owners at the time. The original bill aimed to designate corridors for infrastructure projects such as transportation and utility corridors, and the bill's key impact would have been placing unlimited and indefinite restrictions on landowners' rights on their property, with serious fines and potentially prison as penalties.

At the same time, however, the Liberal caucus had concerns surrounding another law concerning property rights, the Responsible Energy Development Act, which created the Alberta Energy Regulator, Mr. Chair. Although the Responsible Energy

Development Act is outside the scope of Bill 1, the Liberal caucus concerns could have been incorporated into the bill.

The Liberal caucus is also concerned about who is granted standing for the hearings on proposed oil, gas, and oil sands projects, Mr. Chair. Only those directly and adversely affected get to participate. This is specifically sections 32, 34, and 36. If the regulator determines that no one filing a statement of concern is directly and adversely affected, there's no hearing. This ignores the property rights of landowners who are indirectly and adversely affected such as landowners who live a distance away from the proposed project. When the proposed project is on public land such as the Cold Lake air weapons range, no one is able to intervene to look after the property rights of the public.

So this restriction also creates First Nations consultation issues, particularly if traditional land is at issue, Mr. Chair. The Premier said that he would address the Responsible Energy Development Act in terms of property rights and First Nations aspects, but no proposal has been released to date. Under the Statutes Repeal Act the Land Assembly Project Area Act would have been repealed in 2016. Starting in 2016, the Statutes Repeal Act will start a process to repeal any unclaimed legislation that has been expired for at least five years. In other words, if the government did nothing, the Land Assembly Project Area Act would have been repealed. So I think this seems like just window dressing, Mr. Chair. But, you know, we are still concerned in the Alberta Liberal caucus. We have a big concern regarding the outstanding property rights concern in Alberta. We will support this bill, you know, but holding our nose. The Alberta Liberal caucus position was against the Land Assembly Project Area Act, and this has not changed, Mr. Chair.

With those comments, I will take my seat. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to be brief here. I think it's important as the representative from Drumheller-Stettler that I, too, speak to the Respecting Property Rights Act because I think it's significant, particularly for this constituency, because the repealing of Bill 19 is reminiscent of a previous day in the Legislature here. I think it needs to be put on the record that Bill 19 was sponsored by the previous representative from Drumheller-Stettler, and I find it kind of interesting that the first act of this Legislature would be to repeal an unproclaimed piece of legislation that a previous member of a similar government brought forward.

It's a good start. I'm somewhat dismayed that possibly there should be more changes brought forward. The Premier had made great fanfare of this in his pre-election tours, and even in the presentation of this in the House it was made to be a great fanfare. To be something of only 10 words or less in the handout provided to us by the pages was somewhat disappointing. There are many pieces of legislation specifically relating to Bill 36 that would be far more significant than this, and possibly that will be demonstrated to us in the future. I look forward to that taking place.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I have several amendments to Bill 1.

The Chair: If you'd just send it with the pages, hon. member, with the original . . .

Mr. Mason: Yes, I will.

The Chair: . . . and then you can speak to it.

We'll refer to this as amendment A1, hon. member. I think you can start speaking to it.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. Well, I'll move that Bill 1, Respecting Property Rights Act, be amended in the preamble in the fifth recital by adding "as a preliminary measure," after "Land Assembly Project Area Act." This is because we feel that this is incomplete and that there are many more steps to go, but the bill doesn't anticipate that.

I have another amendment, which I'll move, which completes this.

The Chair: Hon. member, why don't we deal with this one? Then we'll go to the next one and deal with it.

4:50

Mr. Mason: Yeah. I just wanted to point out that there's a connection between this one and the next one. The two amendments are designed to point out that the following bills remain on the books: Bill 2, Responsible Energy Development Act; Bill 24, Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act; Bill 36, Alberta Land Stewardship Act; and Bill 50, Electric Statutes Amendment Act. We think that these things need to be dealt with as well. I think that that's one of the things that I wanted to mention. I think that we want to indicate that it doesn't go far enough, and the commitment by our party regarding land rights five years ago remains unaddressed. We're especially disappointed that the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, amended by a controversial Bill 50 in 2009, has not been addressed. By failing to address that bill, the government continues to prioritize the interests of industry, in this example electricity, over landowners and Alberta families.

We want to indicate by this amendment that there are further changes coming and that this bill, in and of itself, does not accomplish the things that are set out in its preamble. It is only a step towards accomplishing those things, particularly the first and second elements of the preamble: "is a fundamental element of Parliamentary democracy." I don't know how ownership of land is a fundamental element of democracy. It confuses democracy with rights, in my view. That's the first thing.

Secondly, "The Alberta Bill of Rights recognizes and declares the right of the individual to the enjoyment of property and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law," and "The Government is committed to consulting with Albertans on legislation."

In my view, Mr. Chair, this is an incomplete bill, which does not satisfy the objectives set out in the preamble. Thank you.

The Chair: Speaking to amendment A1, any speakers?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Back to the main bill. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: I've got another one, Mr. Chair. On behalf of my colleague – well, I'll move it in just a second.

The Chair: This is amendment A2. Proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I will move that Bill 1, Respecting Property Rights Act, be amended in the preamble in the fifth recital by adding “part of” after “reaffirms.” So it would read: reaffirms part of the government’s commitment to respect individual property rights. I just think it makes more sense to admit that this does not completely do that, that it’s just a first step.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any questions or comments on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We’re back to the main bill. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I have the last one here.

An Hon. Member: Aw.

Mr. Mason: It’s going quickly. Don’t worry.

The Chair: Hon. member, this will be amendment A3. Please proceed.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will move on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that Bill 1, Respecting Property Rights Act, be amended in the preamble by adding the following after the third recital: “Whereas the Government wants to begin to resolve any ambiguity about its position on property rights.” That would mean that the government wants to begin to resolve ambiguity, which is, I think, what they’ve created. They want to do that. They haven’t accomplished that yet. That’s, as far as I know, the purpose of this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any speakers to amendment A3?

Seeing none, we’ll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: Back to the main bill.

An Hon. Member: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? So ordered.

Bill 3 Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014

The Chair: Any questions or comments on the bill? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Yeah. It’s an honour to rise and speak to Bill 3, the Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014. My understanding is that this piece of legislation merely codifies a directive that was issued by the Supreme Court of Canada. You know, this could have been an opportunity to do a more broad and comprehensive review of this legislation, but in light of the explicit ruling of the Supreme Court, this amendment just appears to comply with that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Bill 3 is a remedy for a judicial review that ultimately resulted in the Personal Information Protection Act being declared unconstitutional and struck down. This bill is intended to make PIPA compliant with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and nothing else.

In practice this will make filming individuals crossing a picket line during a strike legal, regardless of individuals’ consent, along with its internal use and disclosure. According to the bill this will be “for the purpose of informing or persuading the public about a matter of significant public interest or importance relating to a labour relations dispute [with] the trade union.” Bill 3 appears to satisfy the Charter’s requirements regarding free expression during a legal strike.

Although the Alberta Information and Privacy Commissioner is satisfied with Bill 3, the union took PIPA to the Supreme Court, and the United Food and Commercial Workers local 401 is still concerned that the bill’s scope is too narrow, Mr. Chair. That’s the only concern there. I think it’s still a step in the right direction, but those concerns should have been addressed in the bill. We will be supporting the bill but with those concerns from the union.

Thank you very much.

5:00

The Chair: Are there others to speak to the bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: The question has been called.

[The clauses of Bill 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 5 Securities Amendment Act, 2014

The Chair: Any questions?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 4**Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014**

The Chair: Hon. members, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is my honour to rise again and talk on Bill 4, the Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014, in Committee of the Whole. As I stated in my second reading comments, I did have some questions and stated that I would have an amendment, so at this time I would like to propose and bring forward the amendment. I will discuss it after it has been handed out.

The Chair: Hon. members, we have an amendment, which will be amendment A1, to Bill 4. As that's being circulated, hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, you may speak to it.

Mr. Hale: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will read into the record my amendment. It states:

Mr. Hale to move that Bill 4, Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014, be amended in section 4, in the proposed section 7, by striking out “, the Fiscal Management Act and the Auditor General Act” and substituting “and the Fiscal Management Act.”

As I stated in my preliminary comments in second reading, there is a large portion of public funds that are put into Horse Racing Alberta. That was also reiterated by the hon. minister and his staff at the bill briefing. That was part of the reason why they wanted an appointed board to look after Horse Racing Alberta, because there were lots of public funds that were put into it. In their quest and our quest to hold the government to account and to be transparent and accountable to the people of Alberta, I feel that it's important to allow the Auditor General to have some authority to go in and see how the money is being spent and to hold the board, which is put in place through orders in council, to account on how they're spending our money.

It says under section 7:

Status as a Provincial agency

7 The Corporation is not a Provincial agency for the purposes of the Financial Administration Act, the Fiscal Management Act and the Auditor General Act.

To me, when I read that, it's saying that the corporation is not going to be looked at under the Auditor General. We may hear statements that the Auditor General still can look at it, but if this is law, then the Auditor General is not an agency under the Auditor General Act. I feel we need to take that statement out so that there is no confusion, there is no chance that the Auditor General has his hands tied and is not able to look into this Horse Racing Alberta.

The Auditor General does great work. We've seen it many times. He's shown ways that money is maybe not being spent right, is wrongly allocated, and he needs the opportunity in the full breadth of his work to be able to look into Horse Racing Alberta.

As I stated before, Horse Racing Alberta is great for the province of Alberta. It's great for the horse breeders in Alberta and great for the general public. It provides entertainment; it provides jobs. It's a part of our culture, being a western province. You look at a lot of the major cities, Edmonton and Calgary, and lots of horses have been used in the earlier days. The Calgary Stampede is based on agriculture, and horses have had so much to do with our history and our past. It's great to see that it's stayed alive, the horse-racing industry in Alberta.

I just think it is very, very important that the Auditor General be allowed to look into this act, into this board that is ultimately

appointed by the cabinet. Having his title in it, that the Auditor General Act does not apply to this portion – I think it needs to be taken out and the Auditor General given every opportunity to look into this act.

I hope the members on both sides of the House will support my amendment. Thank you.

5:10

The Chair: Anyone to speak to the amendment? The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I actually thank the member for the questions. He raises some good questions.

Mr. Chairman, the reason to exclude the corporation from the Auditor General Act is the same as the reason for excluding it from the Financial Administration Act and the Fiscal Management Act. The corporation does not function as an instrument of the government; that is, unlike other corporations such as AIMCo or Alberta pension services, it is not an agency established to carry out or facilitate the work of the government. Rather, the HRA is, in essence, a body for industry self-regulation, more akin in terms of function to the Law Society of Alberta or the Alberta Association of Architects, neither of which are provincial corporations.

Since HRA, for practical purposes, functions outside the government, it would not be logical, Mr. Chairman, for the Auditor General to be the auditor of the corporation. Of course, the Auditor General can still audit the grant funding provided by the government, but that is more limited and a more suitable interface.

Since HRA does not function as an instrument of government, it has been excluded from the responsibilities and controls that apply to provincial corporations under the FAA or the FMA. It is true that Horse Racing Alberta receives the majority of its revenues through grant funding from the government, but it is the funding agreement that should be the control mechanism that ensures productive use of that funding. Further, the funding agreement should, if it doesn't already, enable either the department or the Auditor General to inspect records of the corporation as necessary to ensure compliance with the provisions with the funding agreement.

Probably the more pertinent question, Mr. Chairman, is perhaps why directors of this particular corporation should be appointed by the government, which is what, but for the express exception, would trigger the categorization of provincial corporation and thus the application of the AGA, the FAA, and the FMA. The answer is governance.

The corporation represents and governs multiple stakeholders within the industry, and this has led to governance issues. Appointing a majority of directors who will not come from any particular stakeholder is a device to address the governance issues. Further, application of the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act will also bring further discipline, that should improve governance.

As for why the government cares about the governance of HRA, the circumstance that the corporation receives the majority of its revenues through grant funding from the government answers that question. Moreover, the government has a legitimate interest in the effectiveness of self-regulation of any industry.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I would ask that we vote down this amendment.

The Chair: Are there others speaking to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We're back to the bill.

Any more speakers on the bill? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: It's my understanding that I'm expecting an amendment from a member this evening. Pursuant to that, I would like to move that we rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

The Chair: The committee shall now rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 1, Bill 3, and Bill 5. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill 4. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 6
Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2)

[Adjourned debate November 20: Mr. Olson]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Yes. It's my honour and privilege to stand and talk to Bill 6, the Statutes Amendment Act. I know that the agriculture

minister did brief members of our caucus and our staff on this bill. I guess, basically, it talks about some changes in Municipal Affairs, the Safety Codes Act, the Ministry of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, some changes to the Workers' Compensation Act, and the Farm Implement Act.

I can see from looking at the bill that my first thoughts are that it's going to help our farm implement dealers. I hear from some of my colleagues and friends that are buying farm equipment that, you know, when they deal with the dealers, a lot of money is changing hands with the cost of our machinery these days. The farms are getting larger, and the equipment needs to get larger, too. It seems that everybody has less and less time to get their work done, so we need bigger equipment. This just protects the dealerships from equipment that's bought at auctions, public auctions. This gives them a little bit more security, I guess, that the equipment that they have to stand up for and cover under warranty is – the equipment is something they have to deal with, and they need to have the opportunity to stay competitive in today's market, and from what I've been told, this is something that our implement dealers are in favour of.

With that, I will take my seat and listen to the other members speak.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other speakers on Bill 6?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question has been called.

The hon. minister of agriculture has moved second reading of Bill 6.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would propose that we adjourn until tonight at 7:30.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has moved that the House stand adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:19 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, November 25, 2014

Issue 7e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 25, 2014

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Good evening. Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Good evening, everyone. I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 4 Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. What a great honour and privilege it is to be here this evening. It's my understanding that many of us were called back here tonight because of little old me, and I thank you, all, for going above and beyond the call of duty to hear my scintillating comments on the bill and to hear my minor amendment, that I think will go a long way to increasing openness and transparency and be a reasonable fiscal management tool for Horse Racing Alberta going forward.

If we look at this bill in the main, I have to ask myself – and I start from the starting point, you know – about Alberta horse racing: do we necessarily need to be in the business of fundamentally supporting this sport? I ask that because, in my view, there are lots of opportunities now in this province to go and bet on horses and to take part in it. They're called local pubs. I see people at those places all the time, like at Schanks in Calgary and other places, where, in fact, most of the people actually go to place bets – okay? – if they're interested in the actual sport of horse racing. You've seen a large portion of the Alberta population move with their feet, and they go, in fact, to these locations. That's where they do their betting. That's where they enjoy their horse racing because . . .

The Deputy Chair: Excuse me, hon. member.

Can I ask the Assembly to keep the level of chatter down? It's very hard to hear the member. I'm sure he's prepared some really good words for us to listen to.

Thank you, hon. member. Carry on.

Mr. Hehr: Like I was saying, many of Alberta's horse-racing aficionados, shall we call them, have decided to move with their feet and vote with their feet. They do. They go to pubs around this great province where they are able to bet on horse racing. You see that at the casinos in Calgary and other locations. You go in there, and they have the races from all across North America playing there, whether they're in California or Kentucky or the like. All the big races are there. That's where it seems to be that the majority of people these days are now going to enjoy their horse-betting experience.

So back to my point: is it necessary to prop up Horse Racing Alberta in the fashion that we do, where we have allowed for this organization – the only one, in my view, in Alberta that gets this special treatment – to have a unique arrangement with the Alberta

lottery foundation and this government as to how they organize and are able to run their operations? They essentially have access to video lottery terminals that are placed at their sites across Alberta. I don't think there are very many left, three or four tracks around this province that are still existing. This money that flows through from the video lottery terminals goes through to support Horse Racing Alberta.

Essentially, it's my understanding that this goes to support both the breeding of animals as well as to having bigger purses for the people who win the said races. You have two groups of people benefiting from this. Largely, they're the same people: one, the people who breed horses – they're the people who put horses into races – and then the people who win the races. So it's the 40 or so people in this province who run horse racing that this unique structure has come about and has been put in place for.

It's different than any other organization, and I have to almost question why we are bending over backwards to do this. It's my understanding that at one time this government wasn't in the business of being in business. Now, I'm not sure whether this government knows from day to day what their stance is anymore on that proposition or the like, but this appears to be, at least on the surface, something that is keeping Horse Racing Alberta afloat.

I will point out, Madam Speaker, that currently the organization has a large amount of debt outstanding on their balance sheet, that even with this unique arrangement with the funds provided by Alberta gaming, it is having a difficult way forward, and maybe – I don't even think maybe. I think it is dying a natural death in this province.

Now, I don't want the horse-racing industry to go away, nor did I really want the buggy and the wagon to go away, Madam Chair, but sometimes the population just isn't interested anymore, and they find other things. I heard they now have this MMA wrestling or, you know, battling on TV and the like that all the cool kids are going to see Friday nights and not necessarily going to their local track.

It's akin to: why would we bend over backwards for this industry when, it seems to me, we do nothing for bingos? My understanding is that the bingo parlours are not necessarily chugging along on all cylinders, you know, and we haven't allowed for that organization to put in video lottery terminals or other measures to increase their bottom line because I think, like the horse-racing industry, they may be dying a natural death. The cool kids just don't want to go play bingo anymore. I don't know why, Madam Chair – you get a dauber out; you start knocking away at those numbers; my goodness, I've had some fun times doing that – but it just seems to be the zeitgeist of the time.

I question as to why we're involved in this unique funding mechanism for this unique product at this time in Alberta, and our party has always questioned whether or not this is the right thing for the Alberta government to be involved in. It seems to be that if people were going to go to video lottery terminals, well, they would go anyway regardless of whether it was horse racing or not. Those funds would come back to the provincial coffers and then could be used to support some charitable opportunities for the homeless, some for the sick or the poor, or things of that nature that may be better served than us propping up our breeder associations and the like. It just seems to be a more rational way to treat our operations. Treat all the charitable organizations and gaming organizations alike. Let's not carve out a unique opportunity for a group that has a long-standing relationship with this government, who, just for the sake of running the operations, continue doing that. I question the whole mechanism of the program, ma'am.

With respect to the actual changes to the bill there are a few of them, actually, that are a good thing. I think that moving the appointment from 12 to 11 members is a better thing because then, you know, there are no tie votes. It's, obviously, important, from an organizational structure, to do those things.

It also increases the members of the public on the board from three to six. I think this is a good thing, too. The six members from the public at large can be people who are interested in horse racing, interested in just the accountability, interested in how we're using our lottery terminals, if that's what they're interested in, and can apply and be named to this committee. That's a move in the right direction and one that I would support.

7:40

Largely, what concerns me in this bill, despite my standing by the fact that I don't think this government should be involved in this business, is the fact that for some reason it is protected from the purview of the Fiscal Management Act. It is protected, then, from the Auditor General going in and looking at how this organization uses public funds. Although these funds are raised at their local operations, video lottery terminals are run by this province.

The Deputy Chair: Excuse me, hon. member.

Hon. members, the noise level is reaching a very high point. I know that each one of you is having a quiet conversation, but when 35 of you are all having quiet conversations, there is a very high noise level. Can we try to please keep it down.

Thanks very much.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Madam Chair. If we look at that unique structure, you know, we're wondering as to whether or not the viability – at least having some public members on that board, who are not from an industry association or a breeding association, I think is a positive thing for this bill.

But like I said – now I'm getting back to my point – I cannot for the life of me see why this organization is not subject to the Fiscal Management Act and the Auditor General Act. These are public funds. Although they're derived from horse-racing operations and the money they raise from the lottery terminals on their property during the events, the government is in charge of these terminals, and the government is in charge of the use and operation of those funds, so my goodness it should be subject to the act.

Therein lies the rub, and I'll cut back to it. Maybe this organization needs the eyes of the Auditor General upon it. Like I said, their books are not necessarily in that good a shape. The Auditor General could look into the practices and understand whether this unique set of circumstances in fact is in the public interest and whether we're getting public value out of it. That's why we have an Auditor General, and that's why I think it would behoove us to take that statute out.

On that note, I would like to move an amendment that does exactly that.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, do you have copies of the amendment?

Mr. Hehr: Yes, I believe I do. They are all here on my desk ready to go or the like.

The Deputy Chair: We'll take a moment until they get distributed to all the members, please. This amendment will be known as A2.

Hon. member, I think you can go ahead and read the amendment while we're waiting for it to be distributed, and then we can proceed.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. I move that Bill 4, Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014, be amended by striking out section 4. If we look at the bill, this would take out the portion of the act that takes away the Auditor General's power and the Fiscal Management Act's power to investigate what is happening with this organization.

Like I stated earlier, the sole reason for the Auditor General existing is to look into the use of public funds and whether they're truly being used in a reasonable and rational fashion and whether they truly serve the best interests of the Alberta public. Are we gaining substantially by this investment as a province? It is the Auditor General's sworn responsibility to do so.

I for the life of me can't understand why Horse Racing Alberta gets the unique position of being unauditably by this organization. We're allowed to audit every government department. We're allowed to audit Alberta Health Services. We're allowed to audit WCB. We're allowed to audit universities and the like. So why is it that this organization deserves the privilege of being excluded? I, for the life of me, don't understand this. Maybe the minister responsible could explain to me why it needs this unique status. Maybe there's a good reason. I, for the life of me, have thought about it long and hard, and I just simply don't understand it. It may be easy for the minister responsible to do so. If we look at where this bill is and what it needs for openness and transparency, which this government repeatedly claims it's all about, then this amendment should happen.

So on that note, I'd like to invite the members to vote for the amendment and proceed from there.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We are debating amendment A2. Are there any other members who wish to comment on amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the chance to make a couple of comments in regard to this very reasonable amendment. I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo for pointing out section 4. I confess that I was just reading the overall bill and didn't look at this one. It stands out considerably because, of course, it excludes the board from the Financial Administration Act.

Considering, Madam Chair, the amount of monies that Horse Racing Alberta does receive from our Legislature here, from our budget, I think it's incumbent upon us to ensure that we use all the means which we have available to us to audit and administer the funds going to boards and agencies which we are responsible for. We debate the money that goes to Horse Racing Alberta. I can't remember how much it was last year, but I remember a number of \$40 million. [interjection] Yeah, that has been historically the amount, and considering the extraordinary financial arrangement that Horse Racing Alberta has as well by which they are collecting more of their VLT money than other equivalent bodies, then with that gambling element I think it's incumbent upon us to ensure that we are auditing and using all of the tools, especially the Financial Administration Act, to ensure that there is transparency there.

Globally, certainly, I don't believe that this subsidy to the horse-racing industry should continue anyway. I mean, historically we know the evolution of the tracks in Alberta. Really, there's only one main track left, and that's here in Edmonton. Attendance is down. You know, they have been making a go of it, and I wish them the best. Certainly, it's a very interesting and historical sport. I certainly followed it in my own family for many years and the track in Calgary, too. But \$40 million for an industry: I think a lot of Albertans are kind of surprised that we even do that. Certainly, at the very least, I would support the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo's amendment here but with the provision that I also in a

more global sense don't approve of our subsidy of the horse-racing industry in this province, period.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who would like to speak on amendment A2? The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would just urge hon. members to vote against this amendment because, in essence, it's the same as the amendment brought forward by the Member for Strathmore-Brooks, which essentially takes it away from the Auditor General Act and the Fiscal Management Act. As was articulated by the Minister of Finance earlier, there is no reason for us to amend this bill in this way. So I would urge all hon. members to vote against this amendment based on what the Minister of Finance said earlier this afternoon.

7:50

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on amendment A2?

Seeing none, shall I call the vote?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We're back to the bill now. You have some time left, hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Well, Madam Chair, I'm surprised at that. It would have indeed gone a long way for openness and transparency and for allowing us to look at how an organization runs its finances. As we well know, this has a unique arrangement in the realm of Alberta government operations. Horse Racing Alberta benefits from a large contribution of taxpayer dollars in the form of revenue generated from our VLTs. I think it would be important for us to have the Auditor General able to look at this arrangement, at whether it's serving our best interest, whether we are doing everything possible to deal with problem gambling and the like, everything associated with horse racing and VLTs. We cannot have an eye on what is happening at these tracks without the Auditor General taking a look at it. So I'm surprised that we continue on this practice.

To close, in the main I'm wondering why we're involved in this industry in the first place. It seems like a government subsidy set up in a unique set of circumstances by possibly a unique set of insiders who are very close to this government and who have long-standing ties. In my view, it's something we should get out of and look at, actually, how our entire lottery industry is set up and whether it's serving the best interests of Albertans in terms of both revenue generation and problem gambling and balance those priorities with what's in the best interest for all of our futures.

On that note, I'd urge all members to vote against this bill, in particular since we voted down the amendment here and the amendment of my friends from the Wildrose that were seeking more clarity and more reasonableness and the fact that having the Auditor General look at things is usually considered a good thing for the Alberta public.

In any event, those are my comments, Madam Chair, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who have any questions or comments or amendments for Bill 4, Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 4?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would move that the committee rise and report progress.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Government House Leader, could you ask us to do that for Bill 4, please.

Mr. Denis: For Bill 4. Mea culpa.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Government House Leader, I need you to say that you'd like us to rise and report Bill 4.

Mr. Denis: Okay. Madam Chair, I would move that we rise and report Bill 4. Mea culpa.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 4. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As it is very late and I know the Member for Airdrie is tired, I would like to move that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 7:56 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 26, 2014

Issue 7a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 26, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Holy and great Creator, guide us this day and every day. Since millions of Albertans have put their trust and faith into our hands as lawmakers, help us to do our very best to not disappoint them. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups, starting with the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a very large contingent of students from Spruce Grove Woodhaven middle school. We have 134 visitors in both galleries. I had an opportunity to have a chat with them down in the rotunda as they were there for their pictures. They passed a law, just as we do, in their parliament that would require mandatory French as second-language schooling in Alberta, which I thought was quite interesting. A vigorous debate was had by all, but I guess it passed. They are accompanied by teachers Rob Peet, Mark Bradshaw, Jayna Butler, Mary St. Amand, and Hazel Wolfert, and parents Jerry Russell, Carie Purdy, and Cory Sinclair. As I said, they are in both galleries. I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any other school groups?

If not, let us move on with other important guests, starting with Edmonton-Decore, followed by Sherwood Park.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly seven guests here in recognition of the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Foundation CTO project, where 100 memorial plaques were unveiled across Canada on August 22, 2014, to mark the 100th anniversary of the implementation of the War Measures Act. One of the memorial plaques was unveiled in Edmonton-Decore at the Ukrainian Youth Unity Complex.

My guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise as I mention their names: Mr. Taras Podilsky, chair, Ukrainian Youth Unity Complex unveiling committee and activist in recognition of the internment operations; Mr. Emil Yereniuk, chair, Ukrainian Canadian Congress internment and assisted to co-ordinate the Canada plaque project; Mr. Jerry Bayrak, internee descendant of Mary Hancharuk Bayrak – she was the last survivor of all the camps across Canada; Mr. Eugene Harasymiw, posthumous; Mrs. Natalie Harasymiw, wife of Eugene Harasymiw; Mr. Adrian Harasymiw, son of Eugene Harasymiw; Mr. Andriy Harasymiw, president of the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Foundation and son of Eugene Harasymiw; and Mr. Andrew Hladyshesky, QC, lead negotiator of the federal internment redress agreement. Also, unable to attend from Calgary were Ms Halya “Helen” Wilson and Mr. Borys Sydoruk. Both were

activists in recognition of the internment operations. I would now ask the Assembly to please provide the traditional warm welcome to my guests.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by the leader of the ND opposition.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two constituents from my constituency of Sherwood Park, Jayme Paccagnan and Derek Fettback. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, leader of the ND opposition, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my guests, Debbie Arcand and Rodney Kusiek. Debbie and Rodney are both executive members of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees local 47, which represents continuing care employees in the private sector in central and northern Alberta. The Alberta NDP is extremely proud to stand with local 47 to fight for an increase in funding for seniors' housing across the province. I'd like to ask my guests to rise, which they've already done, and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Chris and Mrs. Carol Robertson. The Robertsons are constituents from Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, and we're very proud to have them here today. Mr. Robertson is the first and only person in history to travel from the bottom of mainland Canada to the top under his own power, on his bicycle. He has authored a book entitled *To the Top Canada* and has spoken to over 5 million Canadians, challenging Canadians with just one question: what will you do to make Canada a better country than you found it? I would like them both to rise – they're seated in the members' gallery – and I ask for the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce five students from the University of Alberta. I spoke to their class recently about my compassionate care bill and what it means for Albertans. They're now interested to see the inner workings of the Chamber, so I'm very happy to have them here today. They're looking very studious up there as well. I ask Maria Dolores Irizar Carrillo, Kristen Huggett, Sandra Langat, Erin Cherlet, and Carla Cichowska to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, two minutes each, please.

Provincial Debt

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, the message in today's fiscal update couldn't be clearer. There is an emerging fiscal crisis developing in this province, that we need to address immediately. We have a systemic budget deficit. What does this mean? It means that in order to avoid having to borrow money to pay for government infrastructure and services, the oil price needs to be roughly \$110 per barrel, but it isn't. Instead, oil prices are set to be in the \$60 to \$80 range for an extended period of time, which means billions upon billions in new debt every single year. Our provincial financial health is literally in the hands of oil tycoons in the Middle East. It's upsetting, and it's disturbing.

Now, I could stand here and rail against this government for putting us in this position. The Wildrose has been sounding the alarm on this exact set of circumstances for the last five years, and our suggestions, including many that the government is now actively considering, were regularly mocked and called extreme. The fact is that I don't really care whose fault it is anymore. I just know that if we in this House truly care about our kids and the future of our grandkids, the future of our amazing province, we need to come together and fix this problem. We need to ask ourselves: what are we leaving to our children? A bunch of debt? Schools, hospitals and roads that they can't afford to staff or maintain because they are drowning in debt finance charges? What kind of legacy is that?

We still have time to get this right, but we must start now. Our window of opportunity is shrinking daily. It is my hope that all of us in this House can come together and agree to a new, multiyear fiscal plan that will balance the budget at \$80 oil, eliminate the need for additional debt, and save for the future. We are at a critical, critical crossroads. We owe it to all Albertans to get it right.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

1:40

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The second-quarter fiscal update delivered today by the Finance minister reflects the provincial government's continuing dependence on oil and gas royalty revenue to fund public programs. His job, as he put it, was to finish the fiscal year in the black. Hard choices lie ahead, so he said. Hard choices indeed. A large drop in royalty revenue with no increase from other sources means only one thing: more cuts are coming, layoffs and hiring freezes are coming, waiting lists will grow, and user fees will rise.

The Premier said that lower oil prices mean that it won't be business as usual for the government, but for this PC government, cuts when oil prices fall is business as usual. This government has promised for years to get off the royalty roller coaster, but here we are once again coming over the top of the rickety track, about to plunge down amid screams and white knuckles. We've been on this ride too long, Mr. Speaker, and it's time the government got serious about getting off it.

In the early 2000s the Klein government, its coffers brimming from sky-high natural gas royalties, offered two major tax cuts, ironically, to the people who needed them least. The first was the flat tax, and the second was a massive cut in corporate income taxes. Both of these initiatives cost the provincial treasury billions of dollars. Now with gas prices down and oil prices right behind, this PC government is poised to cut health care and education and other public programs yet again.

Mr. Speaker, there is a price to be paid for rock-bottom tax rates for the wealthy and the corporate sector. That price is paid by low- and middle-income Albertans, who depend on the government programs, including access to our health care system and a high-quality, accessible education for our kids. It's paid by seniors who receive inadequate care in nursing homes and by young people who can't afford a postsecondary education.

Mr. Speaker, there is something we can do. A good start would be to axe the flat tax, a practical step. In that way we can take one concrete step to ensuring that when the price of oil drops, we are not yet again laying off teachers and nurses. Every other province in this country has a progressive income tax. It's time Alberta did as well.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Edmonton-Decore.

Patriotic Acts

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our society was rocked when Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent and Corporal Nathan Cirillo were killed on Canadian soil. Prior to this many of us thought that we were immune to such horrid acts of terrorism in Canada. It seemed that we all stopped and took a collective breath, and during that breath we took stock of the many rights and privileges we enjoy. Our children have the freedom to attend school, and in Alberta we even have many educational choices. We have the right to assemble, to move about freely. We have the right to practise our chosen religion. The list is lengthy, and we should give thanks each and every day for those opportunities and for the men and the women who wear the uniform to protect our country.

Throughout the province acts of patriotism sprang forth. Some people sang *O Canada* just a little louder. Many more people attended Remembrance Day ceremonies, and in Fort Saskatchewan one man, Chris Robertson, got up extra early, grabbed the enormous flag he had from his national unity ride from March 1997 to January 1998, stood on the corner of highways 15 and 21 in our early Fort Saskatchewan rush hour, which, by the way, is just as congested as any large city rush hour, and proudly waved the flag. He wanted motorists to share the pride he had for his great country and to share the message. They responded. They honked their horns. Soldiers, their families, and industrial workers stopped and thanked him and brought him a lot of coffee, by the way. Coverage of this small act spread across the world. The message: we will not be silenced.

Chris Robertson, seated with his wife, Carol, in the members' gallery today, moved to Alberta from Ontario less than a month before his flag-waving stand. He followed his children here, and he loves his adopted province. He rode from Point Pelee to Tuktoyaktuk to take a stand for national unity, and he challenges all Albertans to ask themselves what they can do to make Canada a better place than they found it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Foundation CTO 100 Project

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, Canada may be renowned for its tolerance, multiculturalism, and respect, and it may pride itself on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but enacting the 1914 War Measures Act was a dark moment in our nation's history. This was a piece of legislation which permitted the Canadian government to establish a national internment operation. From 1914 to

1920 in excess of 8,500 Ukrainian and other European immigrant men, women, and children who were unconnected with the conflict of the First World War were imprisoned at 24 internment camps throughout Canada.

The apprehended immigrants, who had come from what were seen as enemy countries, had their movements controlled, their properties and valuables confiscated, and anyone thought to be an enemy sympathizer could be arrested and kept in interment without trial. These were immigrants who chose our great country in response to the Canadian government's first concentrated policy to promote immigration. They came seeking opportunity only to become prisoners in the Canadian promised land. This was not a proud moment, Mr. Speaker, in Canadian history, and it is very difficult to comprehend the unjust policy mistakes of the past. As a fourth-generation Ukrainian it is with a heavy heart that I am reminded of the price paid by our forebears. The damaging effects and crippling impact of an internment experience are incomprehensible.

Mr. Speaker, on Friday, August 22, 2014, at 11 o'clock local time the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Foundation CTO project unveiled 100 memorial plaques across Canada to commemorate the 100th anniversary since the War Measures Act was initiated. The Ukrainian Youth Unity Complex in Edmonton-Decore was one of the 100 sites to unveil a memorial plaque. Special thanks to the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Foundation, the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association, the Descendants of the Ukrainian Canadian Internee Victims Association, and the Canadian First World War internment recognition fund. Together their steadfast efforts will ensure that the generations will be vigilant *to keep alive the memory of those who have suffered*.*

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, followed by Medicine Hat.

Strathcona Community Hospital

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recently opened Strathcona community hospital is an excellent example of the health care services that we enjoy in this province. Albertans want to receive the care they need close to home, and the opening of the Strathcona community hospital ensures that residents have access to the quality health care they need in their community.

The hospital provides a seniors' clinic and an ambulatory home-care clinic, ensuring that community seniors are taken care of, houses the community mental health facility, providing county residents with comprehensive mental health services, and offers rehabilitation services and chronic disease education classes. It has a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week emergency department, which means that people can receive emergency care in our community instead of being sent to Edmonton, and features 27 stretcher beds suitable for an overnight stay if necessary.

On average only 3.6 per cent of emergency department visits have required transfer to another facility to meet complex medical needs. That means more than 96 per cent of emergency cases are able to be dealt with by the Strathcona community hospital. The hospital responded to nearly 19,000 visits between the time it opened this spring and the end of October, around 125 patients per day. For the last 30 days on average the wait time from triage to being seen by a physician is 1.2 hours.

The success of the Strathcona community hospital shows that your government is committed to providing Albertans with a

patient-focused, efficient, effective, and sustainable health care delivery system. I'd like to congratulate the community hospital on their opening and their successful delivery of health care services in Strathcona county in the last few months. With partners like the staff and physicians at the Strathcona community hospital we'll be able to continue to provide Albertans with quality health care services that meet their needs in their community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Housing Initiatives in Medicine Hat

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to share with all Albertans a real success story. The Medicine Hat Community Housing Society is on the verge of ending homelessness within its five-year goal, five years ahead of the provincial goal. Ending homelessness means that no one in our community will have to live in an emergency shelter or sleep rough for more than 10 days before they have access to stable housing and the wraparound supports needed to maintain that status. This has been achieved through engagement of community partners and local stakeholders in addressing the complexity of affordable housing and homelessness.

This collaboration takes a systems approach to change the status quo in Medicine Hat in order to effect meaningful and lasting change. In 2001 Medicine Hat was the first in Alberta to implement the housing stability program, which focused on increasing housing stability for social housing tenants to reduce the risk of homelessness. Since April 1, 2009, 489 homeless adults plus 253 children have been housed. Like other communities, we do have a variety of factors that cause homelessness, and the key is working with local partners to address those issues and tackle them head-on.

In Medicine Hat it is estimated that homelessness costs between \$66,000 and \$120,000 per person annually while providing housing with wraparound supports is estimated at \$13,000 to \$34,000 per person annually. There is an estimated 51 per cent reduction in days spent in the hospital, a 41 per cent reduction in the use of emergency rooms, plus a 48 per cent reduction in the number of days spent in jail. To meet the final goal of ending homelessness in Medicine Hat, there is a request to the provincial government for additional funding of \$12.6 million.

Medicine Hat had similar per capita numbers to Edmonton's and Calgary's and yet found a path to success. If Medicine Hat has found a solution that works in the real world, then it can be shared and the lessons learned can be implemented elsewhere. I want to congratulate all the Medicine Hat partners in reaching this lofty goal by facing this challenge head-on with the true intent of success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, 35 seconds for each question, 35 seconds for each answer, maximum. Let us begin with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Provincial Budget

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the second-quarter financials are in, and I couldn't help but notice that the new managers are using the same budgeting tricks that got the old managers into so much trouble. Instead of counting money in and money out and reporting the

*The text in italics exceeded the time limit and was not read in the House.

difference the way any normal Albertan would understand it, they continue to pretend that some spending isn't really spending. Apparently, you can take in \$44 billion, spend \$47 billion, borrow \$3 billion, and still claim that you have a surplus. Imagine that. To the Premier: why does he continue to claim a surplus when he knows he is going deeper into debt?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, in response to the direct question I would encourage the hon. member to spend some time with the Auditor General to clarify her understanding of public-sector accounting rules, which the Auditor General, I'm sure, will be happy to do, because the premise of her question is entirely incorrect. But I do welcome the focus upon the public finances of the government of Alberta. The Finance minister spoke about this today. This is a time that warrants prudence, caution, and discipline in terms of public expenditures.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would encourage the Premier to return to the consolidated budgeting that we used to have under Klein and Dinning.

This government couldn't actually balance our books when oil was around \$100 a barrel, but since then oil has fallen to the \$70s. The hole in our budget will be massive if this continues. Good fiscal management once had Alberta with no debt and \$17 billion in savings, but during an economic boom this government nearly wiped out our savings and took us into debt. Will the Premier tell us how far into debt he is willing to go?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, as Albertans we have the lowest tax rates in Canada, we have the highest income in Canada, we are arguably the only jurisdiction in North America that is in a net asset position. This is all something that Albertans should be proud of, and at the hands of this government we'll continue to manage the finances of this province in a responsible way. But I would again encourage the hon. member to meet with people from the accounting profession, from the public sector – the Auditor General is a good source of information – because her understanding of public-sector accounting is wrong.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Albertans were also proud to be debt free.

Speaking of debt, Mr. Speaker, this government likes to pretend that debt doesn't have a cost. They borrow billions and tell us that it must be done, but then they don't tell us the downside. Here are the facts. By the end of this year Alberta taxpayers will be forking over \$700 million to service our debt. That's \$700 million that won't be available to pay for education or to look after our seniors. To the Premier: doesn't he see that his government's debt policy has long-term dire consequences?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, very clearly, we have a fiscal advantage in this province. We have a competitive advantage relative to all other jurisdictions in North America. It's important that we maintain that. As I've said to the hon. member, our province is in a net asset position. You only need to look at the heritage savings trust fund, at the assets that we have relative to the debt that we have to understand that. We are the lowest taxed people in the country by a very wide margin, and this is a source of enormous competitive advantage to our province. We have no sales tax. We have the lowest effective personal income taxes. These are advantages that this government is intent on maintaining.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions. The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Smith: For the record, Mr. Speaker, we'll have \$20 billion worth of debt by the time we go into the next election in 2016, and that's not acceptable.

Alberta Health Services Executive Compensation

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Public Accounts Committee yesterday made it clear just how badly managed Alberta Health Services is. One of their most senior executives was proud to explain how AHS retitled their executive layers. You see, she used to be an executive vice-president, but now she is a vice-president. What she couldn't tell the committee was if any money was saved by taxpayers when positions like hers were renamed. So can the Premier assure us that when AHS did its retitling process, Albertans actually saved money?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Health Services made a tremendous effort to reduce the number of executives in the organization by about 80 different people. They've rejigged the situation. They've created opportunities to have people do other jobs. I think that it's very important that they're trying to make sure the organization still is run properly with people who have great talents.

Ms Smith: Well, that was quite a dance, Mr. Speaker. Rejigged, indeed.

Mr. Speaker, at Public Accounts we asked what work former AHS CEO Chris Eagle did for the \$650,000 he was paid when he went from being CEO to special adviser. The answer was unsatisfactory, to say the least. Any normal person would conclude that he was given a phantom job as a way for the government to pretend that they weren't actually paying him a severance package. Will the Premier ban the practice of creating phantom jobs for failed executives?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, first of all, this Premier has been very clear about the role, that we must ensure that people get proper value for their money in Alberta. Those things will not happen under my watch. To be very clear, the current head of Alberta Health Services also said that proper contracts will be done in a proper way. People will not get the kind of severance that happened in the past. This is a new regime, a new time, a new leader.

Ms Smith: Yes, Mr. Speaker, but they're still rejigging the VPs rather than getting rid of them.

Alberta Health Services management is a mess. Allaudin Merali's expense scandal at Capital health should have been shocking, except that this government then appointed Merali to be the chief bean-counter for the entire government, and AHS then stole him for themselves. By the time this is over, Merali will have collected millions of dollars in severances and executive pensions from the taxpayer. Can the Premier tell us the total cost to the taxpayer for the legal fees they've paid to settle this severance circus?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, this was an arrangement that was settled through an action – that was a previous Premier. This is a new government, a new way to do things. This Premier makes sure that contracts are done in a way that meets the standards which Albertans expect. We will not do that anymore. But it's also

very important that the member realize that there are people at Alberta Health Services who work very hard, and to say disparaging words about the people there is not fair or reasonable.

Student Assessment

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, we have some troubling news regarding education in Alberta, and I believe that we need to address it. A new report from the CBE shows that the grades for Calgary public school kids on their PATs are declining significantly. Now, it's no secret that the past few ministers of Education have been pushing a dramatic shift in the education system. They proudly announced that they are changing everything. It is not working. To the Minister of Education: why are you phasing out PATs at a time when achievement is declining so? Are you trying to cover up poor performance?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, Alberta students are performing very well on the international stage and on the national stage. We recently had test results which indicate that students here in Alberta have the highest science test results across the country. That's something that we can be very proud of. Student assessments are very important, and we will continue to ensure that we have the very best student assessment system that we can in our province.

Mr. McAllister: The CBE is also proudly telling Albertans that it is getting rid of percentage grades for K to 9 students. Now, this flies in the face of the Premier's mandate letter calling for coherent grades – and for the record, quite frankly, I support the majority of the direction of that mandate letter; I believe it was very good – so to the Premier: will you do the right thing for our kids and intervene, or will you do what many have done before you and follow the lead of the educators?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to see that the member opposite is in tune with lining up and embracing the mandate for education of this particular government and this particular minister. We're going to ensure that we have a coherent grading system that parents understand, that is in the best interests of students, and that moves forward our education system in the direction of the mandate letter that has been given to me.

Mr. McAllister: I would certainly support it if you'd put it into action, Minister. There's no question.

Mr. Speaker, we're hearing from teachers that the new SLAs are a complete disaster. Now, we know that the PATs weren't perfect, but we need continuity, and we need accountability in the education system. Right now we don't have it. We need it for the betterment of our kids, and we need it for the system, also. To the Premier or the minister: will you undo yet another mistake by the former Premier and revisit the issue of PATs?

2:00

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans expect us to ensure that the needs of students are at the heart of our education system and to ensure that parents and students have the ability to identify students' strengths at the beginning of the year so that they can move on improvement right through the rest of the school year. We are very pleased to be phasing in our new student learning assessments. We are piloting with the grade 3s at this particular point in time. Administrators, students, parents have been responding positively to the pilot. We're going to continue to ensure that we have the very best assessment system . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The results of the second-quarter fiscal update are out, and just like in health care, they're not good. Despite a booming economy we have broken roads, packed classrooms, a lack of quality seniors' care, underfunded municipalities, less savings, and more provincial debt. The Premier states that the new PC government is focused on sound conservative fiscal principles. That's just code for more of the same without the extravagances of the previous regime. To the Premier: what, if anything, have the Conservatives really conserved?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's nice to hear the rhetoric from across the floor, but the reality is that we do have one of the strongest financial positions in North America, and despite the recent downturn in oil prices we're still on track to run a surplus this year. This is a great economy. We're doing well in the forestry sector. We're doing well in the agricultural sector. Our housing starts lead the country. We are going to have a plan in place to make sure that we control our spending. We're going to make sure that we look at efficiencies, that we contain costs, and that we are very productive as a government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, being the best of a bad bunch is nothing to brag about.

Like his predecessors, the Premier has made many promises. However, our children, families, and seniors can expect to bear the burden of failed PC policy. Today we have over 140,000 children living in poverty, more inequality in our society than ever. Mr. Speaker, we need better public services now. We must pay for them today and not continuously pass the blame to the previous leaders and pass the buck to the next generation. To the Premier: how are you going to keep these promises and build our province, with declining oil revenue, with your current fiscal policies?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's obvious the member didn't hear the answer I just gave. We have a great economy. The Premier has made it very clear that we are going to manage the growth we have in this province, which is unprecedented anywhere in North America. We're going to look after our core services in health care, education, seniors, and our most vulnerable, and we are going to control our spending and make sure that Albertans are proud of this government moving forward.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the two previous Premiers tried to control spending, and we're in this mess today.

In 2001 this Conservative government gave the largest tax cut to large corporations and the wealthiest and tied the delivery of our essential public services to the price of a barrel of oil, leaving no wiggle room when nonrenewable resource revenues dropped like today. The regressive flat tax was actually a tax increase on middle- and lower middle-income Albertans and a massive tax cut for top earners, which brought \$1.5 billion less into the treasury. To the Premier: will you now fix this inequality and bring in a fair and progressive income tax?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a fair tax system in this province, and it's shown by the hundreds of thousands of people who come to this province every year because they see the advantage of being in Alberta and they see the opportunities. We

have the highest wage income earners anywhere in Canada and the lowest tax regime, and we're going to continue to have that.

Hospital Infrastructure Maintenance

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, AHS has two lists it uses to track deferred hospital maintenance. One list is the must-have-it-yesterday list, and there the Mis needs about \$43 million. AHS also has a preservation list, which describes the current work necessary to maintain the hospital over time, and by that measure the Misericordia needs \$110 million. My question is to the Premier: your Minister of Health talks about \$25 million, but in the face of ongoing deterioration at the Mis should Albertans be accepting \$25 million out of the necessary \$110 million as good enough?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member: my understanding is that we've committed \$40 million to the Misericordia hospital, the first \$25 million being in the first few years. The Misericordia hospital is now getting the second and third floors reworked and rebuilt so that they can be put back into use. I think this government is making every effort to make sure the Misericordia hospital delivers the services it needs to for the citizens of west Edmonton. There are challenges there, but the challenges are being met by this government.

Ms Notley: Well actually, Mr. Speaker, the government has two choices. It can continue to dither over replacing the Mis, in which case the \$110 million is required for its preservation, or it can commit to a new Mis and invest the \$43 million that is required today to meet the most emergent repair obligations now. Either way, \$25 million doesn't get the job done. So to the minister: won't you admit that fact, secure the needs of the people in west Edmonton, and actually invest what's necessary?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, this government cares deeply about the residents of the west end of the city of Edmonton. Our commitment is to make sure the Misericordia hospital operates in as effective a way as possible. There are many patients in that hospital. We have to find a balance of what we're renovating, what we're using, and make sure the hospital still functions in an effective way. Investing \$25 million today is the first step. We will continue to invest in a facility that ensures Albertans have the kind of health care they need in Edmonton.

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the province-wide must-have-yesterday maintenance list, this government is over \$400 million short. But this PC neglect isn't just about numbers. It's actually about a lack of emergency services when they're needed, it's about delays in diagnostic testing, it's about compromised infection control, and the list goes on. To the Minister of Health: will you fully fund the urgent needs of all Alberta's hospitals now, or will we see the kind of deterioration we see at the Mis spreading throughout the province?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I think that if the hon. member would look at the investment that this government made across this province, whether it's in Grande Prairie or Fort McMurray or Medicine Hat or any other number of cities in this province, we've made a tremendous effort to rebuild and invest in the infrastructure in this province. We'll continue to do that. We'll also continue to invest in the operation of these facilities by ensuring that they have the financial support so that they can deliver the services they need for their communities.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's proceed, and please avoid or curtail any preambles to supplementals so we can get the most members up who want to ask questions.

Let us start with Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Red Deer-South.

Health Care Wait Times

Mrs. Forsyth: The Premier asked Albertans to judge this government on its progress, so let's talk progress. In September 2013 Albertans waited an average of 38 weeks for shoulder surgery. In September 2014 the average wait was 43 weeks. In September 2013 the average wait time for back surgery sat at an extraordinary 40 weeks, in September 2014 still 40 weeks. In September 2013 Albertans waited 32 weeks for cataract surgery. A year later that wait time has not changed either. To the minister: is this progress?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, this government takes very seriously its desire to make sure that Albertans have excellent access to our system. We've invested in long-term care. Home care is up 26 per cent. We've invested new dollars in a variety of other programs to ensure that emergency wards are taken care of. You know, the challenge is that when a hundred thousand new people are coming into the province, it puts great pressure on the system. This government is doing all it can to ensure that wait times are under control.

Mrs. Forsyth: Given that in May of this year wait times for a knee replacement sat at 42 weeks and that by September it had grown to 45 weeks, Minister, is this progress?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, wait times can be a variety of things, and numbers can be numbers. But let's just quote. Wait times for radiation therapy for cancer were three weeks last year and 5.3 weeks four years ago. Cataract surgery: the wait was 31 weeks last year, 41 weeks four years ago. Knee replacement surgery was 42 weeks last year, down from 49 weeks. Colorectal cancer screening: 57 per cent last year, 36 per cent in 2008. This government is making steps to do the kind of things necessary so that waiting time is decreased.

Mrs. Forsyth: Given that in May of this year Albertans waited 37 weeks for a hip replacement, and in September it's still 37 weeks, Minister, progress has been slow. Yes, there has been some improvement and progress, but what are you going to do so that people don't have to wait this incredibly long time?

2:10

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member: we are very concerned about wait times. We want to make sure that Albertans have access to the kind of service they need as soon as possible. We're investing billions of dollars in the health care system. We'll continue to try to improve wait-lists. But you know something? One of the big things we have is our PCNs, our primary care networks, which give Albertans access to their own doctors, and 80 per cent of Albertans are accessing their own family doctors, which gives them an opportunity to get into the system. I think this is a policy that is really one of the best in this country, and the PCN is a way in which we can deliver the kind of service necessary.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Provincial Fiscal Position

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, with the Q2 results released today, we've all seen how things can change in just a couple of short months and the subsequent impact to Alberta's fiscal situation. My questions are for the Minister of Finance, President of Treasury Board. What, Minister, are we doing right today to ensure that this province doesn't plummet into a deficit position by year-end?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, while Alberta's finances are on track to balance the budget at the end of this fiscal year, there's no question that with declining oil prices we need to be fiscally prudent and responsible, and business can't be as usual. So we're going to look at, as I said earlier, efficiencies, containing costs, and increasing productivity. Across government we've made it very clear to our ministers and our departments that we will look for ways and bring forward actions so that we can contain our spending while maintaining our core services.

Mr. Dallas: Well, that sounds good, Minister, but our fiscal situation was much different in September, and based on this, we committed to build hundreds of new continuing care beds and the most expansive school infrastructure program in Alberta's history. How can we accomplish this without taking on new debt or pushing back delivery timelines?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a capital plan, and our Minister of Infrastructure will bring that forward in the next little while. We know that we have two challenges. One is to control the spending within government and our operations, which we're going to do, but we also have to make sure that we look after the unprecedented growth in this province. If we look at a hundred thousand people, that's 15,000 children, and that's 28 schools. We need to make sure we have spaces for our children in education, we need to make sure we have spaces for our people in long-term care facilities, and we'll make sure that happens.

Mr. Dallas: Well, my final question to the same minister. Once again we find ourselves at the mercy of volatile resource revenues, which we know we cannot control. I know that the Premier is working hard to open up new markets for oil, but what are we doing as a province to reduce that reliance on one revenue source and to build a more resilient economy?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was very clear this morning that we need to get off the roller coaster of oil prices and we need to look at diversification and innovation in all sectors, which will be key to addressing the issues, whether they be agriculture, tourism, or the tech industry. Forestry, for example, has made significant investments in the technologies used in the mills across the province, including facilities in my own riding of West Yellowhead, in both Edson and Hinton. These investments allow us to compete on the world stage, which will keep Albertans employed, strengthen communities, and contribute to our economy and our provincial revenue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Calgary-Fort.

Child and Youth Advocate Recommendations

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The annual report of the Child and Youth Advocate came out last week, and it highlights a shocking trend. It notes that the Ministry of Human Services often does not address his office's recommendations and that there has

been minimal action taken on most of the recommendations. Given the history of this file and how just last year the outcome of your ministry's unwillingness to address and implement the advocate's recommendations was front-page news almost daily, to the Minister of Human Services: can you please explain this appalling lack of action?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Working with the Child and Youth Advocate, Mr. Graff – I've had my first meeting with Mr. Graff – I think it's really important to talk about these recommendations and to see how we can improve the child care system. We know the child care system is not static; it's always being adapted. Working with communities, taking into account all the needs that we have, cultural sensitivity, research, and current best practices: that's what I'll continue to do with him.

Mr. Wilson: Weak sauce, Minister.

The fatal care series prompted your ministry to take serious action and announce a five-point plan to address your government's failures, one of which was appointing a team of professionals to accelerate required action on recommendations from previous reviews. Now, were you just hoping that this problem would go away, or can you demonstrate to Albertans that you take it seriously and tell us how you will fix this problem before we have more kids dying unnecessarily in your government's care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is talking about the oversight committee, so ably chaired by Mr. Tim Richter. We know the work that the oversight committee did in looking at the recommendations and in looking for solutions on how to solve some of the problems we have. Any recommendations we look at, we need to learn from and not place blame but support the children and youth and families with the help they need.

Mr. Wilson: The advocate himself is suggesting that you're not following or implementing his recommendations. He can't make it any clearer.

Another report came out today with three more recommendations to improve services for our kids and prevent future tragedies. What assurances can the minister provide to Albertans that these recommendations will not be cast aside as so many others have? Frankly, given this government's history, why should we believe you at all?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. No one feels the passing away of this troubled young man more than the young man's aboriginal community. My thoughts go out to his family, friends, caregivers, and loved ones.

We know the Premier and this government are committed to working closely with First Nation and Métis leaders to develop solutions. I also know that we are making a difference in that we've seen an 11 per cent decrease in the number of aboriginal children in care in the second quarter of this year. We will continue to work with the designated First Nations on a regular basis.

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

Workforce Integration of Veterans

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that men and women serving in our nation's military work hard and put their lives on the line for our freedom, so it is only right that they have their field experience recognized upon returning to civilian life. Unfortunately, I have a constituent who told me that he served as a mechanic in the military, but his credentials were not recognized when returning home. My question is to the hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. How can a veteran of the military remain in the trades and more effectively integrate into the workforce?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for standing up for men and women in uniform. It's important that we recognize their service and sacrifice made throughout the years, and it's important that we help them get back into the workforce after they've served.

The Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board recognizes a long list of military trade qualifications as equivalent to Alberta trade certificates. I invite the hon. member to give me the details on his constituent so that we can see how we can fit that in and get your constituent help. All of the members of the Canadian armed forces that hold trade qualifications . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister. You mentioned some programs available for veterans to advance their skills so they can secure jobs. I would like to see that. If there's a list of such, we would love to have it.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important that we get this particular case dealt with. I invite the hon. member to get the details, because I do know that if the Department of National Defence gives a trade certificate, we recognize that. So we need to look into this particular case.

We have several other programs to assist veterans. Again, I invite the hon. member to get together with our ministry and with your constituent, and we will address the situation as best as we can.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. That is very good news that there's a program as such for integrating veterans into our workforce. But what about any funding coming up for that as well?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have several programs that work with veterans. One is called the base-to-business program, which helps to increase the capacity of employers to hire and retain military veterans and transition them into the civilian workplace. We also work with our federal partners, with Canada's helmets to hard hats program, which assists retired military members transition specifically into the trades. So we are doing that on an ongoing basis, and I want the hon. member to know that we're in contact with those programs to look at ways to enhance them.

The Speaker: Thank you.

2:20

Provincial Fiscal Policies

(continued)

Mr. Hehr: Today's financial update reinforces the fact that Alberta's fiscal structure is broken and does not let the province do what it needs to do today: build schools, hire teachers, reduce homelessness, ensure a vibrant middle class, and provide dignity and hope to those living in poverty. If the government couldn't fulfill promises like these when oil prices were considerably higher, how does the Premier expect to do it now?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said earlier, we will balance our operating budget, and we will continue to build the necessities that we have to as far as infrastructure to look after our children that need new schools, to look after our seniors that need new spaces in continuing care.

Mr. Hehr: What we should have learned over the course of the last 25 years is that having the lowest tax jurisdiction by a country mile leads to two things, spending all of the oil wealth in one generation and leaving the province unable to build schools in neighbourhoods where kids live. To highlight this, not one of the 50 schools promised in the last election has been constructed. Why persist in employing a broken fiscal structure that leaves this province perpetually short in both good times and bad?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of the 50 schools that were committed to in phase 2, the vast majority of them are actually in the tendering process as we speak. Construction for the vast majority will be starting early next spring, and children will be in classrooms for the vast majority of those schools in the fall of 2016 as promised.

Mr. Hehr: To the minister of the treasury. Every PC Finance minister who has retired from politics has stated that we have a revenue problem. Further, economists from all sides of the political equation have confirmed as much. Why won't this government ensure schools are built, teachers are in classrooms, and seniors get the care they need by returning to at least a progressive income tax, like all other provinces, to bring in some fiscal sanity?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, we have the highest wage and income earners anywhere in Canada, and we have the lowest tax regime. We will continue to build schools, we will make sure that we have teachers to put into those schools, and we will make sure our kids get the best education possible.

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

Child and Youth Advocate Recommendations

(continued)

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Child and Youth Advocate released another heartbreaking report into the death of a young man in provincial care. Last week the advocate said that the government's responses to his recommendations show that "there has actually been minimal action taken on most of the Advocate's recommendations." This is absolutely unacceptable. Can this Minister of Human Services explain why her department is failing

to take action on recommendations meant to protect Alberta's most vulnerable children?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, as I said previously, a death of any child is a tragedy, especially a child in care. My thoughts again go out to the family, the caregivers, the loved ones, and friends who tried to help this troubled young man.

We know that in working with the aboriginal community we're doing many, many things, including developing cultural plans, working with the elders, the community and family connections, and, as well, the signs of safety program, which we have begun to implement, that has shown great success. Finally, there are mental health supports that we are providing, including supports to the caregivers as well.

Mr. Eggen: Well, again today we see the results of this government's neglect. Given that this report shows clearly that despite this young man being an obvious suicide risk, there was no plan put in place to prevent his death and given that the advocate identified that this government has repeatedly failed to take action on this officer's recommendations, that could have prevented this death, will the minister commit to responding to the advocate's recommendation in regard to suicide prevention within 60 days?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, working with the Child and Youth Advocate with this unfortunate passing, we know that the supports that we have in place that we did to help this young man were – some of the mental health supports that we needed to put in place were there. At the end of the day it was all of the staff that were there doing the best they could. The recommendations that have come forward are something that we'll be looking at.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that today's report and last week's report and last year's report show the harm that is done to children in care when they are bounced around from place to place and given that the advocate once again is recommending that this government take action on transitions, will this minister commit to implementing the advocate's recommendations with 60 days?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recommendations that have come forward with respect to a cultural plan, the suicide risk intervention, and the information sharing are something that we're looking at in the ministry. Information sharing is something that is of deep concern to me, especially when individuals go between provinces, those things, so I will be looking at that very carefully. I look forward to having the conversation with the Child and Youth Advocate on the good work he is doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Chronic Disease Management

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To quote from the September Auditor General's report on chronic disease management:

AHS does not have meaningful indicators for its CDM performance . . . [It] is not able to determine readily on a province-wide basis how much it spends on CDM services, how many patients

or which ones attend, what its waiting lists are, or whether the services are effective.

To the Minister of Health: how can you provide meaningful health outcomes when you're not measuring chronic disease management effectively?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we're making every effort to ensure that there are a variety of measures. Alberta Health Services does do a lot of measurement right now, and we're endeavouring to put those in a more broad-based way so they can have more meaning for the citizens of Alberta. Measuring chronic illness is vitally important, and making sure people have the understanding of what we can do for them depends upon how we can measure what outcomes are needed. We'll continue to do that.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Auditor General also states that "a unified clinical information and electronic medical record system in Alberta is one of the greatest potential areas for improvement in CDM and health care as a whole" and given that the government has spent hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars on developing the electronic medical records over the years, why are we still left without a unified system that would allow chronic diseases to be managed more effectively, Minister?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises a very important point. In Alberta right now we have a variety of e-medical records systems. We need to create one record system. Right now we're looking at Calgary as a very good system. We're looking at trying to take that across the province. They've done a great job down there. We think that's an opportunity to do something which is affordable and reasonable but will deliver the kind of information both for the clinicians and the researchers. We've got a group going right now with Service Alberta. We're trying to make sure that we move forward on that. It's vitally important.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that family care clinics were offered up as the made-in-Alberta solution to this team-based health care and invested in heavily for three years by this government before this minister pulled the plug, Albertans want to know what this minister is proposing as a primary health care alternative that will address the complex needs of chronic disease patients here in Alberta.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we do have a wonderful system right now, called the primary care networks, which is being used throughout the province. We did support those family care clinics which were started and were ongoing. We think they have value. We're not trying to define what has to be in communities. We want to talk to communities to see what they need. We're going to a variety of communities across the province of Alberta to develop the kinds of programs they need not just for the community but for those who deliver the services. We need to listen to the doctors and the various other people in the system so that we can make sure that we get it right. Family care clinics had some benefit, but they really didn't meet the need.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

School Construction in Southwest Edmonton

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like many Albertans, I'm thrilled that this government is under new management. However, we still have a mighty task ahead of us. As we all know, our student population continues to grow. In my own constituency of Edmonton-South West Southbrook school, a K to 6 public, is put out to tender. Allard, a K to 9 public; Desrochers, a K to 9 Catholic; Windermere, a K to 9 Catholic; Ambleside, a K to 9 public; Windermere, a K to 9 public, are all in the planning stages. Minister of Infrastructure, we're incredibly grateful to see these seven new schools, but the parents of Edmonton-South West want to know when can we expect . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member is quite right. This is a mighty task, and that's why the people of Edmonton-South West are lucky to have a mighty MLA representing them. I can confirm that Heritage Valley, which was tendered on September 19, actually closes tomorrow. Windermere and Ambleside, which went to tender on October 2, close December 19. Construction will . . .

The Speaker: Thank you. I'm sure we'll hear more.
First supplemental.

2:30

Mr. Jeneroux: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I may be mighty, but he's bigger than me.

Given that Johnny Bright school, Monsignor Fee Otterson school, Bessie Nichols school, and Sister Annata Brockman school are all P3-model school builds, what role will P3 contracts play in the construction of these seven new schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Some might say that we've had mighty significant savings by using the P3 process in the past. In fact, \$245 million have been saved using the P3 process for schools. At present we are working with our partners in various school jurisdictions to focus on having schools open in the fall of 2016, as soon as possible, and we'll look at a variety of methods of delivering those.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that we have a mighty model of schools built in partnerships with our communities, an example being George P. Nicholson school, with a YMCA daycare and an AHS health clinic, what role will we be able to see community partnerships play in these seven new schools?

An Hon. Member: Don't say it.

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, if I might . . . [interjections]

Community partners, Mr. Speaker, are very, very integral to the construction of our schools. In fact, in many new communities school infrastructure is perhaps the only public infrastructure available. I promote these partnerships but not at the expense of delays. Children deserve to be in schools close to their homes as soon as possible, so I encourage all to work on those partnerships long before construction starts.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

North West Upgrader Project

Mr. Hale: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The North West upgrader is the only refinery out of eight that hasn't been cancelled and has been consistently plagued with delays and cost overruns. Last January the PC government committed Alberta taxpayers to a financial black hole by giving \$300 million in corporate handouts to the financially risky project. According to the former PC Energy minister Ted Morton this commitment has resulted in the \$26 billion liability, up from the \$19 billion already committed. To the Minister of Energy: will you commit to get out of the business of picking winners and losers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. An interesting question. It's been clear on all sides of this House that not only is access to international markets important to Albertans, but upgrading is important as well so that we get maximum value for the natural resources that we have in our province. We have reviewed from a number of angles the North West Upgrading project. It is under construction. It will be built, it will deliver, and it will expand the suite of products that we offer to international markets.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, given that Morton points out that "the province is now on the hook for \$26 billion in processing payments . . . which translates into a processing cost of \$63 a barrel, making it even less likely that the investment will ever break even" and given that we are bound by contract to these commitments, can the minister explain what steps are being taken to ensure taxpayers won't be left on the hook for this government's corporate handout?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, there are no corporate handouts involved here. We've incented the construction of a merchant upgrader by using our BRIK barrels, and we'll pay an upgrading toll on those barrels, and then we'll get the revenue from the sale of that upgraded product. The full product review is available on the website. There's nothing secret. There are no corporate handouts. It's a project that's met many reviews, and we're quite pleased with the progress.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, \$300 million of debt in cash that they're giving them: I call that a handout.

Mr. Speaker, given that this project is increasing government liability in the form of guarantees and grants to the tune of \$26 billion and given the government's outright refusal to increase the total guarantee to the cattle feeders' program, which only receives the \$55 million guarantee, can the minister explain why this government's policy has so blatantly placed PC-chosen corporate interests ahead of hard-working Albertans such as the cattle feeders?

Mr. Oberle: We're putting the interests of Albertans and their interest in getting the maximum value for our resources at the forefront, and we're not putting anybody else's interests in front of those. This House has repeatedly and Albertans have repeatedly talked about the need to upgrade in our province. We're delivering, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Medicine Hat.

Services for Seniors

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government continues to address the changing needs of Alberta's growing seniors population. Residents of Calgary-Glenmore are pleased with the Premier's decision to create a stand-alone Seniors ministry; however, Health still plays a major role in providing for seniors' needs. My first question is for the Minister of Health. Given that most seniors prefer to stay in their own homes, what health services is your department providing to support their desires?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we all know that if we can keep our senior citizens living in their homes, it's a much, much better way for their lives and their families as well as for the province of Alberta. Home-care spending has increased 26 per cent over the last couple of years, to over \$500 million a year. That's a commitment. The 2014 budget dedicated additional funding to home care and rehabilitation services like the destination home program, which helps people return home quickly after hospital visits, which is vitally important.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is for the Minister of Seniors. Given that seniors in Calgary-Glenmore are active and are staying in their homes, how is your ministry supporting with nonhealth supports?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it's a very good question. This MLA does a great job advocating for her constituents and for her seniors. You know, seniors have become a big priority under this Premier and this government. While there are many initiatives going across several ministries, the ones that are unique to mine are the property tax deferral program, the Alberta seniors' benefit, and the special needs assistance. The special needs assistance is a program that provides lump sums to help seniors pay for repairs and things, some of the soft services within their homes. The property tax deferral allows them to tap into the equity in their homes to pay utility costs or whatever they need to put that money towards so that they can remain independent.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplemental.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you. That was a mighty fine answer, Mr. Minister.

Given that the affordable supportive living initiative program, or ASLI, has moved from Health to your ministry, how is this initiative helping to meet the growing needs of Alberta seniors?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, this is one of the good-news projects of this government to date. It's our goal to provide the absolute best care to seniors at the right place in the most appropriate manner. Many will notice that there was a large announcement with respect to the affordable supportive living initiative: 1,500 spaces, \$180 million. We issued the RFP last month – it closes December 19 – and we expect to be looking at those and making decisions in the new year. Those facilities will be built to the higher standards so that seniors can age in place. We expect this

increased volume that we'll add to the 1,400 units will be coming on to help seniors age . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Homelessness Initiatives

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of recent reports we know that there is more work to be done on the 10-year plan to end homelessness. Thousands of Albertans spend every night on the streets or in shelters, and this PC government continues to let them down. In Calgary alone there are over 3,500 homeless men, women, and children. We know that the government has verbally committed to ending homelessness, but we've seen little progress year over year. Why doesn't this PC government care about these at-risk Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The most recent homeless count showed a decrease of 16 per cent province-wide since the launch of our plan. In Edmonton homelessness was 27 per cent lower, in Lethbridge it was 45 per cent, Wood Buffalo saw a 49 per cent drop, and that's despite the population growth by more than a hundred thousand people a year.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, given that operating on a housing first principle is important and given that this is the model that the government says is being implemented, can the minister responsible tell us if it is a lack of funding that is causing this inaction, or is it government inaction that is leaving so many Albertans sleeping on the streets every night?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that there's the interagency housing committee and there are seven cities that are working very hard on the issue, including folks from Medicine Hat. We know that housing first is the model we need to pursue. We also know that there is a need for that, and that's something that we need to discuss further. But we also know that nearly 10,000 people were provided housing and supports since the launch of our plan and 3,200 have graduated from the housing first programs. We know they're working.

2:40

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Medicine Hat Community Housing Society and its partners have been leading the charge in ending homelessness in five years, not the 10 years the province has set out, why can't this government follow this successful model used in Medicine Hat, take some action, and finally address the issues facing the homeless Albertans across this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know the importance of the discussions the seven cities are having, including Medicine Hat. It's going to help the other cities solve the problems of homelessness and make sure people get into the housing first program versus temporary shelters. I look forward to

further conversations with this committee, and I know we need to continue working on this important issue.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Bill 203 Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014. The bill proposes to amend the Safety Codes Act to allow buildings of wood construction to be built to a maximum of six storeys, or 18 metres. The bill will ensure a commitment to safe, sound, and affordable infrastructure development. It will contribute to the growth and prosperity of municipalities and communities across Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne has moved first reading of Bill 203, Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, I understand you have two tablings. Proceed, please.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to section 15(2) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act I am pleased to table the 2014-15 first- and second-quarter report on the Alberta heritage savings trust fund.

The Speaker: That was two and one, I gather?

Mr. Casey: Yes.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's move on to the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. McIver: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the Certified Management Accountants of Alberta 2014 annual report and the Certified General Accountants' Association of Alberta 2014 annual report, possibly the final reports subject to the passing of Bill 7.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a text sent by a student to our gay-straight alliance hotline. In this text message the anonymous student describes how he intended to start a GSA at his school but was shut down by the school board. It's one of the many messages we've received which prove that Bill 202 is necessary and support for GSAs by school boards needs to be mandatory.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of the Ontario Bill 38, which recently passed first reading and will ban the use of menthol as a flavouring in tobacco products next year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a section of the list of AHS preservation infrastructure maintenance project needs for a five-year period as of June 25, 2014. What this shows is a troubling \$103 million needed in projects and funding to maintain and preserve the Mis. This is well above the \$43 million in deferred maintenance costs that we already know the Mis has requested for urgent needs to keep, oh, say, the roof from falling in. What the document illustrates is a major failure of the government to do even the bare minimum for the Mis.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings from constituents. The first is from Mary Mumert, and Mary is writing to tell me that her rent has now gone up to \$795, so almost \$800 per month, which she knows is just over half of her AISH. She's asking for some kind of help because everybody is feeling the pinch, and she's worried that it's going to continue to go up and her AISH payment is not.

The second tabling is an e-mail, actually quite a lengthy e-mail, from Dawn Lindboe, also a constituent, who's making the point about how frustrating it is now with an infestation of bedbugs and cockroaches. Living in an apartment building, she has now gone through and been sprayed four times in seven weeks and never got a response from Alberta Health when she complained. You have to wrap all of your belongings up and rewrap them, and it's just a really frustrating position to be in. She's looking for some improvements in the way this is dealt with.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to be tabling the requisite number of copies relating to a question that I asked some time ago about three roads in the constituency that I represent of Strathmore-Brooks, in the county of Wheatland and the county of Newell, provincial highways 569, 841, and 876, some pictures of these roads, and some letters to the hon. Minister of Transportation regarding their condition.

Also, the required number of copies referring to the question that I asked today. It says, "Morton: Upgrading bitumen is risky gamble for government," dated September 15, 2014, in the *Calgary Herald*.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Fawcett, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, pursuant to the Environmental Protection

and Enhancement Act the environmental protection security fund annual report April 1, 2013, to March 31, 2014.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, there are no points of order, so we can march right along and go to Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 6 Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2)

The Chair: I'll recognize the first speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: God, I hope other people are going to speak to this. [interjections] Okay. Good. Because this bill is – well, in the old days, Mr. Chair, which was two years ago, statutes amendment acts like this that came forward with amendments to multistatutes were called miscellaneous statutes, but they involved a certain amount of negotiation with the opposition members, and the Official Opposition, in fact, had the veto power to pull bills out if they felt they weren't minor changes to the bills. But, ever clever, this government decided not to allow that process anymore, so now they're just called statutes acts.

When this originally was talked about, it had 16 different statutes that were being discussed in one act, and I pointed out that as fast as I can speak, I couldn't speak fast enough to cover every bill that was being included in this in the amount of time that I'm allowed to speak to it. It's incredibly unfair, and I hate being made to do a poor job on something. I hate being put in this position.

2:50

You know, I'd need another couple of weeks to be able to really understand what's in this bill. The advice that I received and always took from Nick Taylor was that if you're not absolutely sure about what's in a bill or you're not absolutely sure that you support it, don't vote for it because there'll be something in there that you didn't understand or you didn't read that'll come back to haunt you. So I'm in a funny position with this, you know, because the staff have had a briefing. It seems to be okay. But what does that mean? I haven't read every word in this. Has anybody else?

Mr. Hale: Bill 1?

Ms Blakeman: Bill 6.

Just wait. I'll read it out to you, and you'll see why my hair is changing colour again. This statute is amending the Dairy Industry Omnibus Act, 2002, the Farm Implement Act – that's two – the Safety Codes Act, and the Workers' Compensation Act. That's four. So it's changing four different acts at the same time, Mr. Chair, and it ain't just, you know, a name change. It's not just a typo correction. There is stuff that is being actually changed here.

It's really frustrating when the government does something like this because we'd all like to do a good job, and it's hard to do it. Now, the government has been co-operative in giving us briefings, with 24 hours' notice, mind you, which makes it a little hard to spin on a dime. For those of us that are in small caucuses, this isn't

easy to do, but I do appreciate the opportunity to get technical briefings on this.

This is the one that's coming under the broad classification of agriculture because all of the acts that are being changed can be generally clustered under that. The only one that I'm really questioning is the Workers' Compensation Act. Of course, I was hoping that I would see compensation and coverage for nonfamily farm workers, which has been something that my caucus has worked on for a very long time, but it seems to be that it's about disclosure of personal information that would be continued to be governed by section 40 of FOIP and subject to a rigorous review and a redaction process to ensure only necessary information is disclosed. Well, under general circumstances I'm not going to agree with that. You know, I'm the avenging angel of making sure that people's personal information is protected, but the reverse of that is that the government gives out the information that it should be giving out. So on the face of it I'm not going to object to that.

You know what? I'm going to let some other people speak to this, and maybe I'll get a chance to stand up later, once I have an opportunity to listen to a few other people lay out their reasons for supporting it or for not supporting it because I just don't feel well enough prepared.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll look for the next speaker. The Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 6, the Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2). Oh, yes, of course, because we split it in half. That was very good.

Actually, that brings up the first sort of categorical comment that I wanted to make here this afternoon, and that is that I'm seeing this disturbing trend of pulling together a large volume of statutes amendments. This used to be sort of a tradition, I believe, with miscellaneous statutes amendments that would be agreed upon between the House leaders before the Legislature went forward so that we knew that it was an innocuous package of, perhaps, bureaucratic or timely adjustments that needed to be made for the sake of the public service and for changing laws, maybe, in other provinces and so forth.

Now we are seeing, Mr. Chair, these statutes being put together, but then inside of them we're finding some individual changes that are not really miscellaneous changes at all, nor would we have agreed to them if we did sit down and have a meeting with the House leaders before to decide if this package of miscellaneous statutes amendments would be okay. As some provision to that, at least, we managed to split this in two, I believe, which showed some sign of negotiation.

Always, you know, when you are trying to make the House work, it's very important that you do carry something in your pocket to negotiate with. Certainly, we only have limited tools available to us as opposition to negotiate the conduct of the House and the passage of bills and so forth in the House. But I would suggest that the government should always remember that they should bring something to the table as well because in the spirit of good governance and making good laws, ultimately, we do want to use the time in the best possible way.

Let's say that yesterday I found that by not following the agreed proposed business order that we had set forth, that we get every morning – as a House leader, I get it as an e-mail. By deviating from that in such a radical sort of way so that we shot forward, it's like growing lettuce or kale in your garden. I'm sure that you've probably seen this – right? – where everything becomes very

edible and lush for a minute, and then after a couple of days it shoots up and the whole plant becomes bitter and you can't eat it. Similarly, as a metaphor, Mr. Chair, I would suggest that we saw the same kind of thing happen yesterday.

I would just like to make sure that we know that not just the Order Paper but the agreed-upon proposed business order is followed or, if it is not followed, that we have a discussion about that before the afternoon or the evening proceeds because now we're in a position where some bills came forward, including this one, before we even got our amendments from Parliamentary Counsel and the briefing notes from our dedicated staff put together. You know, I just find that very disturbing.

The reason that this is relevant, of course, is that Bill 6 was brought up on the Order Paper yesterday even though it was not agreed upon nor did we have the capacity to even provide the amendments or to debate it properly. You know, that just doesn't work, Mr. Chair, because ultimately we provide our amendments and our discussions in the interests of best practice to create good laws. If that gets compromised, then the whole proceedings of the House get compromised as well.

That's just the first thing I wanted to say. I hope everyone understands that. I mean, we don't have that many tools available to us as opposition, but one of the things that we can do, certainly, is alter the way time passes here in the House, just to let you know that in case you are surprised during the course of this afternoon.

Bill 6, the Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2), has updates and clarifications and changes to five different existing acts. You know, most of them seem to be okay. Certainly, the amendments to the Dairy Industry Omnibus Act of 2002 make changes to perhaps make the supply and management of the Dairy Control Board to – well, it became Alberta Milk, changing that organization, and in itself that seems okay. Certainly, the Dairy Control Board is something that I think maybe we need to revisit in the future someday. It certainly did provide a good service and stable governance of the industry, but that's not for us to discuss here today because, of course, the amendment is just to do with the governance of Alberta Milk, which seems fairly straightforward, I think.

The second section is dealing with two different acts, the Farm Implement Act and the Farm Implement Dealerships Act, which will combine to create the most utilitarian and practical title of Farm Implement and Dealership Act. This section of this bill certainly seems okay. It seems to be in alignment with other provinces such as Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, so that really doesn't have a great deal of problems as well.

3:00

The third section of the bill deals with the Safety Codes Act, which I believe falls under the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. This seems to be something to do with ensuring fire protection and the building code as well. The bill seems to be dealing with registering designs and registering the safety of designs. I guess there's only one administrator that could approve those designs in the past, and this might allow for a multiplicity of people to be able to deal with those designs. Again, that seems okay.

The fourth section of the bill is the one that we find to be a problem, and this is amending the Workers' Compensation Act. Mr. Chair, I'm sure that as an MLA as well as the chair here in the Legislature you know that the Workers' Compensation Board is a great source of controversy and problems for many thousands of Albertans around the province. We know that there are lots of problems with the timely delivery of services that are insured under the Workers' Compensation Act and the delivery of those services under the board. Apparently, this amendment in Bill 6 is

designed to allow WCB to disclose information related to a worker's claim or his or her appeal of a decision of the board to other entities directly concerned such as employers, doctors, and so forth.

The government seems to be insisting that this is just a codification of an existing practice, but I just immediately had some alarm bells flare up in my mind when I heard this, because, of course, like I said, the WCB in general is a source of great anxiety and controversy amongst people right across the province and because ensuring the sanctity and the privacy of information, the very most personal information of people, I think is very important, especially in this day and age of electronic records and so forth. Right away I thought, based on those two things, that we should investigate here further. Sure enough, these things in this section of the larger bill are the areas where we have concern.

You know, we're here to help, of course. That's why we're elected here and placed on this Earth. So we have some amendments that can help make this a better bill and a better place, which we will get to as soon as we get them delivered. Like I said from the beginning of my speech, we were caught out yesterday by Bill 6 appearing somehow on the Order Paper when it wasn't meant to, and the timely execution of Parliamentary Counsel and so forth just made it impossible that we would have the amendments available to us before. So we will be seeing those this afternoon sometime, I'm sure, in due course.

Certainly, we oppose this lack of consultation, first and foremost, that came up with this WCB portion of this omnibus bill. You know, like I said before, we would be happy to package these things to make sure that the Legislature is functioning in a smooth and operative place. But when we sort of have these things foisted on us, then, you know, I'm concerned. I've watched omnibus practices in the United States and in the federal government. Right? Calgary-Buffalo, you should be thinking about this, you know, these big omnibus bills. They are a tool that the federal Conservatives have been using now for a number of years, and it's quite odious and offensive, really. We know that it's a way by which you can put a little package of maybe bills that you agree with and bills that are necessary and that people really need and then tuck some offensive neoliberal, sort of right-wing thing in the corner somewhere that you can't accept. It creates this dilemma, Mr. Chair, for honest, hard-working MLAs like ourselves over here in the NDP. We have this sword hanging over us.

That's kind of what we're presented with here today with the WCB section of this larger bill. So, yeah, it makes it hard for us to, you know, support a larger thing, including dairy and farm implements and all this other stuff that might be very necessary, because suddenly you have this WCB thing tagged onto the end of it, which is not acceptable.

The changes to the Workers' Compensation Act. We noticed that there wasn't a great deal of consultation going on, so we did it really fast in the last 48 hours, using our amazing powers of telephone and electronic media and the connections we have to shop this around and say: "You know, we're suspicious. What is this thing?" We've talked to a number of people. One individual told me that these changes decrease the transparency of the WC process in regard to how and to whom the WCB can transmit information about a claim. Okay? This person who advocates for WC claimants as a business also said that under these proposed amendments there are fewer safeguards to ensure that employers don't see irrelevant details about an employee's claim like their medical history, medications, or claims they've made previously in other jurisdictions, as suggested in section 147(4).

I mean, this is a fundamental problem, right? If an employer has access to different aspects of an individual's medical file, they can

exert prejudice over that individual by maybe knowing that they have a pre-existing condition, either physical or mental or both, that might compromise their capacity to do the job or their capacity to be promoted or exert any other sort of powers that an employer has over an employee. You know that this is something that raises a red flag amongst all working people and especially us as the New Democrats.

Under existing occupational rulings in the previous legislation the Workers' Compensation Board is not allowed to divulge claimant information to an employer if the employee files an appeal to an Appeals Commission. So while personal information might still be governed by freedom of information laws, FOIP, there still will continue to be a redaction of certain information – there should be anyway – no longer a two-step redaction process when things are sent to an Appeals Commission. Again, a serious problem. Can you imagine yourself in this situation? It's a compromise of your personal security.

Also, Workers' Compensation Board claimants should be entitled to privacy from their employers just like any other Albertan. Why would we diverge from that basic human right when someone has to make a claim to the WCB? The power imbalance between employer and employee, which is a chronic issue – right? – that is so often tipped in favour of the employer here in this province, is heightened somehow by the filing of a claim. The rights of an employee need to be given special consideration, I believe, in this situation because they are in a compromised circumstance. It's not like you are just moving along freely with your job and your life. You've run into a physical or other compromising situation that requires you to file a claim with WCB. So that, by definition, should be a person that we would defend and look after more through regulation, not less.

3:10

The workers' compensation process, Mr. Chair, needs to be a transparent process, first and foremost – right? – so that employees understand what's being done on their behalf and their rights are not being trivialized merely because they have decided to make a claim against their employer. It's a basic and, I think, unassailable position to start with.

The Privacy Commissioner, who's an officer of the Legislature here, rejects this claim that the WCB would be providing personal information to an employer as a fundamental component of the system. So, again, we hire and carefully pick these officers of the Legislature to ensure a third-party objective analysis of what we do in this Legislature. In this case I think the Privacy Commissioner makes it clear that providing personal information to an employer is a fundamental component. The current practice is not enough to merit these changes. The Privacy Commissioner notes that the WCB seems to make it a habit to disclose claim files to employers after they've only completed two forms, neither of which explicitly requests the claim file or makes a reasoned argument why it's needed.

So, Mr. Chair, you know, it seems pretty clear to me that the relevance of this larger bill, first of all, like I said before, brings forward the problem of grouping together miscellaneous statutes and then changes that have more substance to them. You know, we should refrain from that practice, and I think everybody would be the better for it.

Two, it's very important that we ensure and maintain clear communication between all parties in the Legislature to know that if we are moving faster or slower through different points of legislation, we sort of agree to do that. Right? I mean, like I said, this is something that if you just picked it up and said, "We're just going to change the dairy board or Farm Implement Board," we'd

say, "Hey; that sounds great." But after another six or seven hours we realize that there is a substantive problematic piece of this bill that requires further examination.

So that's kind of what I would like to just open with, and I welcome other people's analysis and comments.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Before I recognize the next speaker, could I just ask that we keep the side conversations down to a softer roar? Thank you.

I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise on Bill 6, Statutes Amendment Act, 2014. As others have mentioned, this has been a whirlwind, with this bill being so late and things moving so quickly, so it does give us pause.

There's so much that we have to get up to speed on that it's with reservation that we have to approach such a large omnibus bill, which was, I gather, cut in half at the request of our House leader and still has four bills and amendments within it, including the Dairy Industry Omnibus Act, with transitional provisions repealed; the Farm Implement Act, combining the Farm Implement Dealerships Act, which is repealed, with maximum fines doubling to \$100,000; the Safety Codes Act, to increase the workload efficiency of the administrator by allowing safety codes officers to register designs and remove burden from the administrator to determine safety that is beyond the requirements of the act; and then, finally, the Workers' Compensation Act, which itself is such a large and complex bill, with huge implications for many workers in this province, the general purpose here being to clarify the workers' compensation authority to disclose information, improve flow, and resolve natural justice issues along with operational issues. According to the government the amendments are supported by the appeals tribunal and the Appeals Commission. These amendments address recent decisions by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner which questioned the authority of the WCB to disclose information deemed necessary to conduct its business.

Well, that raises not a few concerns with not only workers but also with workers' agents, and as I will identify in the next bit, I will be recommending two amendments to try to ensure that, especially in the Workers' Compensation Act, we are addressing some of the concerns about workers' agents and the appeal process itself.

Under the Dairy Industry Omnibus Act the sections were transitional provisions when Alberta Milk took over the production quotas from the dairy board. The board was a government board that oversaw the quotas and inspection. The ministry kept the inspections, and Alberta Milk obtained the quota. So, clearly, not a great concern to this caucus, especially since Alberta Milk is a producer-run organization.

The second act, the Farm Implement Act, also seems to be progress. I met with the minister and his researchers, and it seemed quite sensible that maximum fines could be increased to \$100,000 from \$50,000 when someone has been jilted in relation to a farm implement sale or the repair of a warrantied item.

Section 30.3(3) requires the distributor of the implements to purchase from the dealer any and all unused equipment, parts, and supplies in the event the agreement between the two is terminated or expires. This section denotes the rate of the returned items, the due date of the payment, and the provisions for court appeals.

Section 30.4 requires the distributor, on the request of the minister, to provide to the minister a copy of an agreement between them and the dealer, particulars of an unwritten agreement with any and all dealers, and a copy of written or unwritten agreements with

any or all dealers with respect to the return of implements or parts to the distributor.

Section 30.5 denotes the provisions that must be included in an agreement between a dealer and a distributor. These provisions are who pays for the replacement costs for a substitute farm implement to be provided to the farmer and, number 2, how farmers will be notified if a part or implement cannot be provided and how the substitute implement cost will be covered by the dealer and the distributor.

This act, The Farm Implement Act, also adjusts regulatory powers under section 30.3(4), which allows for interest to be charged on amounts owing to the dealer by the distributor. The Lieutenant Governor in Council may set the interest rate. The Lieutenant Governor in Council may also set any regulations governing any matter in connection with the incidentals to section 30.3, the repurchase of implements, and 30.4, the minister requesting copies of agreements or provisions between distributors and dealers. All the other regulatory powers remain the same.

Those are some of the issues that we have very little difficulty with. Some of the concerns, as I mentioned, relating to the Workers' Compensation Act are somewhat different and will be addressed in amendments.

With your permission, Mr. Chair, I will put forward an amendment to the Workers' Compensation Act.

The Chair: Do you have an amendment ready to go, hon. member?

Dr. Swann: Yes.

3:20

The Chair: Okay. The pages will circulate that if you just pause for a brief moment, and then I'll invite you to speak to it.

This being the first amendment, hon. member, we will deem that to be amendment A1. If you'd send me the original, I'd really appreciate it. Thank you.

I think you can start speaking to the amendment, hon. member, amendment A1.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. This is an amendment to Bill 6, Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2), that it be amended in section 4(4) in the proposed section 147(3)(a) by adding "including the worker or the worker's agent" after "directly concerned." This was raised to us by concerned individuals who've been involved with the Workers' Compensation Act for a number of years. We don't have any trouble with sharing more information with both the worker and the Appeals Commission but also want it to be accessible to the worker's agent. We don't see any reason why that should be withheld from someone who's acting in the interests of the worker, including a lawyer or an advocate. It would simply make clear that withholding that kind of information from the worker's agent would be either deliberately or incidentally ignoring the importance of that agent on behalf of the worker to seek justice or to seek appeal of decisions that were not in the worker's best interest.

I look forward to the discussion, Mr. Chairman. I think it's a common-sense decision that simply includes the phrase "or the worker's agent" in the sharing of information around an appeal in relation to the worker's compensation.

The Chair: Speaking, then, to amendment A1, are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the amendment that's been made by my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, and I very much understand the

intention. This bill will allow the disclosure of otherwise confidential information of a workers' compensation recipient to maybe his medical people or to his employer. The hon. member, as I understand it, wants to make sure that the workers' compensation recipient themselves or their agent also has access to the information, and I appreciate that.

The difficulty that I have with respect to this – and we have some amendments of our own with regard to this – is that we don't think that section 147(3) should actually exist in the sense that we don't accept that the employer, for example, should have access to confidential workers' compensation files about their employees. So we're actually going in the other direction. We're wanting to get rid of this as opposed to adding to it.

Now, if it's going to be there – and I can't imagine that the government would vote down an NDP amendment to a bill, but if that should happen, Mr. Chairman, then this would strengthen a section that we would really rather just get rid of. As we're speaking, we're trying to come to some decision with respect to this. We're in a bit of a conundrum about it because our amendments will just basically punt the section in general. [interjection] I guess we can strengthen the section and still vote against it in the end. I think that makes sense.

Okay. Mr. Chairman, I'm speaking in favour of this amendment, and I appreciate the hon. member helping me clarify the strategy with respect to this. As the hon. member has moved that the proposed section 147(3)(a) will be improved by adding "including the worker or the worker's agent" after "directly concerned," on that basis we will support strengthening this very weak section before we support getting rid of the section altogether, and when you put it like that, it makes perfect sense to me.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others speaking to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the hon. member's amendment to this act. I'd like to speak, you know, in generalities for a moment about this act.

First of all, we find ourselves facing yet another omnibus bill, which I find to be fairly problematic for a couple of different reasons, Mr. Chairman. One, when we start amending – and I know the government likes to downplay the act and refer to it as minor housekeeping types of changes – the reality is that we've seen time and time again this PC government, the same government that was elected in 2012, that hasn't changed, try to slip through other pieces of legislation that are not just mere housekeeping but that have a significant impact on many Albertans.

Part of it was going through this act – and I'm not going to lie. I mean, some of these sections, particularly the one that this amendment deals with, I find quite problematic. You know, it's interesting. As my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has just stated, we do have a couple of amendments to try to improve this bill. Again, it's going to be a long shot of an attempt to improve the bill because of, especially, section 4, that is quite challenging.

I appreciate the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View's attempt to improve this section. We're talking about ensuring that we are proposing legislation which serves the interests and the best interests of our greatest resource here in the province, which is its people. We're talking about trying to improve access to and make it easier for those that need to access workers' compensation. We know that there are many Albertans who are frustrated and get frustrated by the system and the bureaucracy that they have to work through. In this section we're talking about

protecting our workers and ensuring that they're not going to be exposed and that that information will remain confidential.

I think it's interesting, you know, that this amendment is trying to provide a worker with another option. We're talking about the worker or the worker's agent. I think I have a pretty good idea of where the member is going with this. I mean, there are a lot of people who are in the Alberta workforce who may have service providers that help them, so this is ensuring that if there are people who are care workers or workers that are designated to provide assistance, they will be privy to this information so that they can properly advocate on behalf of the worker and help them navigate through the system.

I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that I can think of direct examples of this. In my former capacity as a high school teacher in the inner city we did have a number of students that regularly needed help navigating through the systems of bureaucracy, that often are interpreted as – or one gets the impression that they are – barriers and walls that are put up by this government in order to make the system less accessible. Whether it's talking about dollars or rights that people have, it seems like they're intentionally set out to frustrate and discourage someone from accessing what they are legally entitled to and what their rights are as an Albertan and as a citizen. There have been many times when I have actually played the role of an advocate on behalf of my students and acted in a capacity of helping them navigate through some very challenging systems.

3:30

Now, maybe they didn't always apply to WCB. Maybe they applied more to accessing dollars for school, for grants, for housing. But the point is that I played a pretty crucial role, as did many of the staff that I will give a shout-out to, not only staff at Inner City but staff throughout the province that are advocates for their clients, that are there because they feel a sense of compassion and wanting to ensure that the rights of all Albertans are not only protected but that Albertans have a voice.

As we know, Mr. Chair, there are a growing number of people that are fitting into or falling into this growing disparity gap, you know, a disparity between the wealthy and a growing number of people that are struggling to make ends meet. I see that this amendment would provide additional support for those Albertans that, again, struggle to advocate on their own behalf.

You know, to put this into the context of my position today as the representative for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, my office regularly gets calls and letters and visits from folks who are trying to navigate through the system of WCB and who get quite frustrated. Now, obviously, my staff do a phenomenal job. I'm extremely grateful for the work that they do advocating for my constituents and advocating on behalf of my constituents. One of the largest numbers or sources of calls that come in do relate to WCB.

It's my understanding of this amendment that this would provide, again, the tool or the ability to inform workers. As we know, Mr. Chair, you know, we're trying to ensure that Alberta is as inclusive as possible. We're encouraging people to join the workforce and to work, and there are people who sometimes need additional assistance or, again, need a voice or an advocate on their behalf. This amendment does deal with that and provides workers an opportunity to ensure that their advocates are part of the process and that they have that information.

You know, in a few minutes, Mr. Chair, I will be speaking to, I believe, an amendment that my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood will be bringing forward. Now, that deals with the whole of section 4, really, of this act. So in an

attempt to try to improve a subsection of section 4, I am speaking in favour of this amendment. I will urge all of my colleagues of this House to support this amendment, making this system a little more accessible and, again, ensuring that all Albertans have the opportunity to have representation or assistance or an advocate working with them, which I think is a very good idea.

With that, I will thank the member for moving this amendment and encourage all members of the Assembly to support this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Other speakers? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw on amendment A1.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. What I'm wondering is if there is anyone on the government benches who can clarify for the House that the way the amended bill is looking to be read is: any person "directly concerned," but the amendment is just clarifying with "including the worker or the worker's agent." I'm wondering if someone from the government bench can tell me if they would define someone "directly concerned" as the worker or the worker's agent, thus making the amendment somewhat redundant?

Thank you.

The Chair: We might be able to get to that a little later, hon. member.

Meanwhile, I'll recognize another speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the chance to speak on this amendment. It almost feels telepathic. I don't know how the Member for Calgary-Mountain View was perhaps seeing what we were seeing in such a clear sort of way.

Mr. Mason: He's clairvoyant.

Mr. Eggen: Clairvoyant maybe. Maybe our first names are the same. I don't know.

It certainly does focus specifically on section 4(4), which, as I outlined in my original comments, was the problem with the section of Bill 6 that I had spoken about in my first go-round here. So I just want to look at that again because, you know, we want to make sure that we fix this, right? I mean, it's not as though we're trying to create any obfuscation here at all. We want to make sure that we get the job done here.

Sections 147(3) and 147(4) talk about fewer safeguards to ensure that employers don't see irrelevant details about employees' claims like their medical history, like other jurisdictions did, okay? I mean, this is the essence of, really, what part of one of our amendments is as well. The section talks about transparency of the process and protection of privacy rights of workers who are forced to file claims with the WCB or decisions through the Appeals Commission.

You know, it's a defence of current practice that I don't think, Mr. Chair, is good enough, really, to merit changes. It's not just like: "Oh, well. This is the way we've been doing it for so many years, you know. Let's codify it." Well, maybe what we were doing for so many years is not the best thing to do, right? It could be that people were just simply backsliding into the practice of sharing this information, which, in fact, was detrimental to, maybe, some of these people whose files were passed around.

The Privacy Commissioner notes this as well, and notes that the WCB is starting to make a habit of disclosing claim files to employers after they complete only two forms – right? – which it

explicitly requests the claim file or makes a reasoned argument as to why it might be needed. The amendment that the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View did bring forward here is to add "including the worker or the worker's agent" after "directly concerned." You know, I guess I'm going to play it both ways here in case this one maybe doesn't get voted with an overwhelming majority. I'm certainly going to support his amendment, and then I can always have a backup one in case I need to.

You know, it's really important that we show some solidarity with the workers who actually are compelled to make claims to the WCB because, of course, like I said before, they are in a compromised situation to begin with. It's not as though you are with your full health and faculties when you are in the midst of a claim process with the WCB. You're more likely to be, in fact, quite the opposite. With that in mind, I think it's incumbent upon all of us to ensure that there's some sense of protection of an individual's rights and not anything less than that.

Mr. Chair, I certainly do support the Member for Calgary-Mountain View's amendment. I wish and encourage everybody to support that amendment. We can only expect that if not, I might have one that I can pull out of the hat as well.

3:40

The amendments to Bill 6, because of its voluminous sort of collection of statutes, I guess, from the beginning make it not a miscellaneous statute but really some form of the American-style omnibus bill that is a plague on democracy both in the United States and in our federal government. You might have innocuous statutes about milk and so forth, but then you have within there the Workers' Compensation Act, and the section that is a little bit less than palatable.

That's why we certainly feel like we want to just pull that out, right? If we amend it, that's great. If we change the language, that's good, too. Then just as a backstop, an extra little bit of safety, I have another idea in my pocket to perhaps fix this.

You know, I really encourage all members not to just vote for Calgary-Mountain View's amendment but to express themselves a little bit about it, too, because I always find that when I talk things out, I feel better. I'm feeling, obviously, really good now, and I can only imagine that I'm going to feel excellent by 6 o'clock.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there other speakers to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm privileged to be able to rise today and begin discussions on Bill 6, which as . . .

The Chair: Specifically to the amendment, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Yes. Right. Sorry. The amendment to Bill 6. So in discussing the merits of the amendment, it's possible I might touch on Bill 6; in particular, the section of Bill 6 which relates to amendments to the Workers' Compensation Act and, in particular, amendments in Bill 6 relating to the Workers' Compensation Act which talk about confidentiality of information.

I'm glad that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View chose to raise this issue. We, too, have very significant concerns, frankly, about all of section 147. I think this is a good opportunity to look a little bit into how Calgary-Mountain View proposes to fix the problems in section 147. I think, certainly, his proposal does help a little bit, so in principle I do appreciate that it's helping in the kind of way that I would like to see help. The only, I guess, concern that I would have is that I do believe it's possible that we're going to come forward afterwards and attempt to eliminate

this section altogether. But in so doing, we're doing it for a number of the same reasons that Calgary-Mountain View has proposed his amendment.

Essentially, what he is talking about here is ensuring that the worker or the worker's agent is very clearly included in the list of people who would receive information that the board considers necessary to carry out the purposes of the act. I think that's a really important issue because I certainly spent a good deal of time in my career before I was elected working in the area of workers' rights. I was an advocate that way and spent a lot of time dealing with health and safety issues and representing workers when they had concerns relating to their entitlement to workers' compensation.

I will say that, generally speaking, this is a system in Alberta that troubles me deeply. The overarching record of our Workers' Compensation Board has not been balanced, and it has not achieved the objective of assisting workers who are injured in the workplace so that they suffer no loss of income arising from the injury they received in the workplace. As many people in this room I'm sure know, you know, workers' compensation is the product of what's often known as a historic compromise.

The historic compromise was one where a little after the turn of the century, back a century in the early 1900s, people noticed that a lot of workers were getting killed and very, very seriously injured at work. Then what would happen is that their families would be incredibly destitute as, you know, maybe 1 out of every 50 of them would navigate all the hurdles between them, their poverty, and the court system in order to be able to sue the employer for what was invariably a multiplicity of negligent actions, in order to receive some kind of compensation for the injury which occurred at the hands of the employer, who, as many people here I'm sure know, legally is seen to be in control of the workplace. Anyway, that was the historic compromise.

So what happened was that, on one hand, workers more often than not were not getting any kind of compensation, nor were their families. On the other hand, even as it went from, say, 1 out of every 10 workers getting compensation and then 2 out of every 10 and then 3 out of every 10, employers started to get worried that those insurance costs were getting out of control and this might actually become too expensive for them, having workers having the right to sue them. Indeed, that's what has happened in the U.S.

All that being said, as a result, then, there was a negotiation that occurred legislatively, essentially between workers and employers, where workers gave up the right to sue the employer, and in return the employer replaced the workers' income, so they suffered no loss of income as a result of their injury. They never got any pain and suffering compensation, they never got anything for a loss of pension, they never got anything for the impact on their family, none of that kind of stuff, but at least they didn't lose their income.

That was the theory, and WCB was to be this objective, fair, neutral arbitrator, taking the place of a judge, actually, in this dispute between workers and employers. What has evolved in Alberta, unfortunately, is that WCB does not function as an objective, neutral arbiter or judge between workers and employers. WCB functions as a tool of the employer, through the work of this government, as a means primarily of saving employers money. So they are basically a very, very cheap form of insurance to employers. They measure their success by how little benefits they have to pay out, and they measure their success by how few premiums they ask Alberta employers to pay.

For instance, employers in Alberta pay about half the national average of what is paid to injured workers as a result of injury, and that happens at the same time that we have some of the worst

injury statistics in the country. What that means, in fact, is that our so-called neutral arbitrator between the interests of employers and workers is actually tipping the balance very aggressively on one side in favour of employers and at the expense of working people and their families once they've been injured. That's a long-standing process that's been going on in this province.

So, then, this section suggests that we can somehow rely on this theoretically objective and neutral board to decide what confidential medical information of the injured worker should be given to any number of people for any purpose, and that's what this legislation would do. It would give that massive, broad authority to the WCB. The presumption is: oh, we can trust them because they're a neutral arbitrator. Well, my friends, I will tell you that they are not, and they have not been for years.

People in this province also suffer from another disparity, which is that we have amongst the lowest funding for legal aid in the country and that almost no Albertan can gain access to legal aid support to hire a lawyer to help them in their legal contests vis-à-vis the WCB. Since there's no access to the courts, there's no way to pull the WCB back towards the centre of what should be a neutral, objective adjudication role, and in the absence of the courts doing that and holding them accountable, it doesn't happen. So the only people that take the WCB to court in Alberta are employers. Workers never do.

3:50

This goes directly to this issue because the issue here is that this section without the amendment basically gives the board the discretion to decide whom should get that information. What the member from Calgary-Mountain View is trying to achieve here is to ensure that, at the very least, the worker or their agent – and just to be clear, it's not their counsel; they can't afford counsel 99 times out of a 100 – would at least be aware and receive the same information that is distributed to other parties.

It is an effort, therefore, to insert a little bit of specific balance to what is otherwise a very unbalanced process. Given the way I introduced our position on this amendment, you can imagine that, really, it's more likely the case that we would be proposing that we just punt the amendment to section 147; I guess it's section 4(4). That's actually what we would probably choose to eliminate altogether.

But I certainly appreciate the intent of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I think his intent comes from a similar place as the rationale that I'm just describing. It's very possible that I will vote in favour of it, but I have to say that we may still feel compelled to then suggest that the whole darn thing has to go. But in case we lose that one, I'll certainly make every effort to win this one, because it would certainly be an improvement in that regard.

I look forward to having a chance to talk more generally about section 4(4) and the replacement or the substitution of section 147 once we're no longer speaking about the amendment, and I certainly will be doing that.

I do appreciate the opportunity to talk about my support for the amendment that is proposed by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Oh, yes. It's my honour, Mr. Chair, to get up and speak again to this. I think the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona was quite eloquent in her speech. I always find it fascinating to

listen to her arguments. You can definitely see her background as far as coming from a background of law and being very meticulous in her evaluation and assessment of a bill, which is greatly appreciated and, I think, adds great value to the discussion that we have here in the House and to the points that my caucus, the Alberta NDP, are able to bring forward.

I'll keep my comments fairly short. Most members heard, when I spoke a little while ago, about the value of this amendment. Now, I'm speaking to the value of this amendment in, again, improving the ability that Alberta workers have, through an agent on behalf of the worker, to be included in the discussions and to be aware and to have information, not restricting them or being excluded from getting all the information. Again, if we're talking about either caregivers or those that are there to provide support, then it makes sense that they are entitled to understanding the process of a claim or of a person who's working through that. I think it's very important that we consider this.

Now, I mean, it's interesting. We do have a couple of amendments, to attempt to strengthen this section of the bill. When I move those in a few moments here, I will speak, again, more broadly to concerns that I have with omnibus bills and bills that deal with multiple acts and multiple sections of acts. It makes it very challenging to have a thorough and rigorous debate in this House, where different amendments to acts really deserve the time to be a stand-alone piece of legislation, to have that kind of thorough debate. Part of it comes down to the courtesy that the government should be extending to the opposition as far as giving us as much time as possible to work through a bill and its process.

I think, you know, something that's very interesting about this House is the process of how the opposition acquires the bill, obviously after the first reading, but the time seems, at least this week, the speed at which we are blasting through pieces of legislation – I'd like to remind all the members of the Assembly that we're enacting laws that affect this year more than 4 million people. Down the road – I mean, we're expanding very quickly here in the province. We should be taking the time to go through this and have a thorough debate. I don't think rushing legislation does anyone any favours.

I'm happy to remind members of this House of when Bill 28 was first introduced and the fact that it was our caucus that sounded the alarm bells on Bill 28. For those of you who can't remember, that was the discussion of locking up and incarcerating mayors of municipalities, you know, which was – I'm not sure where that idea came from. I really have serious questions for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and whoever authored that. But my point, Mr. Chair, is that there were many amendments that the Alberta NDP brought forward at that time. Those amendments, unfortunately, were voted down by the government, the PC Party. Lo and behold, six months later an amending piece of legislation came back, and there were numerous amendments that we put forward that were in the government's amendment to their own bill. At the end of the day, that's time that we debated those, that could have been resolved a year prior.

You know, when we look at wasting 87 members' time, your time, Mr. Chair, the Clerk, the Legislative offices staff, if we're going to bring forward legislation, then let's take the time to get it right, get it right the first time, and have fulsome debate. Now, I know that there are members of this Assembly who seem to think that, you know, I don't know, an hour or two hours is fulsome debate on a bill. I disagree. I think we need to provide the opportunity and to move at a pace that ensures that members, who, again, are speaking not just for themselves, on behalf of their 40,000 to 50,000 constituents or so, are heard and that their opinions are expressed.

You know, Mr. Chair, I'll remind you that at times it takes time from the first reading, when the bill is accessible and gets into our hands, for us to consult with stakeholders. I know that the government loves to use the term "consultation." I'm not going to lie; it causes me to get a bit of a twitch because it seems that their definition of consultation is completely different than when you talk to municipalities, First Nations, other stakeholder groups, environmental groups. You know, the definition of consultation changes drastically.

My point, though, is that, you know, we like to speak with our stakeholders, our members, engage Albertans as well. When a bill zips from first reading to third reading in the span of 24 hours, as have many of the bills that are on the Order Paper, Mr. Chair, it makes it very challenging for the opposition to read through the bill, interpret, and then offer amendments which are, for the most part, meant to strengthen and improve a bill. They might be ideas that the government hasn't thought of. They might be ideas coming directly from stakeholders. There is real value – again, we live and work in a multiparty parliamentary system that values the opinions of different perspectives. Quite frankly, that's why I'm here, to provide perspective. If we value the input of all parties in this Legislature and all members of the Legislature, then they need to be given the opportunity with which to have debate and share their ideas.

You know, getting back to this amendment, I'm happy that we've had as much debate as we've had. I'm sure the member that moved this amendment is quite content with the discussion that we've had. I look forward to further discussion. I hope members opposite will speak to some of the amendments that we're going to be bringing forward. I will urge members of the Assembly to support this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

4:00

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to, first of all, thank all members who have taken part in the discussion, the debate on this amendment. I would like to just provide a little bit of context, some of which was already in my comments in moving second reading, so some of this may be repetitive. In terms of context I would just say that this amendment really does stem from some practical experiences that have been noted by the Workers' Compensation Board, which, I might point out, is obviously made up of representatives of both employers and employees and the general public. Comments have come from the Appeals Commission and also in conversations with the office of the Privacy Commissioner. In fact, there have been a number of discussions back and forth between these parties in coming up with these amendments.

I think the result that we have here is a practical solution to some issues that were on the horizon, because the Privacy Commissioner had taken a certain view of the way some of this information should be flowing. What we have here today as a result in terms of this amendment, not the amendment from Calgary-Mountain View but the bill itself, is something that will respect privacy, make for efficient movement of information when it's going up from the Workers' Compensation Board to the Appeals Commission, and, I think, serve Albertans generally and, certainly, serve workers and employers on both sides of the issue.

I don't feel that I can support the amendment from Calgary-Mountain View. I don't think it's necessary. I think it's redundant because we already have a system where the worker can sign a

consent for information to be shared. Also, in speaking to the Workers' Compensation Board and in the briefings both that I've received and that have been available to the members opposite, it's been noted that the Workers' Compensation Board was uncomfortable with having to filter and screen whatever would go to the Appeals Commission before they made their decision. So for the purposes of natural justice we thought that it was important that that information be available to the Appeals Commission. They still are subject to all of the FOIP requirements and the FOIP laws.

It should be noted, too, that at this point in time something like a million pages of information are being copied and passed to the Appeals Commission. We are trying to move and I know that the WCB and the Appeals Commission are trying to move to a system that will be electronic. It'll be much quicker. It'll serve the interests of everybody because the information will be more readily available.

While I respect the comments of the members opposite and have taken note of their comments, I can't support the amendment that's being offered because I do think that it is redundant. It's already available. The passage of that information is already available to people who are acting as agents and so on. I would encourage members to not support this particular amendment, and I look forward to further discussion and debate from all members of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Chair: Other speakers to amendment A1?

If not, we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We're back to the main bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much again, Mr. Chairman. I'm disappointed that that amendment was shot down because it certainly didn't add any threat to the bill and would have given some comfort to workers that nothing would be withheld.

To go to a second amendment, I will be moving, on Bill 6, Statutes Amendment Act, 2014, that it be amended by striking out section 4(3) and substituting the following . . .

The Chair: Sure. Okay. If the pages would distribute that amendment. Just pause for a brief moment, hon. member.

We'll call this one amendment A2, hon. member, and you can speak to it.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This is an issue that has to do with the appeal process and the very short timeline that workers have to appeal a decision of the board in relation to compensation. It's a very problematic and frustrating and demoralizing issue for many workers who are not able to provide appeal information based on all the consultations that they may have made with doctors or various health workers and consultants around their injury.

They have to have this all together within one year to appeal. Many provinces in the country don't put any limit on the appeal period, but in Alberta we put a one-year limit on appealing, which in some cases has actually left people with serious injuries, especially head injuries where they have cognitive problems, emotional problems, out in the cold because they didn't get their appeals in within 12 months. The only reason that I can see that the WCB would want to limit the appeal period to one year would be to reduce their liability. This body, the WCB, is supposed to be

there to fairly and adequately compensate workers regardless of how long it takes for them to get all of the information from their specialists or consultants or counsellors.

The essence of this amendment is to extend the appeal period from one year to 10 years, to allow workers, especially those who are severely injured, who take months and months, in some cases, to get in to see their specialists, who may get contradictory reports from different specialists, who may need further surgery, who may need other aspects of their care, including mental health issues, dealt with – this unfairly excludes people when they haven't managed to get through the appeal process within one year, when you think about how long it takes to get in to see specialists, how long it takes to get in to surgery at times, when you think about the seriousness of the impacts on individuals' mental health and their families. It seems draconian and seriously unfair to limit people on the basis that they didn't get an appeal in within 12 months when they're dealing with financial issues, family issues, trauma, posttraumatic stress, and in some cases tremendous delays within the health system.

All we're saying, I think, in this amendment is that by striking out "one year" in subsection (8) and substituting "ten years," we are giving workers who are injured in the workplace a fair opportunity to appeal what they perceive as unfair decisions. If they don't have the evidence, if they don't have the support from various health specialists or psychologists to sustain their appeal, it will be thrown out. There's no reason to limit workers to a one-year appeal period unless it's simply to remove liability from the WCB, and that is not the purpose of the WCB. The WCB is really there to act on behalf of injured workers and try and make sure that they have a fair restitution of their rightfully due compensation.

4:10

I would really strongly encourage members here to consider this amendment as a vote in favour of fairness, justice, and requiring the WCB to do its due diligence and extend, in some cases, the appeal process beyond one year, which is impossible in some cases for the worker to do for the reasons I've given.

Now, the WCB will come back and say: well, we have the discretion; we could extend the period of appeal if we see that there are extended periods. But it never happens. Why does it never happen? Because they want to limit their liability. They want to reduce payments in some cases instead of letting natural justice do its job.

I feel very passionately about this. I've had a number of people in my office who have had various reasons – for some of them it's simply lack an awareness on the worker's part; for some of them it's because they've had brain injuries; for some of them it's because of their family dynamics, the loss of their house, whatever – interfere with their judgment or their ability or their timely appeal. Whatever the reasons there is absolutely no reason to limit a person's appeal if they have just cause for compensation. There is no reason to limit their appeal period to one year. In many other provinces in Canada there is no limit on appeals.

In the interests of being and being seen to be a fair government, we can implement what is a minor change on paper, from a one-year to a 10-year appeal period, but which has a huge impact on a number of workers. Thousands of workers over the last 50 years in Alberta have been excluded from reasonable compensation just because they didn't meet that very narrow, one-year period.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Are there others, to the amendment?

Ms Notley: Well, I want to begin by truly thanking the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for this amendment. I want to congratulate him and/or his staff on the ingenuity of injecting this issue into today's discussion, because this is a really important issue, and it addresses a profound injustice which happens very regularly in this province. This is an absolutely excellent proposed amendment, and I absolutely support it.

Why do we want to change the appeal period from one year? Let me count the many, many ways. Let's begin by noting that it's a relatively recent decision by this government to inject the statutory limit on the amount of time a worker has to appeal. It was a decision that I believe was heartless, and it was a decision that displayed a profound level of being out of touch with the realities of working people who find themselves unable to attend work and unable to earn an income. Maybe folks over on that side are used to having, you know, five years of salary cushion between their time of working and when they start to get into trouble if they don't have an income, but regular working people certainly do not.

This issue of whether they are entitled to compensation when they are unable to work due to their injury is profoundly – profoundly – important to them. This one-year limit to an appeal restricts their rights more than would be the case for somebody exercising a number of different rights within our court system. Were I, say, for instance, Daryl Katz, I could wait six years to start a legal action about a breach of contract. So say, you know, that I'm a hugely wealthy developer and somebody breaches a contract and I think that I've lost hundreds of millions of dollars, I can wait six years before I go into court with that one.

But no, no, no. If I'm the injured worker who's been told that your back injury from being required to lift a patient on your own – and you're lifting that patient on your own because the other five people who might have been working with you that night have been fired or laid off or no longer exist. So you lift that patient, and you permanently injure your back in the course of doing that. Well, you are going to be told that that's because you're old and your spine is deteriorating and that it has nothing to do with that lifting action. Then you're going to be told that you don't have any income, and you have no ability to go to work to do the job anymore. Then you're going to be told that your employer has no obligation to accommodate you because, of course, employers in this province are about 30 years behind the rest of the country when it comes down to implementing their human rights obligations under the human rights code.

So that's what is going to happen to those people, and those folks are told that they only get one year to appeal. Wealthy, wealthy developers suing under breach of contract: six years. Injured woman, caregiver who helps patients and has her back injured at work: one year. Does that sound fair to you? I'll say what I think it sounds like. I think it sounds like beating up on some of our most vulnerable yet important members of our society. So that's just to start.

That being said, let's just talk about other reasons why a worker may not be able to file an appeal within one year. The first one has already been identified by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. That is that the injury experienced by the worker may actually have implications for their mental and emotional state. It may be a form of PTSD. It may be a brain injury. It may be an excruciatingly painful back injury, which ultimately generates an addiction and an incapacity to sort of think clearly; that happens, too. So any of those things could be the nature of the injury, and the very nature of the injury then interferes with the worker's ability to file their appeal on time.

To review, that worker doesn't have a lawyer because in Alberta we have pretty much the worst legal aid system in the country, and there's no way on the planet that any injured worker in Alberta is going to get legal aid support to help them appeal. So they're on their own. If they've been injured in a way that impacts their ability to function emotionally and cognitively, then they're very likely to struggle to read those documents to file their appeal on time. So that's the first problem.

The second problem arises when the injury itself is not static within that one-year period. Anyone who's ever been involved in a car accident or anything like that knows that the permanence of the injury and the degree to which that injury impairs you is not crystallized within a 12-month period. So WCB says: oh, you don't have an issue that warrants your being off work because you're not really that disabled, so we're going to deny your claim for lost-time benefits. And you think: "Well, all right. Okay. Well, it seems to be kind of getting better." You go back to work and you carry on, and you realize after about three or four months that even though it's not quite the same as it once was, it is, actually, still impairing you, and you may be out of time to appeal the decision.

Now, the third thing which is problematic with that one-year limitation to appeal is the fact that, as we've talked about many times in this Assembly, our access to health care in this province is profoundly delayed. Oftentimes the very foundation for an appeal that a worker will do – and I now speak as a lawyer who used to do these kinds of appeals – stems from the medical opinion of the doctor. Well, how many examples have we heard about how long it takes to get in to see a doctor in Alberta? How many people can get in to a doctor, a specialist, that will have a sufficient gravitas to counter the written-on-a-notepad-out-of-their-back-pocket opinion of the paid WCB medical adviser, who's never actually met the worker.

So you've got that evidence in there saying: "Oh, no. It's not a compensable injury. I am a medical adviser. I've never met the worker, but I've decided the injury is not related to work." In order to counter that, you actually have to go see a doctor who's a specialist in the area because your evidence has to be better than the WCB's evidence. Then you have to wait to get an appointment to see that doctor. And guess what? That's if you know right away that that's what you've got to do and it doesn't take you six months to get advice on how to do that. Then, lo and behold, you're filing appeals when maybe you don't actually have a case, but you have to file the appeal because you don't know if you're ever going to see the doctor in time. It's just ridiculous. There's just no good reason for this one-year limit.

4:20

Now the issue of whether or not the WCB has discretion to extend the limit. Well, I've been on that side of that issue as well, and let me say this. I have made representations on behalf of injured workers who have done everything a reasonable person would do to ensure that that appeal is filed, and when the appeal is not filed on time, it is not their fault. It's because someone that was helping them told them they were doing it but didn't do it. For instance, right there. Like, that is an excellent reason why an extension of the time to appeal would be made, yet that, which is a classic case of a reason for extending the time of appeal, is rejected.

Then I've also in my time, sitting as an appeals commissioner, in different contexts looked at the question of whether or not one can extend the time to appeal a decision. I've looked at cases where it's very clear on the record that the person never actually received notification that the decision was made, yet no, we're not going to go ahead with that extension. We get to assume on the

basis of our policy that that person received the decision even though it's clear on the record of it that the address that it was mailed to is no longer this person's permanent address. I mean, really simple, basic, natural justice questions like this are repeatedly and regularly ignored by the Workers' Compensation Board in the administration of these claims. That happens and will continue to happen, and it will happen more and more when you're looking at a one-year time limit.

Personal injury claims: two years. Contract breach claims: six years. Vulnerable injured workers without legal representation: one year. You know, folks, really? I mean, when you look at the profile of the people that are accessing each of those different windows within which to appeal, it becomes very obvious very quickly that the ones who have all the time in the world are the most entitled, and the ones who have the least time in the world are the least entitled.

The Workers' Compensation Board, just to be clear, in the representations in the submissions that I've already made in the past, does not have a record that warrants them being characterized as entirely objective and neutral in terms of how they deal with workers and workers' appeals.

Another thing that's interesting, another example that I've come across – and I'll mention it when we talk about this section in more general terms as well, but it's also applicable to this. The Member from Calgary-Mountain View says: well, we need to extend the one year because we can't count on the WCB to exercise its discretion fairly. One of the interesting cases where I've seen the WCB not exercise its discretion fairly is where the WCB is both adjudicator and employer. You imagine: oh, they can't possibly be both adjudicator and employer. Well, yeah. Guess what? They are. They are in this province. With their own staff they exercise their discretion in a way which is just brutal. It is absolutely brutal. It's beyond the pale of acceptability, and it is absolutely not neutral. So for all those people who are actually employed by the Workers' Compensation Board, God forbid that they miss an appeal deadline, perhaps because of a brain injury, and they have to rely on the WCB, who is both employer and adjudicator, to make a decision in their discretion that would allow the person to still pursue their claim. I've seen it. I've seen that exact case.

Let me tell you that the record does not reveal a record of a professional, objective organization, for sure. All in all, there are a number of different reasons: when you consider that the appeal process itself with respect to the Workers' Compensation Board is extremely complicated and complex; when you pair that with the fact that much of the evidence that is collected and used when the merits of a worker's claim is considered is medical in nature, very professional in nature, and again, very complex; when you consider the issues around work-relatedness – for instance, does this lung condition typically arise when you are working with that chemical in the workplace?

Again, I've done a lot of WCB claims. I've done claims for firefighters, for pipefitters, for X-ray technologists where significant lung capacity issues have arisen as a result of exposure to chemicals. In all those cases, getting just the general research on those chemicals, what kind of injuries they typically are understood to cause and how that manifests itself in terms of the symptoms in the person who's exposed to them – that information is very complicated. It requires a lot of research. I can't even begin to tell you how many hours well into the night I have spent poring over those.

I think there was a website back in the day when I was doing this, about a decade ago, called PubMed. You'd just enter stuff, and you'd read medical journal report after medical journal report

after medical journal report, trying to decipher what actually supported the notion of a causal relationship between a particular chemical and a particular injury. That's very complex.

Then there's the issue of securing the medical reports. I think we have more than one medical doctor. We have two medical doctors in the Liberal caucus. I can't remember if we have more medical doctors over on that side or not. I'm having a blank.

An Hon. Member: We've got a veterinarian.

Ms Notley: A veterinarian absolutely works because it's even harder to become a veterinarian than a doctor, I'm pretty sure.

In any event, the point is that they will know that when they are approached to write medical legal opinions, it's not something they love to do. It takes a while for the appointment to be made. They often don't know how to write them. They charge lots of money for the medical legal opinions. When they do finally write the medical legal opinions, they take a long time to be written because it's not a doctor's happy place to be writing medical legal opinions. Most doctors' happy places are to not write medical legal opinions, so they delay it.

So you've got to badger your doctor to get a medical legal opinion. You've got to coach your doctor on how to write a relevant medical legal opinion. You've got to do the scientific research on the causation. You've got to do all that kind of stuff, and you've got to do all of it without a lawyer because, to review, you're not getting access to a lawyer if you don't have income, and you're not getting access to a lawyer through legal aid. So you're doing all of this on your own, and you've got to do it within a year. Well, that's just not reasonable. That's absolutely not reasonable. That's why this one-year appeal process has really hurt a lot of people.

Another thing that I found in my travels doing this kind of work is that oftentimes people won't realize that the injury or the symptoms they experience are actually related to work. The classic case is, of course, repetitive strain injury. Classic case. You know, you're typing in an awkward office set-up, and you have a new boss come in, and suddenly the amount that you're typing triples. You start doing that, and about eight months later you start to feel a little bit sore, so you file a WCB claim. WCB says: "No, not related. This is your own kind of achiness because you're a diabetic or you're a woman over 50." All the various and sundry explanations that they love to use to say that these kinds of things aren't related to your work. So you keep it up, and then your employer ups how much you've got to type yet again, and about a year later you're going to see the doctor. Now you're wearing wrist braces, and you're being scheduled for carpal tunnel surgery. Now you might even lose time. Of course, you filed your claim 14, 15 months ago. WCB was very fast in rejecting it, and it took another 14, 15 months for the symptoms to slowly grow to the point that you're now losing time off work. And guess what? You no longer have the right to appeal the decision because it's the same mechanism of injury as what originally started, and it actually took two years for it to grow from being a painful annoyance to being a job-ending condition.

4:30

Those are just some of the examples of how people are (a) repeatedly, over and over and over and over, having their rights overlooked by this process and (b) how they also suffer. Their families suffer. Their income is lost. Their families are stressed out, and they struggle to put food on the table for their kids. Generally speaking, you're creating more opportunities for poverty. To be clear, this person is injured, so they are not able to work. The

way that's supposed to be fixed is workers' compensation, but unfortunately workers' compensation is denied to them by these incredibly oppressive and restrictive limitations, which, I will just remind people once again, are not applied to people who sue for breach of contract. Just to be clear, the profile of the folks suing for breach of contract: these are not workers living from paycheque to paycheque. These are multimillionaire/developer business types. They get the six-year window. Our people or people that are more vulnerable get one.

That's what I have to say. That's why I'm very, very pleased that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has made the decision to bring forward this motion. I'm glad that we've been able to talk about it because it really, really raises a profoundly important inequality that exists with respect to our workers' compensation system.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, hon. member.

I'm going to recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll thank my colleague from Edmonton-Calder for allowing me to speak in front of him. We both have some interesting points to make on this amendment.

Mr. Chair, there was a bit of a question circulating briefly or recently about the validity of this amendment. It's my understanding that Parliamentary Counsel has in fact declared that this amendment meets the parliamentary requirements to be a legitimate amendment.

You know, I have heard – and I'm sure that the minister will . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, if I may, just for the record the question was whether or not this amendment was attempting to amend the WCB act itself or this section as it refers to it in this bill. The clarification has been received from Parliamentary Counsel that it, in fact, speaks to this section of this bill and is therefore in order, so you can proceed to speak to it.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you for that clarification, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank Parliamentary Counsel because this is, as my colleague stated, a very good amendment. I'm glad to hear that it is in order.

I've heard that the minister is claiming that this deals with the WCB act and not the omnibus bill that is currently being debated in the House here. You know what, Mr. Chair? That raises serious concerns. This is one of the points that the Alberta NDP has made regularly when it comes to omnibus bills and the challenge that we face in that this piece of legislation, that is going to amend a few different acts, is getting brought forward as one bill. You know, this is the time for us to bring forward amendments and to improve this one section, which deals with the Workers' Compensation Act. However, I find it interesting and maybe disappointing that the minister is advocating or trying to assert that this amendment deals with the act and not this bill.

I guess he's highlighting the fact that this is one of the challenges that occurs when you bring forward an omnibus bill as opposed to dealing with pieces of legislation that amend a specific act, one act at a time. Again, I'm very grateful that we can in fact debate this amendment. I do agree with the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that this is an important amendment. As I've alluded to before, Mr. Chair, we do have a couple of amendments to try to improve this section of the act as well. We have a few opportunities here to make some progress on a bill, again, that covers, really, a variety of bills.

You know, a point that my colleague brought up, which is really important, is ensuring that when we're looking at appealing

decisions made by the Appeals Commission, there is adequate time to be able to collect and organize documentation in order to make an appeal and to present a proper case. As the act currently reads, there's only a one-year period for this to occur. Quite frankly, Mr. Chair, there are examples of where it's been very challenging for claimants to be able to organize everything they need within a one-year period, so it seems quite reasonable to me that we expand this window to a period of 10 years.

Again, folks who have to make claims through workers' compensation – I mean, the effects of whether it's an accident or what happens at work often affect them for life. It seems at odds that they have a very tiny window to be able to make an appeal as opposed to ensuring that Albertans have due process, that they have the ability to be heard and to appeal decisions if they feel that they are unjust.

This really does provide another tool for Albertans, you know, who are injured and trying to deal with claims. I mean, I can appreciate the level of stress, anxiety, difficulty, and duress that these folks are already under, and providing a very limited time frame for them to appeal a decision that's probably already taken a significant amount of time to get to the place that they're at – this provides them with a broader window to be able to appeal and to right a wrong, for lack of a better way of framing this, Mr. Chair.

You know, I wished on this amendment that I could speak as eloquently as my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. She definitely has quite a bit of background knowledge and experience when it comes to working with the bill that deals with WCB claims and appeals, coming from, you know, a background of law. But the point here, Mr. Chair, is that this is an amendment that would greatly strengthen this section of Bill 6, and I'm hoping for and am very curious to hear the points and arguments that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Calder is going to make on this. I'm curious to hear his interpretation and will urge all members of the Assembly to give him their undivided attention.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

4:40

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the brevity of the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and his spry capacity to jump ahead of me. I don't know what that means, if it's an unconscious action that he's making there, you know, to demonstrate his youth and vigour. I don't know what it is.

Anyway, certainly, I'm interested in the Member for Calgary-Mountain View bringing forward quite a substantial amendment to Bill 6. It's, again, no surprise that it focuses specifically on the WCB part of this bill. You know, it's interesting that we would have any controversy, really, or that the essence of the controversy is on why we would be dwelling on WCB issues and WCB legislation so extensively here. Well, that's, ironically, exactly the essence of what I have a problem with, this using miscellaneous statutes structure to start to create something that resembles an omnibus bill. It's just like keeping Alberta rat free. You want to make sure that we draw the line somewhere between Saskatchewan and B.C. and keep the rats out. Well, I stand here today to make my claim to keep Alberta omnibus bill free as well.

We see the blight of the omnibus bill rampaging across the United States. You hear about it as this clever tactic that exists in all state Legislatures and national bodies in Washington, and it's become almost like an animal unto itself, right? It's given a life of its own, and it combines good ideas with bad ideas, it combines politically nefarious ideas with innocuous amendments, and the

whole heady brew can be toxic, quite frankly. You know, I just don't find any use for it here in Alberta, where we're straight-shooting sons of guns and men and women who cannot descend to using large pieces of legislation that don't have any relativity to each other just for the sake of – I don't know – a combination of expediency and maybe some other less than . . .

Mr. Bilous: To confuse, to hide.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. You know, not really the best of intentions.

Again, we go back to the way that we do do this. Sometimes, the odd time here, we agree and sit down around a table and make a miscellaneous statutes agreement, shake hands, and everybody feels good. But we didn't do that with this one – right? – so the legislation gets hung up a little bit. Again, just to remind you, everybody gets hung up as well if we don't talk about how we're going to run our afternoons and evenings.

If Bill 6 had come through in a timely manner and I was given the mechanism by which to know exactly when it's going to be and to have my critics in place to debate not just Bill 6 but Bill 3 as well and other ones, then, you know, everything would have been smooth. It would have been like driving on fresh asphalt here. It would have been like a trip to the mountains, right? Instead, we're kind of stuck here.

Mr. Mason: We're going off road.

Mr. Eggen: We're going off road – that's right – driving in circles.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I think, is showing some ingenuity here in building this amendment for Bill 6, speaking very specifically about the Appeals Commission, about the records of individuals and how they may or may not be shared. You know, there's a difference between natural justice, I would venture to say, and just continuing on with a habit that may be really not in the best interests of individuals. While it may have been common procedure to share files on individuals over the last number of years, it doesn't mean, necessarily, that it was the best practice or in the best interests of people that are actually filing. I just find that to be something that we need to be concerned about here in the Legislature.

I find it interesting that once you start talking about the Workers' Compensation Board, it's like opening a can of wasps, Mr. Chair, because you find that so many people have not done well by the way that the WCB functions. Certainly, I've learned a very practical and hard lesson with reviewing literally hundreds of cases of WCB claims that have come through my constituency office over the last number of years and just this tale of woe.

You know, so much of it could be easily fixed if we really did employ a sense of natural justice about looking to work in the best practice or the best interest of the individual filing the claim rather than trying to presume that someone is trying to exaggerate or somehow misrepresent their claim. By just simply approaching WCB claims backwards, I think philosophically we've created a sort of negative environment that is a little bit reflected in this part of the bill here, which is the sharing of information in regard to a person's medical faculties when they're filing a claim with the Workers' Compensation Board. Certainly, I find it interesting that we have to kind of work through that here. I think that for the sake of saving the other parts of this bill, which I believe to be quite regular and normal – there are certain populist sections here talking about the farm implements, and so forth, that are very useful for people in this province. By striking out or amending the sections here on the WCB, I think that gives us food for thought.

You know, I spoke to a number of people who advocate for WCB claimants here in the province, and they definitely made no

bones about how we should strengthen the privacy of individuals' medical files and not pass that information around helter-skelter, that people really are in a compromised situation when they are before the Appeals Commission or just filing the claim with the WCB. Again, if we make that presumption of innocence and presumption of best intentions the first premise by which we approach each individual case, then I think we'd go a long way to promoting goodwill – right? – because right now the adversarial environment that the WCB has created for themselves has just compromised that somehow.

Yeah. Good for the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for coming up with this innovative amendment. You know, I'm feeling really good about this one passing, but just in case, I think we might have something that can fix the problem as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I'm just glad to again talk a little bit more about this issue because it really is very close to my heart. I want to just talk about a couple of examples of people that I've dealt with in the past who were victims of the one-year limitation period in terms of appealing their case. I want to tell a little bit of their story, obviously with no names being released or anything like that.

One example for me was a corrections officer who I met back in the early '90s, when I worked for the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. It was a young woman who had been attacked by an inmate at the remand centre and had in fact been isolated and sort of in a bit of a kidnapping situation for several hours with her life under threat until such time as the rest of the remand police were able to come in and save her from that situation.

4:50

Now, as it turned out in that case, she suffered physical injuries, so she applied to the WCB for compensation as a result of those physical injuries, and she received some compensation during that period of time. That's all great. Eventually her physical injuries resolved, and she was told that she had to go back to work. The letter was written, and a decision was made that she had to go back to work. That decision crystallized at a certain point. "Here's your decision. You've got to go back to work. You're super cool. Off we go."

Meanwhile, while she had been receiving treatment for her physical injuries, she also started getting treatment for growing, increasingly apparent psychological injuries. Those injuries slowly developed. By the time she was told that she had to go back to work, those psychological injuries had grown to the point that she was not in any state to read the fine print about appealing that issue. So she didn't appeal it when the decision letter was written that she was fine and she was ready to go back to work.

What happened was that she just didn't go back to work. A number of things occurred, issues related to whether she was allowed to be away from work, whether she had abandoned her position. Ultimately, she used her sick time instead of workers' comp time. Then she ran out of sick time, and then she started applying for LTD benefits. Meanwhile her condition deteriorated, and issues developed: substance abuse issues, family issues, lack of sleep, all the kinds of things that are often associated with PTSD. Anyway, eventually her family unit broke down. She ran out of sick leave. She was in tremendous crisis, and that sort of reached a pinnacle at about two years after she had originally been told that her injury was over and she was done.

Now, as it turned out in that case – that was, as I said, back in the 1990s – it was before the WCB introduced the one-year rule. So in that case we were able to do an appeal for her, and we were able at that time to go out and get the information that was necessary, send her to all the specialists, yada, yada, yada. To be fair, in that case once all that information was collected on her behalf by someone who understood the workers' compensation system – and, of course, it took her almost two years to get somebody, to finally pick up the phone and contact somebody that knew something about the issue. As soon as we heard her story, we went: "Oh, well, this is outrageous. I mean, you're suffering from PTSD. This is exactly, completely related to that initial incident from that point, you know, three years earlier." We sent her off to the doctors, and we contacted her treating professionals. We made the case, and we did the appeal. Of course, she ultimately received compensation, and she got her sick time back, and she got her job back, and yada, yada, yada. It all ended up brilliantly.

Of course, there are two differences between her position and many other people's position. First, of course, she was a member of a union. Ultimately, when things absolutely crumbled to the final extent and she reached out to her union, she was actually able to enjoy the benefits that so many Albertans don't enjoy, and she got the benefit of legal representation, that is not available to the vast majority of Albertans, who are not members of unions, in these situations. She also benefited from the fact, as I said before, that the one-year time limit was not in place. Now, of course, even with all the assistance that she could get through her union, she still would be potentially living on the street because that one-year time limit would have stopped her ability to appeal.

This is what happens with injury a lot, and anybody who knows anything about disability law knows that these kinds of issues are not clearly laid out within a year. That is often the case. And that is particularly the case when injuries gradually occur, when the condition itself gradually occurs, or when you're dealing with mental health issues. Those people are particularly vulnerable to not getting appropriate compensation.

I find that there are actually a lot of places in our regime of periodically, in a scattered sort of way, providing support to disabled Albertans where our system actually quite actively discriminates against people with mental health or cognitive or emotional illness. It's not limited to WCB. I will say that. But one of the places that you definitely see our system very exhaustively and effectively discriminate against people with mental health issues is in the WCB, and one of the ways that happens is where you have a time limit of exactly one year within which to assert your rights. So that is an issue that really needs to be changed.

Really, you know, if we could change this with the WCB and then also look at how we manage our AISH system and income supports systems and all those other ones – oh, I could go on forever about how we find a way to discriminate against the people with disabilities. We discriminate against those with mental health or cognitive or emotional issues because the very system we set up to establish their eligibility discriminates against people whose capacity to navigate that system is impaired by the very condition which contributes to their eligibility. So it's a circular problem.

I truly believe one of the first things I'm going to do if I ever get a chance to retire, which I will say that I do think about more longingly every day, is a systemic human rights complaint on the AISH process that we have in place on behalf of people with mental health issues.

Mr. Mason: Have a roast.

Ms Notley: After Brian organizes a roast, yeah.

Mr. Mason: And a Christmas video.

Ms Notley: And a Christmas video.

Anyway, that being said, I think I've had an opportunity to really lay out for my colleagues in the Assembly why the change that was made – I don't know, now; I'd say that it would be five to 10 years ago – that reduced the period of time within which a worker could appeal a decision made against them to one year, why that decision was such a bad, unfair, hurtful decision. And I hope I've given some description of why that hurts people. To be clear, we don't have legal representation. The issues are complex. People are usually in crisis, and that crisis can in fact be exacerbated by the very condition which would otherwise render them eligible for these benefits, and were they not workers injured by their employer, if they were a wealthy developer driving the street and hit by a stranger, they would have two years, and if they were a wealthy businessman suing somebody on a contract, they would have six years. But if they are an injured worker, they only have one. So that is all I'm going to talk about on that particular issue today.

I do once again need to provide my tremendous gratitude to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for providing an ingenious opportunity for us to discuss this important issue today in the House. For those members who are annoyed by the fact that we get to talk about this issue in what was supposed to be a very simple miscellaneous statutes amendment act, this, to me, would be a cautionary tale to the government against the practice of lumping a whole bunch of issues together into a miscellaneous statutes amendment act and suggesting that they're all really merely administrative in nature and don't warrant their own separate pieces of legislation. This is what happens because the substance and the merits of said miscellaneous statutes amendment act can sometimes have far-reaching consequences, so something which should sail through reasonably quickly does not. Frankly, it ought not to because we're all elected here to do exactly what we're doing.

5:00

Dr. Swann: Is this part of what happens with an omnibus bill?

Ms Notley: These are exactly the kinds of problems and/or challenges and/or opportunities, I suppose, which occur when the government of the day chooses to replicate the rather anti-democratic practices of the Harper government and to bring them into our Assembly by creating larger and larger and larger omnibus bills entirely dedicated to the task of reducing legislative oversight.

I mean, at least in Parliament they sit I think at least 200 or 250 days a year versus here, where we're: not so much. I think that Prince Edward Island is the only province in the country which sits less frequently than we do, and of course it is roughly – I don't know – one-thirtieth our size or something like that. We're only a just a few days more than them, just to be clear; we're not 30 times more than them.

The Chair: You're still on the amendment, hon. member?

Ms Notley: I am. Thank you for that reminder, Mr. Chair. You're quite right.

Anyway, all that is to say that even though it is buried in a miscellaneous statutes amendment act, it is a very important one. Frankly, the Workers' Compensation Act as a whole is one that deserves thorough and extensive review by an all-party committee

for a very long time because there are so many injustices that occur every day to workers in Alberta as a result of decisions which are authorized by the legislation for which we are responsible.

Dr. Swann: Not to mention farm workers.

Ms Notley: Not to mention the fact that we don't even deal with farm workers. I know that's not what we're talking about in this amendment, so I won't go on about it for too, too long, although let me just say that it is really quite egregious that farm workers have no right to any kind of compensation. Again, I guess they can sue, but you've got to find yourself a lawyer. That's your first thing.

Mr. Mason: You're a lawyer.

Ms Notley: I'm a lawyer, but I tend not to do legal work anymore, so that just won't work. Anyway, all that being said, I've been distracted by the comments from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. It's very easy for me to be distracted.

All righty. Anyway, I'm going to once again end by thanking the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for this wonderful amendment. I completely support it without reservation, and I look forward to hearing further comments on it by my colleagues.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move at this time that we rise and report progress.

The Chair: The Deputy Government House Leader has moved that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

The Chair: The committee shall now rise and report progress on Bill 6.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 6. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in that report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Speaker: Any opposed? Thank you. So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 1 Respecting Property Rights Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow to move third reading.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and move third reading of Bill 1, Respecting Property Rights Act, on behalf of the Premier.

Bill 1 will repeal the land assembly project act and will also include the preamble to establish the importance of property rights to this government. I appreciated the comments during the second reading and the Committee of the Whole from the members who spoke to the legislation. It is clear that property rights are very important to all Albertans and to members of this Legislature.

Several hon. members spoke to the dissatisfaction Albertans have had with the Land Assembly Project Area Act, also known as Bill 19. This government has listened to Albertans and is repealing the Alberta assembly project act as part of Bill 1 as it does not meet the expectations of Albertans and their individual property rights. By immediately repealing the Alberta assembly project area act, we have demonstrated that we are here to listen. We have listened to all Albertans, and this government has acted at the first available opportunity.

More importantly, Mr. Speaker, this bill demonstrates this government's commitment to property rights. It affirms that private ownership of land is of fundamental importance to this government. The preamble sets out the parameters of how this government will treat property owners and what they can expect from our government going forward.

I was pleased to see several hon. members express their support for Bill 1. Some hon. members voiced concerns that more needs to be done to protect property rights beyond Bill 1, but, Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 is clearly a statement of support for property rights. It begins to address landowners' concerns and upholds their rights, and this government is not stopping there.

Mr. Mason: What government?

Mr. Donovan: This government.

Pursuant to the Property Rights Advocate Act the 2012 and 2013 Property Rights Advocate reports have been referred to committee for review. We will look forward to hearing from the committee and following their review to see if there are any ways we can better protect Alberta property rights. This government is committed to a clear and fair process that respects the Legislative Assembly and respects the input from the members of the Assembly in this process.

Mr. Speaker, our Premier's commitment to property rights has been a matter of public record for decades. He has made clear his intent to apply the same kind of common sense, responsibility, and balance to this issue that he has already demonstrated in many other files. I'm pleased to stand in support of Bill 1 and to support the property rights for Albertans. I urge all members to support Bill 1.

Thank you.

5:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, our convention is to go to the Official Opposition – we have one speaker there – and then to the Liberal opposition, then to the ND, and then we'll alternate after that.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to talk about Bill 1 as well. Of course, any step forward on improving property rights will be supported by the Wildrose caucus and our hard-working MLAs, our commitment for the last two and a half years, even the year and a half before the election, of supporting town halls, whether, in my case, it was several town hall meetings, sometimes with 200, 300 people at them, always – always – very, very amazed at a government that claimed to be conservative, that

would remove statutory consents without access to the courts, without access to full and fair compensation.

Of course, I'm very, very disappointed that Bill 1, the bill that the Premier, when he was running for the leadership and wanted to be leader of the PC Party and be the Premier of our great province, said was his most important act, ended up being seven words long. So disappointing. It's disappointing that it didn't at least tackle the huge infringements in Bill 36, where they can take a landowner's statutory consents away, take them away without access to the courts, without full and fair compensation to the landowner. Our MLA from Drumheller-Stettler has explained it very, very adequately to me this way. It's like you have a truck, and you use your truck every day. The government doesn't have to take your truck away to stop you from driving; all they have to do is take away your driver's licence. That's what the parts of Bill 36 do.

Possibly it's fair to suggest that because the Wildrose received 440,000 votes and became the Official Opposition, it stalled the government's desire to enact parts of Bill 36, that it slowed things down, which is a nice reward for all the people that voted for our MLAs in all the constituencies. Bill 36 still looms, with its draconian power, in the only western democracy where property rights, the driver's licence, can be taken away without full, fair, and timely compensation, without access to the courts.

Bill 24 still looms over us, where they can pump carbon into the pore space underneath our land without paying compensation.

We weren't in here for about six months, from I think some side of May 12 until a week or so ago as the PC leadership race went on, and I saw three people work quite hard at it around the province.

So it's very, very disappointing to see Bill 1, seven words long. There are other aspects to it, and it's why my MLA associate from Lacombe-Ponoka worked so hard on Motion 501, the idea of elevating – elevating – the importance of individuality, the idea of government knowing better where government ends and individual rights start.

True, Alberta has been a leader in Canada economically, growthwise, partly because of our ability to balance a budget, which for seven years now has been thrown away, partly because of no debt. We're somewhere around \$11 billion or \$12 billion now, headed towards \$20 billion, headed towards \$700 million or \$800 million a year in interest. The government still presents budgets that aren't consolidated. Now we're headed towards property rights. I use the phrase "kick the can down the road." Off to the committees. I don't know. When will the committees sit? When will the committees look at this?

I rise to support Bill 1. Yeah, it's a small baby step in the right direction when this government, this Premier, this new Premier, this reset, this fourth Premier in six years or whatever it is, said that it was his main thing, his main focus. Needless to say, I'm very, very disappointed in the efforts of Bill 1, although I guess that's better than Bill 2. We still haven't seen that one. That was also very, very important. So if property rights in Bill 1 was seven words long, integrity and accountability in Bill 2 might be three and a half words long.

So I rise to support Bill 1, which totally removes Bill 19, which two Premiers ago was hollowed out anyway, never proclaimed, never acted on. Like many other Albertans, especially rural Albertans, I am very, very disappointed that this is all of the action we've received so far.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the independent Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really glad that I am going to get this chance to speak to any part of Bill 1. This bill has just whipped through so fast. It's Wednesday afternoon, and it's in third reading. So if I hadn't come in extra to do this, I wouldn't have been able to speak to this bill at all.

In many ways this was a good choice as the first bill, the flagship bill, for the new Premier because there's support for it pretty much through every party, for different reasons, interestingly enough, but there is support. Why am I supporting it? Why does my caucus support it? Well, because we were very much against the bill that is being repealed, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, which came through in 2009. I don't remember the number of it; Bill 19, maybe.

At that time it seemed like overkill. There were processes in place already. So if the government wanted to assemble land, to put through something that was going to be for the public good, for the common good, transmission lines or railways or high-speed rail links or any number of things that you would want to assemble a lot of land in a straight line for, you know, we have the Expropriation Act. We had other acts that were already allowing us to do this. So it seemed really over the top, kind of hysterical, if you will, that this act was so draconian.

It wasn't only that we're going to mark your land for the future, but we're going to mark your land for the future, and you can't do anything with it because if you do something with it, we're not going to pay you for it. So if you're on a farm and you're a pig farmer, don't bother putting up that new barn to expand your operation because come 25 years down the road, when we decide we're actually going to take this land from you, we're not going to compensate you for the new pig barn that you built. It just seemed: whoa; calm down. But, no, that's what happened here. Of course, lots of other people have talked about the number of bills that link together to further what the government was trying to do at the time.

What I find really interesting is that this act was never proclaimed, and now they're taking it off the books. Why now, you say? Why now? Because with the statutes review process that we have coming by in 2016, anything that hadn't been proclaimed, like this bill, the land assembly act, would have been wiped off. So if they just did nothing, it would have disappeared in another year and two months, right? So why did they bring it forward now? I mean, if I had to guess, the government had to be seen to be doing something, and property rights is a big, big point of contention. Certainly, it's a big point of contention between the government and the Official Opposition, represented by a number of my colleagues from the Wildrose Party. So it was something the government could be seen to be doing that might cause some problems over here. I don't know.

5:20

But what I was really taken by was that during the Premier's comments he talked about re-establishing trust, and this was to re-establish trust. Oh, sorry. I got a little off on a tangent. Boy, I do that a lot.

The purpose of the bill at the time was to assemble all of this land. Yes, indeed, but at that point we were talking about a very large electricity transmission company that happened to want land that was assembled for them. Lo and behold, here we are five years later, and that project has now been completed. Maybe that's why we have the timing for this bill. They no longer need to put it all together for that particular large electrical distribution company because it's been accomplished. Now they can wipe that bill off the books, and who knows? Maybe in a couple of years nobody will even notice.

Now to talk about the Premier's comments about wanting to rebuild trust. I was really taken with that because, like everybody else in Alberta, I'm watching this new Premier. I'm going: okay; do I think he's, you know, representative of me and my values and what I want to see happen in Alberta? Maybe. Maybe not. So I'm watching for what he believes in. I understand that the Premier thinks that this bill is step one in rebuilding trust with Albertans, but I think there are a couple of other steps that he needs to be taking, Mr. Speaker.

Here are a couple of them, things that the Premier needs to do to rebuild trust with Albertans. Well, I think for starters he could rebuild pride in the civil service. These are the people that work very hard to make us look good in the House. They work very hard to implement the policies that we're passing here. They work very hard on behalf of Albertans. They choose to go into the public service rather than going into the private sector, where the advantage would be gained by the company they work for, or perhaps they are the boss, and it's going into their own pocket. I'd like to see us back at a place where being a civil servant would be regarded as something that you're proud of, something that you would move towards as a younger person because there's a career in public service or at least a longer period of time than what we've been seeing.

The second thing is that I think the government could stop taking advantage of the not-for-profit organizations, the non-government organizations in this province because, boy, the government owes a lot to these agencies. So many of them have agreed to take contracts to provide services that the government used to provide but not on the same amount of money. The government only gives them the line amount for the money but not all the additional administration that goes around it. So you now have these groups out there in the community raising money to subsidize their delivery of a program that used to be a government program. All we hear is: let's get more volunteers. That's what we heard in the throne speech. Well, great. Let's get more volunteers doing stuff for free. Well, yeah, a lot of people like to do that, but the point of it is not to give the government free service. They do it for quite other reasons. I think if the Premier wants to be rebuilding trust, then he could be working to rebuild capacity and resilience with those communities.

I'd like to see this government quit playing games with the environment, monitoring, protecting the environment from greenhouse gases. Quit playing games. I mean, it's silly. It's embarrassing now, you know, to talk about a carbon levy that actually incents a change in activity. Right now it's just cheaper for those companies to pay, but it's not incenting any change at all. So what's the purpose of this? It's a money raiser, then? No. I think that has broken a lot of faith and a lot of trust with people. If he wants to rebuild trust with people, then let's look at some incentives to actually use that additional money generated by the carbon levy to incent people to move to solar and wind.

It'd be really nice if this government could rebuild trust with people. If they would stop killing our animals, that would be great. If we could manage to convince the government to leave the caribou alone instead of continually giving away licences that crowd into their space — we know it kills them, yet we keep doing this.

As the Premier said when he was bringing this bill forward, this is step one to rebuild trust with Albertans. Okay. Well, let me give you a couple of other ideas, then. Let's look at forest practices, where they're logging to the edge of waterways. That shouldn't happen. You could rebuild trust with a lot of us by stopping that. You could actually protect protected lands and not allow for additional licences to be granted for drilling and exploration.

The government could score a lot of points with people if they could manage to actually fund municipalities. I mean, hearing them talk yet again about: oh, we give every municipality MSI money. Yeah, well, the government never managed to achieve its first goal for how much money was supposed to be distributed through MSI funds. It didn't. They were supposed to come up to \$1.7 billion. They haven't even made it that far yet, and we're in the second iteration of the MSI funding. They happily allow the municipalities to be shouldering the load in providing the services directly to people.

If the Premier wants to rebuild trust with people by doing something like Bill 1 and repealing the land assembly act, okay, that's one step, but there's a lot of other things that can be done. It'd be nice if we could see the government and the Premier quit disrespecting the Legislative Assembly, quit disrespecting the opposition by playing silly games. You know, other people see this, and they phone us and they write us and they say: "What's going on? What is the problem here?" And we have to say: "Well, you know, they're playing silly buggers because they think it's amusing. Tee hee. Isn't that funny." Well, it's juvenile, frankly, and it's not respectful of the Legislative Assembly. So if the Premier wants to rebuild trust with Albertans, I'd like to see what he's going to do to make this a better place to work and to have it be more respectful.

You know, allowing private members to have their own time to be able to put current issues on the floor, like is done in the federal government: now, there's a concept. Right now we get polled during a lottery process in the summer, and our bills generally would come up the following spring, almost a year later, so they're no longer current, they're not up to date all the time. But we even have a situation now where the government is trying to make sure, by fooling around with stuff, that the bill I'm bringing forward and the bill ahead of me aren't even going to see debate. I mean, really? Really? I'm no threat to anybody. Heck, no. But it sure seems like it for the amount of activity that's going on over there to try and make sure that my simple little bill doesn't come to the floor. I mean, really, Mr. Speaker, that's building trust with Albertans? I'm finding that hard to believe.

If the Premier is really interested in – actually, there are a number of things. They could restore the speaking times. They could quit doing these multistatute bills, where we've got 16 bills going through. Oh, well, with some co-operation we managed to break that into two, I think a seven and a nine or something. But just trying to get through those bills and get a handle around them, you know, who's got the time to do that, especially when the government is racing through things? Why would they need to get out of this Assembly so fast? I thought we were scheduled to be here until the 18th of December. I'm more than happy to be here until the 18th of December, but it looks like we're going to be out of here by the 4th, if not sooner, at the rate we're going here. So, you know, take a deep breath. Settle down. Now, why would it be that the government, maybe even the Official Opposition, needs to be out of here so quickly? Well, I have a couple of theories on that, Mr. Speaker.

5:30

Anyway, I think what's important is that the Premier has said that he wants to rebuild trust. He believes he's going to be able to do it, move a step forward by repealing the Land Assembly Project Area Act. When it's gone, we still have, as I started with, the acts that were there before. Really, if these acts are that bad, if the Expropriation Act is that terrible, why don't you work within the confines of the Expropriation Act?

There are some ferocious hand signals going on over there. Is he all right?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think somebody is trying to call somebody else out for a little chat. That's all. It's nothing to do with you. Apologies for the intrusion.

Ms Blakeman: With flags it would have been a really amazing semaphore demonstration.

Did he manage to get the person he was looking for?

Mr. Bilous: He did, yeah.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. There you go.

I'm encouraged that the Premier would want to take a step towards restoring trust with Albertans. I think that's an admirable thing to do. I think this is a good first step. Boy, I've finished my 15 minutes here, but I could use a lot more than 15 minutes to make suggestions on how this Premier and this government could restore trust with Albertans because they have done a lot to destroy it. And they're not bad people. These are not bad people. They all came here with an intent to do good things. Why, when you get them all in a room together, they manage to do stuff that is so bizarre I will never understand. Maybe it's the room – I don't know – the air they pump through it or something.

Anyway, I'm pleased to see that there is a commitment from the Premier.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing no one, I will recognize Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and speak to the third reading of Bill 1. I feel fortunate that I was able to speak to the second reading of this bill. But I think it is worth noting that it seems we're trying to move at a breakneck pace with legislation here, where, you know, several bills have moved from second reading, through committee, and into third within a 24-hour period. I would contend, again, that if we want to ensure there's adequate debate on these bills, we slow down the pace a little bit. I can appreciate that folks may be getting excited for the holiday season coming up. However, I think it is important, as representatives of the over 4 million people that live in this great province of ours, that we do take the appropriate and adequate time on each of these bills and recognize the trust that was given to us and the responsibility that we have as elected members.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that I have the opportunity to speak to Bill 1. You know, it should be noted right at the outset that I will be supporting this bill. I believe my caucus will be supporting this bill as well. And there are some positives, the fact that it's repealing, I believe, Bill 19. That's positive. However, as some of my other colleagues have pointed out, I dare say that this bill doesn't go far enough. If we truly want to act in the best interests of landowners, of the rights of Albertans, then we need to have a serious conversation about several other pieces of legislation.

I know my colleague from Edmonton-Calder was on the road travelling the province and meeting with thousands of Albertans in community halls, in town halls, in community centres, in agricomms and met with some very outraged Albertans that this government was proposing at the time I believe it was Bill 36, the Alberta

Land Stewardship Act, and Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act. You know, at that time as well there apparently were some folks that were instructed to attend some of these meetings in order to share some information as far as what was going on with the PC Party, and that, obviously, caused a considerable amount of outrage.

This bill, again, is repealing the Land Assembly Project Area Act. Now, you know, we'll just take a quick trip back in time here to when that bill, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, was introduced. My colleagues in the Alberta NDP argued against it right from day one. Arguments were made that, quite simply, it was heavy handed.

Part of the other issue here – and we'll be the first to acknowledge that – is that there are large amounts of land necessary for infrastructure projects that are going to serve the public good and are necessary for Albertans. But the challenge with the Land Assembly Project Area Act is that that bill put the government's own convenience ahead of property rights and the rights of Alberta landowners. That's something that we have an issue with. When we're talking about convenience, that shouldn't be the driving factor here, Mr. Speaker. It should be: what is in the best interests? Quite frankly, that section of the bill, you know, fell very short of actually being necessary for Albertans and for public infrastructure projects.

The interesting thing, Mr. Speaker, is that it also allowed the government to limit development that was allowed on someone's land. Part of the issue with that, you know, is that there was no provision for a timeline on when the project that the land was being saved for would begin. Furthermore, there were no requirements for compensation for the prohibition of development on the land for the owner. You know, for a party that frequently claims that they are in favour of and are advocates of the rule of law and property ownership, it's pretty rich and somewhat ironic that they'd bring forward legislation that basically railroads property owners' rights and the rights of landowners, that they don't provide adequate timelines, that they don't provide compensation. For those reasons not only our caucus but, I believe, most of the opposition was quite opposed to the Land Assembly Project Area Act.

Furthermore, it is worth noting, Mr. Speaker – my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood reminded me because this was before my time in the House – that the Alberta NDP really led the charge against Bill 19 and, I would argue, against bills 36 and 50 as well. I remember, you know, attending rallies – there were many Albertans quite upset about this – and listening to my colleagues speak at these rallies and standing up for Albertans, for landowners.

Interestingly, Mr. Speaker, it was amended in 2011 but not adequately enough to address the concerns that we raised. You know, for those that were listening earlier, I spoke about the pattern that this PC government seems to have where they charge out with legislation, then hit the brakes and realize, "Oh, we actually haven't consulted with the very people who the legislation is affecting, and we've ignored and voted against most of the amendments the opposition has put forward," which are often quite reasonable. They'd vote them down, and then later on, whether it's months or years later, they'd come back and introduce amendments to an act that they earlier introduced that contain many of the amendments and recommendations that the opposition put forward.

5:40

You know, I don't know if it's because they have a really hard time playing with others. I don't know if maybe this goes back to

some kind of childhood trauma or something, the fact that we have to continue to revisit legislation whereas, had this current government actually acted on their word – during elections we often hear grandiose promises about working with the opposition, and then we come into the House and see that actions speak louder than words and that that rarely happens.

Interestingly, in 2011 the Land Assembly Project Area Act was actually amended. They tried to make some changes. Some of the changes that they made didn't go far enough, in our opinion, but were based on some of the recommendations and amendments that we put forward years prior. Yet here we are now, in 2014, and they've realized, you know, they just couldn't fix the bill, so we need to now get rid of it. We've gone through this very interesting cycle over the last few years that could have been avoided. This is one of those moments where the opposition could quite easily say, "I told you so," but we won't do that.

Bill 1 is trying to remedy some of the problems that they created. Again, as I said, this doesn't quite go far enough. The concern that I have and that I share with my colleagues is that we have two other pieces of legislation, that are still on the books and exist, which desperately need to be repealed as well. I think I have the agreement of my colleagues from the Liberal caucus and the Wildrose caucus that those two bills should have been repealed as well.

Let's talk a little bit about Bill 50, and I'm sure that my colleague from Edmonton-Calder will be more than happy to share some of the stories and experiences that he had when he went around the province consulting and meeting with Albertans to get first-hand their ideas and feedback on this piece of legislation.

You know, we were disappointed that Bill 50 amended, back in 2009, the Electric Statutes Act. Now, I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona both spoke in 2009 on this bill. The challenge and the problem with it not being addressed today in Bill 1 is that, clearly, this PC government continues to prioritize the interests of industry over Alberta families and individual landowners. We clearly see that one hand helps the other, and unfortunately who pays the price for this? Well, it's Albertans throughout the province, individuals and families.

Bill 50, just as a reminder for those who weren't in the House back in 2009 – and there are quite a few of us – allowed the cabinet to define what's considered as essential transmission infrastructure. Now, I'm reluctant and nervous when we get very prescriptive bills that give sweeping powers to cabinet and to the government. You know, it places unnecessary authority in their own hands and takes it out of the hands of the public and takes away mechanisms that are put in place to ensure that there's adequate feedback and adequate representation and basically concentrates that in the hands of a few, a few who, I may say, as we've seen over the last couple of years, have made grandiose promises regarding many things, I would argue everything under the sun, yet have fallen quite short on fulfilling those very promises.

To jump back – I digress, Mr. Speaker – to what was considered essential transmission infrastructure, basically what this did was that it cut out the Alberta Utilities Commission, which, along with other organizations, developed a process, again, for project assessment decisions, right? That was crucial because they decided that decisions that were made were done in a fair and scientific manner, weren't done on a whim, weren't done because they were offering favours to insiders, to industry, to friends.

You know, again, we're talking about a process that really did reflect openness and transparency and ensured that projects had criteria or that the AUC used criteria in order to select and

approve projects, which makes sense to me. Unfortunately, those processes now have been, because of Bill 50, bypassed, and the power to make a decision goes back to the hands of cabinet.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm not saying that the cabinet is evil. I mean, you know, I'm sure we could argue that there is a good person or a couple over there that wouldn't take advantage of the situation that they're in or the power that they have, but the concern is that there may be some that aren't going to act in the best interests of Albertans. As soon as you take away these processes, we're flirting with something that's very, very dangerous as far as ensuring that there is due process and that the public good is served first and foremost above individual interests or the interests of friends, funders, or anyone else who stands to benefit from it.

Now, when Bill 50 was introduced, we opposed it because it failed to protect consumers from the overbuilding of unnecessary transmission lines where the cost would be transferred onto Albertans. You know, that was one of the issues that . . .

Dr. Brown: Point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have a citation, hon. member, for the point of order?

Dr. Brown: The citation would be *O'Brien and Bosc*, page 788. The content of third reading should be confined to the final . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, please. Our convention is to cite a citation based on our standing orders as to what is being breached by the hon. member, and you may quote *Beauchesne* or some other to back up your point. Did I hear you say 23(h) or (i) or (d)? Do you have some such citation? Is there such a provision that you want to reference, hon. member?

Dr. Brown: It's relevance.

The Deputy Speaker: Relevance. So, hon. member, you're asking that the member be relevant in his comments relative to the bill? Is that all you're asking, hon. member?

Dr. Brown: Yes. Exactly. The member is talking about a completely different bill. He's talking about electric transmission. He's talking about Bill 50. He is not talking about the bill that's before the House, which is Bill 1. Debate at the stage of third reading has to be confined to "the final form of the bill."

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. member has 11 seconds to go. On your behalf I would ask him to confine his remarks to the relevance of the bill. I would hope that that would suffice, hon. member?

Dr. Brown: That would be fine.

The Deputy Speaker: That would suffice.

Hon. member, would you proceed? You have 11 seconds to conclude your comments.

Debate Continued

Mr. Bilous: Wonderful. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the end I will support this bill. Clearly, it doesn't go far enough. I'd love to tell you more about it, but we'll have to have that discussion some other time.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 1.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time, in consideration of the time, I move that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:50 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, November 27, 2014

Issue 8

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 27, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. O Holy Creator, as we conclude our work for this week in this Assembly, let us renew our energies as we return home in order to serve our constituents directly in our communities. Guide us there safely during this extraordinary snowfall today. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Minister of agriculture, you have some hall of famers to introduce.

Mr. Olson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly this year's inductee into the 4-H Alberta Hall of Fame. Charlie Gould is a resident of Rosalind, and he was inspired to become involved in 4-H by his father, Stan, who was also inducted into the hall of fame, in 1977. For 35 years Charlie has served as a 4-H leader for his local beef club, encouraged youth to get involved in the 4-H program, and taught life skills to the next generation of Albertans. We thank Mr. Gould for his outstanding dedication to his community and for serving youth as a mentor.

He's joined here today by Janet Kerr, the 4-H specialist from the east-west central region, who also happens to be his cousin. They're seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let us move on to school groups, starting with Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the brightest, sharpest, most intelligent 44 students from the Grace Martin elementary school in Edmonton-Mill Woods. Despite the weather their commitment to visit the Alberta Leg. brought them here. I would request that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

If not, let's move on to other important guests, starting with the Minister of Transportation, followed by the ND House leader.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of Alberta Transportation employees from our deputy minister's office and the communication branch. These bright young public servants help provide me and my office with information and the support needed to address a wide range of transportation issues across the province, communicate effectively with the public, and ultimately achieve the mandate given to me by the hon. Premier. What's more, for all but one of these individuals it's their first time in question period here today in the Alberta Legislature. I'd ask each of them to stand as I read their names and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: Erin Gregg, Jamie Friesen, Melanie Nolan, Carrie Sancartier, Tina Stewart, and Lyndsay Karges.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my guests from the Alberta Federation of Labour. My guests have been meeting with MLAs to lobby for affordable, accessible, high-quality public child care. I know it's some tough nuts to crack, but I'm sure that they convinced you all. I would like to ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: Juanita O'Reilly, Darcy Thiessen, Cori Longo, Natasha Simons, Bruce Fafard, Siobhán Vipond. I also see Brad Lafortune there. You can stand up, too; don't be shy. If you can all give them a very warm Assembly welcome.

The Speaker: The Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, followed by the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Anne Lydia Sekandi and Robert Muhumuza. Anne is a private-sector partnership specialist at UNICEF Uganda. She has worked for UNICEF since March 2004. When asked what she thought of the weather today, she said that life is 20 per cent what happens and 80 per cent what you make of it. I hope the weather is better in New York. Anne is in Edmonton visiting Robert, and this is her first time visiting the Legislative Assembly. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I ask that they rise to receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had a wonderful meeting just now with the president of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters and also the executive director and former mayor Jan Reimer today, joined by members of the six on-reserve women's shelters from across the province. I learned a lot as a result of that meeting. I wanted to introduce, as well as Brenda Brochu and Jan, Janet Gladue from Bigstone, Darlene Lightning-Mattson from Sucker Creek, Delia Poucette from Eagle's Nest and Morley, and also Dennis Callihoo from Ermineskin, who joined them. Also, I wanted to recognize Sandra Ermineskin from Ermineskin, Doris Sweet Grass from Kainai, and Mary Lepine from Fort Chipewyan, who are unable to be here because of the weather. If they could please stand and be recognized by the Assembly through you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

Just before I call on the Clerk to go to the next item of business, please note that it's so cold out that even our clock inside the building here is frozen, so don't be taking your cues off there, please.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Let us begin. Two minutes each, please.

Mental Health

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Mr. Speaker, we don't talk about mental health very much in our communities. It's not exactly taboo, but we just don't know how to talk about the issue. Mental health can be the proverbial elephant in the room. The Brentwood murders in March of this year were horrifying. People still tear up when they

talk about the loss of these young people, but this horrible tragedy has one silver lining. In our constituency we now talk just a little bit more openly about mental health.

Early in 2015 our Calgary-Varsity constituency office is hosting a town hall to share the positives about what's happening with mental health in our community. We have a long way to go in this journey, but there is some heartening progress. We plan to invite the Alberta Children's hospital to share their research on brain health and to talk about how construction of the fourth wing of this hospital will help move mental health patients out of the basement. We plan to invite the University of Calgary to talk about the new initiative they launched this fall with community support to focus not only on the academic performance of students but on their overall well-being. We plan to invite the chamber of commerce to talk about how they're embedding mental health discussions in our workplace. We plan to invite researchers and experts on dementia and Alzheimer's to share what they're learning about how to strengthen brain health in our seniors, and of course we plan to invite our Minister of Health and his staff to share with us Alberta's plans to tackle these issues in the coming years.

Mental health affects all ages – children, teens, young people, adults, and seniors – and this government must continue to rise up and meet the challenges faced by my constituents and by all Albertans affected by mental health and by brain health. The issues and the solutions aren't the same, but progress is being made, and that, Mr. Speaker, is something to talk about.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Bill 202

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, a week ago I introduced a little bill called Bill 202, Safe and Inclusive Schools Statutes Amendment Act, 2014. Gee whiz. Well, that little pragmatic bill was, I hoped, going to help some sexual minority students to be able to ask their schools and have the school accommodate them in organizing a gay-straight alliance. I wanted to include the reference to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the Education Act, and I wanted to take section 11.1 out of the Human Rights Act.

Well, yikes, Mr. Speaker. My goodness, what a fuss. What I have seen in the week that has passed is the government doing almost anything they can in order to stop Bill 202. There have been attempts to delay it by pushing it off timewise. Now we're going to have the government bring forward a bill – I wonder if it's written yet – that is going to purport to do the same thing except that it doesn't.

1:40

So I'm going to call this one as I see it if you'll allow me. I think that what we are seeing here is a group of people who are trying to impose their will on someone else's, yet that very will itself is enshrined with protection under both the Charter and the Human Rights Act. What I am not seeing is an answer to the question: how would a peer support group for sexual minorities in schools affect anything else? How does a peer support group in a school affect parental discretion or choice or home-schooling or anything else? How does the Charter get affected by that?

Thanks very much.

The Speaker: Thank you. I regret that your time is up.

Let's move on to Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Century Farm and Ranch Awards

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Century farm and ranch award salutes those families who have continuously owned and actively operated the same land in Alberta for a minimum of 100 years. That's a minimum of 100 years. Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development manages the award. From a personal experience of dairy farming for many, many years I can certainly echo their words that farming and ranching consist of hard work and sacrifice combined with a healthy dose of energy and unrelenting faith.

The opportunity of new land combined with limitless spirit and vision are what brought our forefathers to Alberta. They homesteaded the land to build a family farm or ranch, the same land that many families continue to call home today. Courage and determination were what our parents and grandparents had, and they had plenty of it. Marked by the same spirit of steadfast determination, it is not surprising that second, third, and fourth generations continue to build this rich heritage of agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, today I wish to recognize all Albertan recipients of the Alberta Century farm and ranch award, in particular the two dozen families alone from my constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley who received the Alberta Century farm and ranch award this year. Agriculture is a heritage to be proud of and is reflected by the personal sacrifices, perseverance, and commitment to a family way of life. It is a legacy that can be passed on to Alberta's children for generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

4-H Hall of Fame Inductee

Ms Fenske: Thank you. Today I rise to recognize National 4-H Month and this year's inductee into the 4-H Hall of Fame, Charlie Gould from Rosalind, seated in your gallery. Mr. Speaker, 4-H Month is an opportunity to recognize the important contribution the 4-H program makes in our communities as Alberta's largest youth organization, with more than 250,000 alumni, two of which are my very own children, who are alumni of the light horse club program.

Established in Alberta in 1917, 4-H strengthens our communities' connection to agriculture and passes important life skills on to our youth. It not only teaches its members agriculture-related skills; it also focuses on leadership, public speaking, and has evolved to include everything from beef and horses to computers and performing arts. Graduates of the program learn the importance of being active and engaged community members and leaders.

It's a proud heritage, Mr. Speaker, and Charlie Gould is further proof of that. He became involved in the 4-H program as a young child under the guidance of his father, Stan, who was inducted into the hall of fame in 1977. For 35 years Charlie has been a leader in the 4-H club, hosting workshops on his farm, promoting the program, and representing it on district and regional levels. While guiding the next generations in the ways of leadership and agriculture, he has also found time to volunteer with the ag society, various local fundraisers, and St. Elizabeth church. In fact, I think it's safe to say that if you had a cause you needed help fighting or an event you needed help setting up for or a church

property that you needed help maintaining, Charlie Gould would be the first in line to lend you a hand. Our 4-H program would not be possible without the selfless dedication of a group of very passionate volunteers, and Charlie Gould stands as a testament to that as well as an example of how generations of Albertans have been a part of the 4-H program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

Home Renovation Contractors

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently Alberta homeowners were put on notice to ensure that they do their homework before prepaying any contractors for home remodelling or renovations. Over the course of several years and from over 20 homeowners one home renovating firm collected well over \$3 million in advance payments for projects which were either unfinished or never started. To everyone's dismay, the owner has now declared bankruptcy, with \$5.8 million in liabilities and only \$1.4 million in assets. Now these Albertans are left with the financial burden of paying for something that was never even started.

Mr. Speaker, this problem is not new and is a problem this Legislature needs to address. Currently contractors undertaking remodelling projects are required to maintain a security fund that can be applied to refunds for cancelled or unfinished work. However, the amount of funds required is not specified in either legislation or regulation, leaving the amount to the discretion of Service Alberta officials.

Furthermore, there is a concern that some contractors are taking advantage of these homeowners by simply collecting the cash, declaring bankruptcy, and opening a new company under a new name. This is an area where this Assembly needs to take the necessary steps to protect Albertans. As reported in the *Calgary Herald*, Service Alberta typically sets bonds in the \$25,000 to \$75,000 range, which is far too low for large-scale projects with estimated costs at well over \$100,000. In a letter sent to my office, a young family chronicles their experience dealing with the bankruptcy of their contractor and how they paid \$300,000 as a deposit to the company, who only had a bond set at \$25,000.

While an important balance must be struck between protecting homeowners and creating onerous regulations for business, it is clear that something needs to be done.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Rural Seniors' Lodges

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think my fellow members would agree that Alberta is the best place to live, work, raise a family, and retire. We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the individuals whose contributions throughout the years have helped make our province the incredible place it is today. Of course, I'm referring to Alberta's seniors.

Our Premier recognizes the contributions and the ongoing needs of our seniors and has created a new Seniors ministry to address their specific issues. Currently there are almost half a million seniors living in Alberta, and that number is expected to double by 2030, meaning that 1 in 5 Albertans will be a senior.

The growth of our seniors population means we will need more places for seniors to live and age with dignity, close to their families and friends. That's why my constituents were so pleased

to hear our Premier commit \$160 million over four years to expand, upgrade, and replace seniors' lodges throughout rural Alberta. Nearly 70 per cent of all seniors' lodges in Alberta are outside of large cities. In rural regions distances are greater, and services may be more limited, often leaving seniors with no choice but to move when a space opens up somewhere else. They can end up lonely and isolated in a new environment, and that's not acceptable or healthy. Enabling older Albertans to stay in familiar surroundings is the key to keeping them engaged, happy, and healthy as they age. This investment in rural seniors' lodges will help provide our seniors with safe and affordable accommodation options close to the communities that they helped build.

This is just one of the many recent commitments our government has made to improve the lives of seniors across Alberta. The new Seniors ministry has been in operation for 73 days, and already our government has shown Alberta's seniors that they are a priority.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is exactly 1:50 p.m., time for Oral Question Period. Please, when we get to question 6, restrict your preambles so that more time will be allowed for more members to ask more questions.

Let us begin with the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Oil and Gas Revenues

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, OPEC met in Vienna today, and it wasn't a good meeting for Alberta. West Texas intermediate is around \$69 and may fall further. The hole in next year's budget will be billions deep if this continues, and all indications are that it will. The fact is that based on this government's spending, they would need \$110 oil to actually balance the budget. They will either have to get a grip on wasteful spending, or we are headed very, very deep into debt. How far into debt is this Premier willing to go?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's fair to say that all Albertans are concerned about the OPEC meeting, and based on what transpired today, OPEC apparently will continue to produce in excess of 30 million barrels of oil per day, putting us into a low-price environment. This should be a cause of concern for all Albertans. It's certainly a cause of concern for the government. However, it is not time to panic. I would make two points. One is that this government will continue to be prudent in the administration of the finances of this province, and secondly, Albertans will be tough and resilient, and we will get through this.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this government is trying to convince Albertans that this is not business as usual, but other than for a brief period in 2008 and the last few years oil has always been around where it is today or lower. In other words, business as usual is exactly where we're at today. It was the price spikes that were the aberrations. A responsible government would have planned for surpluses during the boom so that we wouldn't be faced with what we're looking at today. Instead, this government took us deeper into debt when revenues were never higher. What is the Premier going to do now?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I have been the Premier of this province at this point for less than three months. I can assure

yourself and Albertans of one thing, and that is that in the low-price environment which we are in, we will be disciplined, we will be prudent, and we will be cautious. We are focused on balancing the budget in the fiscal year which we are currently in. I've made it very clear to Albertans that this is not business as usual. We'll press on. We will deal with this. This province is tough and resilient. We have seen low price cycles before, and we will get through this.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, he certainly knew the record of the party he was running for when he chose to run for leader.

Everyone who has been in Alberta for a while remembers the bumper sticker: please, God, give us another oil boom; I promise not to fritter it all away next time. This government just refuses to learn. For them every boom is an opportunity to fritter away more money. Alberta keeps going through ups and downs of energy prices, and they never get it right. What is the Premier going to do now that energy revenues seem to be returning to their normal levels?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, energy prices are certainly not at their normal levels. This is a low point in the price cycle. We will deal with that. This province is in a strong fiscal position. At this point we are in a strong position to weather this, but weather this we must. It's going to take the support of all Albertans to do so. I hope that we will have the support of the opposition. We have the lowest tax rates in Canada. We have a competitive advantage in this province, both a fiscal advantage and a tax advantage. We will aspire to maintain that, and we ask the opposition to support us.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions. The hon. Official Opposition leader.

Long-term Care for Seniors

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have asked this government for a real plan to actually build 24-hour long-term care nursing beds. These are not the same as continuing care beds. Some patients need round-the-clock care. If they don't get it, terrible things can happen like festering wounds that lead to deadly infections. Today I'm tabling a picture of a dementia patient in continuing care in Fort McMurray whose daughter found her with a horrible fungus growing on her hand, smelling of urine, and left in feces. Isn't anyone over there distressed by this?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, that issue happened in a particular place in the province of Alberta. They were on that issue immediately. They found out about it on Friday night. Saturday morning Alberta Health Services were on top of that issue. They worked very diligently. They worked with the people to ensure that the individual was taken care of. It's a very, very difficult situation. It's a real travesty. We don't like it to happen, but in a system sometimes things go awry. We apologize for it. At the same time, Alberta Health Services was on top of it, and they did everything they possibly could.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it never should have happened in the first place.

Some things have to be priorities. Dr. Paul Parks says that the government wastes \$400 million a year by having long-term care patients in acute-care beds in hospitals. If we build the right beds and we staff them right, we can look after our seniors better and save money. Alberta is the richest jurisdiction in the richest country in the world. Surely, we can run a system where vulnerable seniors

do not have to suffer horrific wounds while in care. When will the government do something about this?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, a few months ago this government under this leader made decisions to build 300 long-term care beds in conjunction with 1,200 continuing care beds. We also made arrangements to move 750 people from acute-care beds into these long-term care beds, of which 464 will be moved over the next six to nine months. We are taking every step possible to ensure that access to the acute-care beds is made available by operating more long-term care beds. This government is acting.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we know it's not going to be enough. This government has money for phantom jobs for failed executives and fired political staffers. It has money for sky palaces. It has money for communications consultants and executive coaches. It has money for severances and for fake airplane passengers. We have shown the government that they can improve care for our seniors and save money. Why can't this government understand that looking after our vulnerable seniors is their priority?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, looking after seniors is everyone's priority. No one in this country or in this province cares more about seniors than this government and, I'm sure, everybody on that side of the table. All of us care deeply about making sure our seniors have the best care possible. This government is committed to that. We're building long-term care beds, continuing care beds, assisted and supportive living beds. We are committed to doing all we can to ensure that our seniors are properly cared for. That is a vitally important part of my ministry, the Seniors ministry, and this Premier's vision for this province.

The Speaker: Third and final main question. The Official Opposition leader.

Feeder Association Loan Guarantee Program

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, several Wildrose caucus members have been asking the government about the feeder association loan guarantee program, and the answers have not been good. This program has a long history, and it's been an overwhelming success. It has helped our beef industry and, in so doing, has been good for ranchers, consumers, and the Alberta economy. Recent government changes have resulted in only half the number of feeders who used to get loans actually getting them. Will the minister do the right thing and double the guarantee to the feeder association loan guarantee program?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Olson: Yes. Mr. Speaker, we've dealt with this question several times, and I'll repeat the answer again. We are at a time of all-time highs in the cattle industry. It's a very vibrant and buoyant industry right now. People have more equity than they had before. I'd ask the member to remember that the origins of this industry were during the Depression, when people had no money to buy cattle, and we have people who, I think, do have the ability to borrow. This isn't the only program through which you can borrow money, and I'd also invite the banks to be a little bit more flexible in their lending as well.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, people are still recovering from the BSE crisis. This has been one good year, Minister.

I ask this question because major employers in southern Alberta like JBS in Brooks and Cargill in my riding are starting to be concerned about the long-term availability of cattle. Cattle exports to the U.S., particularly calf exports, are at an all-time high. The feeder association loan guarantee program has a very low default rate. Doubling the guarantee will have next to no effect on provincial coffers, but hurting the beef industry definitely will. Why won't the minister just double the guarantee?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, as I've mentioned before also, we are fiscal conservatives over here on this side. I'd like the hon. member to understand that a guarantee means legal liability, and we are just simply asking the industry at a time of very buoyant prices to also take some responsibility. I have certainly been asked by industry members to double up on the guarantee. There are more ways of doing it than just doubling up on the guarantee, and we are looking at innovative ways to assist, but the industry needs to take responsibility, too.

The Speaker: Thank you.

2:00

Ms Smith: Seriously, Mr. Speaker? They've given a \$26 billion loan guarantee to the North West upgrader but won't help every-day, regular farmers?

The default rate on this guarantee is tiny. In 77 years there have been only 17 defaults on this program, around one one-hundredth of a percentage of the amount guaranteed. If our beef plants shut down because of a lack of cattle, the impact will be huge. Increasing the guarantee promotes raising and feeding more cattle in Alberta. If something isn't done, there is a risk that consumers will lose, packing plants will lose, their employees will lose, and ranchers will lose. Why won't this minister do the right thing?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that this is coming up now. We spent a year – we had a committee that reviewed the whole program with Feeder Associations. We came up with some things to create more flexibility such as doubling up on individual loan amounts, creating other types of flexibility. This wasn't one of the issues that was being specifically asked for at the time. What has happened in recent months has been that we've got cattle prices that are 65 percent, even 75 per cent higher than they were a year ago. It could be a short-term thing. I'm also having people in the industry telling me that we should not be increasing.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

Ms Blakeman: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. GSAs save kids' lives, plain and simple. They save kids' lives in the public school system, and they would save kids' lives in the Catholic school system, and they would save kids' lives in the private system. So let me ask the Premier: how does accommodating gay-straight alliances requested by students for schools contravene anyone else's rights and freedoms?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, there's no room for intolerance in our education system, and this government has been very clear. This is a commonly held value, evidently. We wish to promote safe, respectful learning environments for our children. The rights in question involve the rights of our children not to be discriminated against based on their sexual orientation, the rights of parents to have a say in the education of their children, and the rights of

school boards, who are elected to administer these education systems. We will balance those rights in a way that Albertans expect.

Ms Blakeman: Couldn't seem to answer that.

Well, next question to the Premier: will the Premier be allowing a free vote for his government bill in the same way that he allowed it for Bill 202?

The Speaker: This calls for some opinion, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Prentice: Yes.

Ms Blakeman: That was easy. All righty.

Well, back to the same Premier, or the Premier; sorry. Given that section 11.1 is a thinly disguised approval to discriminate against people based on sexual orientation or gender identity, why is this government planning to reinforce this by leaving it as is after it moves it to the Education Act?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that she need only deal with this Premier moving forward. There is no room for intolerance in our education system. We are agreed on that. We need to deal with the rights of parents, the rights of our children, and the constitutionally embedded rights of school boards in this province. That's precisely what we will do. This involves a balancing of rights. These are complex issues that matter greatly in terms of the protection and the education of our children, and we will strike the right balance.

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

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, unending amounts of research conclude that gay-straight alliances provide much needed support to the lives of LGBTQ kids and their friends when they are bullied. You've just announced that school boards will be allowed to say no to them. To the Premier: when the school board says no to a group of kids, would you recommend that they (a) just suck it up, (b) leave the school, or (c) perhaps just turn the other cheek?

Mr. Prentice: As I have said, we support a tolerant, safe environment for children. We support an environment in which children are able to come forward and pursue diversity clubs and the protection of sexual orientation differences within the school environment. There are rights that need to be balanced in terms of the education system, in terms of parental rights. These are complex questions that need to have a balance, and that's precisely where this government stands. We will not pit Albertans against each other.

Ms Notley: It's too late for that, Mr. Speaker. He's already done it, and he's made sure that it's going to happen for a long time to come.

With this law, that allows school boards to prohibit GSAs, this Premier has shown himself to be as socially conservative as any lake-of-fire candidate. Indeed, it's as though he's consciously trying to move Alberta back in time. [interjections] I'm sorry. You may not like this, but this is real.

To the Premier: why have you caved in to intolerance and bigotry and failed to support GLBTQ students, who are trying to protect only themselves and their friends from bullying?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, you don't raise your own reputation by trying to lower others'. I have fought my entire life in this province to protect religious freedoms – my record is clear – to advance parental rights for children in the education system, and

to stand up in defence of the rights of gay and lesbian people in this country.

Ms Notley: Well, the Premier continuously tries to suggest this is about balancing rights. I will admit that I'm not intimately familiar with the arguments of those social conservatives who are offended by GSAs, so perhaps the Premier can explain to me now: how does the existence of a voluntary extracurricular GSA infringe on the rights of anyone else?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I would again encourage the hon. member to consider our Constitution, to consider the position of separate school boards under our Constitution. I would encourage her to consider the Alberta Bill of Rights. I would encourage her to consider the Charter relative to the right not to be discriminated against based on sexual orientation, and I would invite her to consider and to look across the country at parental rights, which involve the rights of parents to be involved in making decisions relative to the education of their children. These are rights that are the cornerstone of who we are as Albertans. There are strongly held views. They need to be balanced.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Long-term Care Beds

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The difference between continuing care and long-term care nursing beds is significant. Before my mum passed away, she was in continuing care, and her health eventually deteriorated. Her doctor made it very clear to us that she needed to go to a long-term care nursing bed, or she would have to stay in a hospital bed. Minister, there were no long-term care beds available. My mum was what you have referred to as a bed blocker. How many long-term care nursing beds do we have now, and how many long-term care nursing beds will we have next year?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I inadvertently used that term once, and I apologize for it. It was an improper term, and it shouldn't be used here as well.

This Premier has made every effort to create as many long-term beds as possible. We have committed to delivering 750 beds immediately. It's going to take us a bit of time – 446 of those beds will be ready within the next six to nine months; the other ones will have to be built – but we are searching through the system to see if we can find more. We're working with every supplier in the province to try to find ways to use the facilities they might have to increase the opportunity for long-term care beds. We're committed to it.

2:10

Mrs. Forsyth: So, Minister, let's talk about your suppliers, then. Given that seniors' care providers were completely caught off guard by your suggestion that they would suddenly turn their existing supportive living care beds into long-term care beds – the spokesman from AgeCare said that they actually haven't had any requests from AHS to do this – where are the beds going to come from?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we work through Alberta Health Services, and they've committed to making sure that the program will be completed. There's a very clear list. It's made public. We will have a certain number of beds ready in three months, in six

months, in nine months, and then we'll have to build some. I don't know what the hon. member is speaking about, but my understanding is that we're moving ahead on schedule. It will be difficult, but we're committed to doing it.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, I'll provide you with that information.

Minister, not one of your new continuing care beds would have helped my mum or helped hundreds of other patients facing the exact same problem across this province. Given that last year alone you closed 200 long-term care beds and that, in the most recent stats we have, you have 571 seniors waiting for long-term care nursing beds, not continuing care, your numbers don't add up. You closed 200 this year. You indicated earlier that you were adding 300. Where are you going to put the rest of the seniors?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, let's not forget that the Minister of Seniors has also announced an additional 1,200 beds on top of the 300 they've allocated for long-term care beds. In his group there will also be long-term care beds. My allocation is the extra 300. We realize that there are other people who are going to need long-term care support on the continuum, so we will continue to work with the Minister of Seniors to develop programs so that we can have the beds needed. This is not going to be an easy process. We have also done everything we possibly can to ensure that beds are moved ahead as quick as possible, in co-operation with the Minister of Seniors.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Oil and Gas Prices

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm asking on behalf of the many industries and residents in my constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, many of whom depend on the petrochemical industry. Volatility in oil prices, though, impacts all Albertans. To the Minister of Energy: what action will you be taking to respond to this development in crude?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. I would ask her to note that as exporters we are price-takers, not price-makers. There are certain things that we can't control in the world markets. There are things, however, that we can control, and we're certainly doing that. First, of course, is access to world markets. It's imperative that we get access to world markets so that we get world prices for our products. In addition to that, we're continuing on our development of upgrading and refining capacity in the province. Today we produce about 2.1 million barrels of bitumen. Over half of that is upgraded, and just under half of that is further refined in our province. We're going to continue . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. We applaud value-added.

Given that yesterday's price was \$75 for oil, some suggest that today we are in a crisis situation. Are you confident, Minister of Finance, that your predictions for the other sectors are solid?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, again, the prices are low today because of the decisions by OPEC, but as I've said before in this House and as I've said publicly, we budget our oil

on a yearly basis. We do have some concerns that it's low right now and with the fact that OPEC is not going to cut the production. But we're going to be very fiscally prudent in our spending for the rest of this year to make sure that we balance the budget. We will be sitting down with our ministers in cabinet, as I said yesterday in the House, to look at next year's budget.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. To the same minister: given the volatility of oil prices over the past year and their continuing change in pricing, how can the minister be confident that we are accurately forecasting our oil prices, philosophically speaking?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, I'm not a very philosophical person, but I will give you some comments based on the fact that we consult with a number of experts, like economists, we talk to banks, we talk to the energy industry. Their insights help us actually adjust our forecast on a quarterly basis as we look at changing trends throughout the year. Next week I'll be meeting with the leading chief economists across the country to get their thoughts. As a government we have always been very conservative in our forecasting. We've never taken the high that the experts have told us to take; we've never taken the low. So as this year shows, we've had a very good first six months, and we're going to have a very good last six months.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Electricity Cogeneration

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Cogeneration electricity is another example of innovation being done by industry in the oil sands. It's cleaner, friendlier for the environment, and it's growing. Considering that we've seen this government strip the rights of landowners and skip the independent approval process to build billions of dollars in transmission lines, the lack of partnerships with our industry on this is puzzling. Can the minister explain what is being done to ensure that clean, cheap, and reliable energy can be better accessed by the rest of the province?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much to the hon. member for the question. First of all, to point out that the premise of his question is entirely wrong, we've stripped no one of their landowner rights. Second of all, the thing that we need to do to ensure that cogeneration is available to the whole province is to build transmission.

Mr. Hale: It's to build transmission in Fort McMurray, not in southeast Alberta.

Given that the federal phase-out of coal will begin in 2020 and leave a sizable gap in our generation capacity and given that according to AESO's own projections cogeneration electricity produced in the oil sands will be providing more electricity to the grid, why did this government plow through building unnecessary lines from coal plants and ignore the infrastructure needed to bring more power onto the grid from Fort McMurray?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the hon. member's constituents will be concerned to learn that he doesn't think that they need electricity, but we think they do. That's why we built a transmission grid across this province.

In early 2015 the production of electricity by natural gas, including cogeneration, will exceed that of coal in our province.

The backbone of this province, its transmission system, is ready to receive it.

Mr. Hale: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the government did rescind the part of Bill 50 that gave them the opportunity to tell where the lines are needed because they didn't have the authority to do that and given that the Bill 50 lines have been described as the Cadillac of transmission lines and given that the coal phase-out is only five short years away and no discernible progress has been made on the Fort McMurray lines, will the minister explain what steps his department is taking to ensure that cogen operators in Fort McMurray have access to the grid?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're building a transmission system by a competitive process. The bids are in. The successful proponent will be announced shortly. That's something that I thought they wanted, too. Apparently not. We're building the backbone. It will be ready.

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

School Infrastructure Decision-making

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Constituents in Calgary-Varsity support critical infrastructure spending, but they also care about fiscal prudence. Decisions are currently being made in my community about the construction of education facilities, and people are worried that decisions are being made in silos. To the Minister of Education. The reconstruction of Christine Meikle school is supported by our community, yet constituents are noticing that the facilities for medically fragile students are also needed by other local facilities. How can you ensure that these decisions about infrastructure are made with a local community lens?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, Albertans have told us to trust local school jurisdictions to make decisions that are in the best interests of children in their particular areas. It's the local municipality and school boards that decide where schools are going to be built and decide the makeup of the program that's going to go to the school. We certainly encourage school jurisdictions to communicate and consult with their communities when they're making those location decisions. I recently was in contact with the Calgary board of education, and they've indicated to me that they want to improve their consultation process with communities as they make these school location decisions.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: That's good news, Mr. Minister.

How will you support a community-focused approach and efficiencies to the modernization or the reconstruction of the Foundations for the Future charter school presently being planned in the Montgomery community?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite right in saying that planning for the Foundations for the Future modernization project is currently under way. As I indicated previously, we support the local school jurisdiction, which is responsible for determining the programming and the makeup of the school. We encourage them to establish partnerships with the local community associations, and we monitor to see whether that, indeed, does happen.

2:20

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Now to the mighty Minister of Infrastructure. What other policy changes, incentives, penalties, carrots and sticks, can be adopted within your ministry to discourage silo thinking in decisions about infrastructure?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is really an issue that doesn't take might as much as it takes co-operation. We have 78 schools in the planning process across the province right now. Now is the time to get school boards, local municipalities, and nonprofits around the table to make decisions very quickly. I see no reason why gyms in our schools, libraries in our schools cannot be constructed in a way that they can provide very valuable community resources outside of school hours. Now's the time to have those conversations, to move swiftly to ensure that the infrastructure that we build serves our communities around the clock.

Education Funding

Mr. Hehr: Conservative claims that they are keeping up the funding of core programs like our K through 12 education system are a complete and utter fallacy, and let me point out how. Forty-five thousand kids have started school in the last four years, yet if we were truly concerned about education funding, with the growth of student population we would have seen at least 2,500 more teachers. To the minister: how do you expect to maximize the potential of Alberta kids when you're shortchanging them on having teachers in classrooms?

Mr. Dirks: I thank the member opposite for his question. If there's anything that we're concerned about, Mr. Speaker, as government and my ministry, it's ensuring that we provide quality education for all children in our schools. We have injected considerable increases in funding in recent years, overall 2 per cent last year, and we will continue to ensure that we are providing the teacher resources in the classrooms that are needed to make sure that all children have a quality education.

Mr. Hehr: Well, that's simply not true, Mr. Speaker. The grants that they used to give to school boards – statistics don't lie – show how this government has abandoned children. You can look at the student-teacher ratio. From five short years ago the average class size in our kindergarten through grade 3 classes has shot up now by 10 per cent. High schools are reporting classes with over 40 students. Alberta parents have stated time and time again that they want smaller class sizes. If we're not shortchanging education funding, why do the numbers continue to get worse?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, the notion that we are abandoning children is nonsensical. The truth is that we are ensuring that all of our children in all of our schools are adequately supported and that our teachers have the resources that they need to teach our children in a fashion that's going to prepare them for the 21st century. School boards receive a significant sum of money from the provincial purse, and we leave it up to the local jurisdiction to determine what their priorities are as to where they're going to allocate their funds. We know that they allocate properly for the needs of their children.

Mr. Hehr: Just before the by-election the government, in a frenzy to make it look like they were going to build schools, announced eight starter schools for both Calgary and Edmonton public, yet

we learned today that the school boards do not want starter schools. Instead, they prefer complete schools to be built when the province is able to provide the funds. Did the minister bother consulting with any of these duly elected school boards prior to the announcement of these starter schools, which, by the way, they don't want?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, if school jurisdictions want to change a proposal for a particular type of school, whether it's a starter school or a fully built-out school, that's their prerogative, and we certainly would receive proposals from them. If that's what they wished to do, we would evaluate them appropriately and then make a determination based on their recommendation to us and our review of the situation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Royal Alexandra Hospital Acute-care Tower

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the NDP released documents to show that PC neglect of the Royal Alexandra acute-care tower means that now a completely new structure is required in order to reduce infection rates. Cross-contamination risks are high because too many patients are in each room. The ventilation system cannot meet the bare minimum infection-control standards. To the Minister of Health: why has your government ignored these serious hazards, that threaten the health of patients, for so long, and what are you going to do about it?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to point out that just recently, in 2010, the government of Alberta invested over \$170 million to build the new Lois Hole hospital for women, which is really one of the finest facilities in the country. Recently they had 94,000 ambulatory patients come in and, what's quite wonderful, 6,500 births last year.

To the hon. member's question, the Royal Alexandra hospital is old. The tower is old, and it does need some work, but let's give credit to the people that work there. Their infection rates are better than anywhere else in this country. Alberta is one of the best in this country, and they're right there with it.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, given that the workers have to compensate for poor planning over a long period of time, they do a great job because this government did a very poor job in building the hospital and in maintaining the hospital as well. To the Minister of Health again. Planning implies forward thinking. How can you possibly plan for the future when you've neglected everything well past the expiry date of this hospital?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, the Royal Alexandra tower is a very, very precious part of the Royal Alexandra hospital, which is key to health care in the centre of the city of Edmonton. This government is putting together a plan, to come out some time in the middle of next year, to look at what we need to do with the tower at the Royal Alexandra hospital. We're committed to fixing it, and we will do all we can. You know, this hospital means a great deal to the people in our city. We have to maintain it. We are maintaining it. There's incredible care given by the men and women who deliver it at that hospital.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that these documents released today also review that this government is considering

building a Royal Alex tower through a P3 model – Auditors General in both Ontario and Quebec have panned the idea of P3s for hospitals, and this summer your government had to abandon P3 models for schools that did not get built. To the Minister of Health: would you commit today that your government will reject the P3 model for the Royal Alex tower, and if not, will you explain why you're going to put both public money and public health at risk when our health care system is already in crisis?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, we have one of the most aggressive capital builds in North America taking place here in Alberta. We will look for the most cost-effective, solutions-oriented ways to build our capital infrastructure, whether that be schools, seniors' homes, or hospitals, because what Albertans want is a focus on the services they need, and that's what we'll deliver.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Environmental Monitoring

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Responsible monitoring of oil sands development is critical to keeping our economy strong, protecting our environment, and securing pipeline deals, but the Auditor General's October report said that this government's monitoring information is 15 months old and lacking clarity, this at the very moment that critical pipeline projects hang in the balance. To the Premier. The world is watching. We need to do better. Why is this happening?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, we clearly must place a priority on successful monitoring and on having world-leading standards. The AEMERA process is a good process resulting from collaboration between this provincial government and the federal government. To be fair, the report that the hon. member refers to was referring to the transitional period when AEMERA was set up. AEMERA is in good hands. Dr. Lorne Taylor and Dr. Greg Taylor are responsible for AEMERA. They're doing an excellent job of getting it up and running and achieving the standards that are expected by Albertans.

The Speaker: Supplemental.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has shown no accountability toward monitoring sustainable resource development and the Auditor General's report proves that, again to the Premier: with oil prices free-falling, inefficiencies and delays mounting, First Nations groups walking away, and critical pipeline projects hanging in the balance, what is your plan to fix your broken monitoring system and deliver responsible resource management for future generations?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a dark picture indeed, which I don't subscribe to. Certainly, we are in a low-price environment; we've spoken about that earlier in question period. But in terms of environmental monitoring, clearly this government and, I hope, everyone in the House aspires to have a world-class system of monitoring. That's a national objective, and it's a provincial objective. What the Auditor General's report shows more than anything else is that we are in transition in terms of arriving at that process and achieving a monitoring system which we can all be proud of.

2:30

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General highlighted ineffective project management, not making timelines, and not meeting

their objectives. How can this Premier and this minister expect to build the energy infrastructure when clearly there's no plan to do what's needed?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, clearly, there is a plan. As I say, the Auditor General's report – I acknowledge his work. His work is important. His work was done at a time when we were in transition from the old monitoring regime to the new. The report says quite clearly, if you read it, that he's talking about the transitional period and that we need to make progress. There are good hands in charge of the monitoring process. They have the right objectives. We'll get this done, and we'll do it in a way that Albertans can be proud of.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Seniors' Housing in Fort McMurray

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, last Friday was a mighty great day in Fort McMurray. After many years of struggling to acquire the land that's known as Willow Square, the government finally announced that this land transfer is complete. Now, as fantastic as that news is, we still have many of my constituents that are worried about the timelines on this development. To the Minister of Seniors: what are the plans for this site, and what are the timelines of the transfer?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it was a great day. A lot of people worked very hard on this, including the two MLAs from Fort McMurray, the great mayor they have up there, and many seniors. For technical and logistical reasons it took some time. But thanks to the leadership of this Premier and the Prime Minister, once they had their first meeting, it was one of the first issues they discussed. I'm very happy to say that the government has acquired a hundred per cent of the land from the federal government, and we will be transferring \$3 million as well as a \$17 million site as per the request of the municipality. I'm advised that that transfer is going to the Wood Buffalo housing authority, and I'm advised that the final details of that transfer will be finalized in the next two to three weeks. So it's good news.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Allen: Thank you. To the same minister: given that the seniors in my constituency have expressed a need for seniors' housing, what assurances can you give them that there will be provisions made for seniors' accommodations at Willow Square?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it's a good question. My understanding is that there are some concerns in the community. But I want to assure seniors and folks in Fort McMurray that there are expectations and, indeed, conditions to this grant. Firstly, Wood Buffalo housing will engage in extensive consultation with community stakeholders, including the Fort McMurray Seniors Advisory Council, to ensure that those diverse needs of the community are met. Secondly, the transfer and this grant have been with the understanding and the expectation that the site will be used substantively for seniors and affordable housing. This government wants to enable and empower the local community to build the vision that they have created, and these are the tools they needed to do it. This is what the . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
Final supplemental.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Wood Buffalo has been waiting a very long time for a real continuing care facility, and we have one planned at Parsons Creek. When will we see a shovel in the ground?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The tender will be hitting the streets in January, and my expectation is that construction will be starting next construction season. This is a very important project, a hundred beds, very significant for the community. The tender will be hitting the streets within, as I said, about a month.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Calgary-West.

X-ray Services in Vilna and Saddle Lake

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whether it's for a broken bone or for preventative medicine, many of us need an X-ray at one time or another. The residents of Vilna and Saddle Lake are no different, but due to a decision by AHS they must now travel upwards of an hour each way on highway 28, the road the Premier has called the worst in the entire province, to receive the same services that were once available right at home. It's unacceptable. Does the new minister agree with the decision made by AHS?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, they're constantly arguing whether or not AHS spends too much money or they're spending it not in the right ways. AHS has the ability to make decisions about what projects they support and don't support, what equipment they keep or don't keep in order to supply services to communities. I think in this particular instance the machine was old and was decommissioned. We'll look now at what we can do to replace it to help the community. But they took the steps in order to deal with what it was.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He brings up money. Given that the local firefighters' association has expressed their willingness to raise money to ensure their friends and neighbours receive the health care they need and given that AHS has told them in no uncertain terms they won't allow the local community leaders to raise the money, can the minister explain why AHS believes the residents of Vilna shouldn't receive the health care they need?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we very, very much appreciate the firefighters or any philanthropic organization making efforts to raise money to help with the health care system. It's done throughout the province. But that's the capital side; there's an operating side. So whenever we do something, we have to realize the machine must operate, there must be people to operate it, and that costs money and has to have a budget. In order to do that, we need to make sure that that money is available, and we'd be glad to look into that.

Mr. Saskiw: You should just let them know the amount.

Given that this is a critical need for the residents of Vilna and Saddle Lake and given that the community is willing to raise money for this vital piece of health care infrastructure, will the minister commit today, right now, to allowing the residents of Vilna to get their X-ray machine back?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we will not commit to anything today. We believe that Alberta Health Services investigated what was needed. What we will commit to is to look into what happened and let this House know how we might be able to be of help to that community. We are looking at our rural health strategy. Rural Alberta is vitally important to this government, and we'll continue to work with them. We'll be glad to look into it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by Livingstone-Macleod.

Homelessness

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week seven major municipalities across Alberta released preliminary data from a co-ordinated homeless point-in-time count. The cities conducted counts in October to find out that there are over 6,600 Albertans without a place to call home. To the Minister of Human Services. The province's 10-year plan to end homelessness is in its sixth year, and there are still thousands of Albertans without a home. Is this plan working, or has it failed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The most recent homeless count, as I said the other day, has shown a decrease of 16 per cent province-wide since the launch of our plan. We know the population has grown by 100,000 people a year, but in Edmonton homelessness is 27 per cent lower; Lethbridge, 45 per cent; Wood Buffalo, 49 per cent. We've also invested up to \$83 million this year alone. Nearly 10,000 people have been provided housing and support since the launch of this plan. While these results are impressive, we know we have more work to do.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. The point-in-time counts reveal that in large municipalities such as Calgary, there is an increase in family and youth homelessness. Is anything being done to address supports for some of the most vulnerable in the province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue of youth homelessness is very much indeed on this government's mind. Alberta was the first in Canada to adopt the point-in-time count province-wide and also to work with all of the community partners to target outreach programs that meet local needs like youth. For example, in Edmonton we have Nova house, that provides approximately 20 beds to youth through the Edmonton John Howard Society, and the Boys & Girls Club infinity project, which helps youth with financial and other supports as well.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. We know winters in Alberta can be brutal, such as today, and media reports say that emergency shelters are often over capacity. How will the current homeless population be supported during the upcoming winter months?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the winter storm is upon us. I know that our community partners in the seven

major centres are working hard to deliver their emergency plans to ensure homeless individuals have a safe and warm place to be. We are supporting these plans with \$1.6 million from our government and \$1.6 million from the federal government as well. This is going to help add 320 more bed spaces as well as warming centres and emergency shuttle services. This is in addition to the \$39 million the province has already invested in the operation of 3,200 spaces across Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Funding for Smaller Municipalities

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties asked this government to set aside one-third of the small communities fund from the new building Canada fund, or approximately \$31 million over 10 years, for communities with populations of 10,000 or less. To the Minister of Infrastructure: having heard the AAMD and C concerns and given that 33 per cent of Albertans live in communities with populations of 10,000 or less, will you now meet the request of the AAMD and C and provide adequate funding for these communities?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question, a very important question that came from AAMD and C. The small communities funding out of the building Canada fund is to Alberta, and it's designated for communities under 100,000 in population. That is the criteria that is set out by the federal government. Those dollars will be flowing through our Ministry of Municipal Affairs, and as soon as they start flowing to us, we'll get them out to the communities.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Yes. This time to the Transportation minister. Considering that program received no new funding in this current budget and in the next budget receives only \$75 million for previously submitted applications, can communities instead use the new building Canada fund and the small communities fund specifically as an alternative funding source for waste-water projects?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, that might be a great idea. They would have to apply to it and be successful. But I've also asked for an increase in my budget for water and waste water as well, and we've asked to have some of the building Canada fund moved into the water/waste-water components. Either way, hopefully, we can get some more money. If the small communities want to use it for that, that would be great.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, last week the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka raised a question of water for life funding in the town of Blackfalds. This program has not met the needs of this community and others either. To the Transportation minister again: will this government, then, commit to reinstate and enhance funding for the Alberta municipalities water/waste-water partnership, the water for life program, in the 2015 provincial budget?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've already said, this is a very important program for all Alberta municipalities, and I support it very much. I think there's lots that we need to do there, and I agree with the member. I've asked for that. I think he's asking the question to the wrong minister. Maybe next time he could ask it to the President of Treasury Board.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Oral Question Period has concluded.

I'm going to ask to revert to Introduction of Guests in just a moment, but before I do, I have three quick observations to make. I want to share with you as I've shared with all caucuses now that the last few days I've received the most phone calls ever of a positive nature about the conduct of all members of this House. You have elevated the level of decorum significantly, and that has spread amongst all four parties, including the independent. So congratulations, and thank you on behalf of Albertans.

Number two, please note that a record number of members were able to be recognized for their questions, I think directly as a result of what I just said. We've had up to 16, 17, and, on Monday, 18 different members, which set a record for this particular group.

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: The final point is just exactly that. Two weeks have gone by now and not one single point of order, which sets a record for this Assembly. So please know that you are all part of history, in the most positive way, from my perspective.

Could we now revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Let us proceed with the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just noticed that somebody who is very much a leader in his community has just joined us for the remaining moments of question period, and I did want to draw the attention of our members. I introduce to you and through you Mr. Dan St. Pierre, who is the director of operations and communications for the Metis Settlements General Council. Dan is definitely a fine contributor to his community and somebody that I think many of us here recognize, so we would like to say hello and offer you a warm welcome today.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three items for which to provide notice to the House today. First, I would like to give oral notice of the intention to introduce Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, which will be sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to provide oral notice of intention to introduce Bill 11, the Savings Management Repeal Act, which will be sponsored by the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give oral notice of Government Motion 10.

Be it resolved that the following changes to, one, Special Standing Committee on Members' Services be approved, that Mr. Hale replace Mrs. Towle; two, that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved, that Mr. McAllister replace Mr. Amery; and three, that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future be approved, that Mrs. Towle replace Mr. Lemke.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, do you have a tabling today?

Mr. Bilous: Yes, I do, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. We're moving along quite quickly today. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter written by Eric Musekamp of the Farmworkers Union of Alberta. Eric writes about another needless farm worker fatality in Alberta. On November 4 60-year-old Charles Stauffer, husband, father of two, and grandfather of six, died while working on a feedlot near Raymond. The Farmworkers Union of Alberta is asking this PC government to "support and endorse OHS legislation and mandatory WCB for our agricultural workers to help prevent this tragedy from befalling another innocent Alberta family."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

If not, hon. members, I'd like to take the liberty to rise and table five copies of the biographies of our pages. As you know, we have

seven brand new pages, and each of them has a very interesting story to tell, albeit said ever so briefly in the biographies. Please take a moment to read these and get to know our wonderful pages.

Thank you very much.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Sorry about that, Mr. Speaker. I do have a tabling, five copies of a letter from a constituent that the hon. opposition leader referred to earlier in regard to the picture of the infection that the senior had and that she was describing in her question.

The Speaker: Thank you. We will be careful when we're doing speeches and referring to things we present as a tabling to not use them as a prop. It's a fine line. I didn't see anything too incorrect with the procedure just handled, and I'm grateful for the tabling. Thank you.

Hon. members, we have no points of order, as I have just mentioned, so we can proceed onward.

Orders of the Day

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, given the treacherous roads that we have – in fact, I've just learned of a serious accident in Red Deer where a sheriff has been injured – I would like to propose that we stand adjourned until Monday.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 2:48 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 28th Legislature - 3rd Session (2014)

Activity to November 26, 2014

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 199 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1 Respecting Property Rights Act (Prentice)

First Reading -- 6 (Nov. 17, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 30-31 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., adjourned), 142-146 (Nov. 24, 2014 eve, passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 169-173 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 206-211 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft., adjourned)

3 Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014 (Quadri)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 89 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 165 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 173 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

4 Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 89 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 165-167 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 174-175 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft.), 177-179 (Nov. 25, 2014 eve., passed)

5 Securities Amendment Act, 2014 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 89-90 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 167-168 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 173 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

6 Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2) (Olson)

First Reading -- 22-23 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 90-92 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 175 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 193-206 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft., adjourned)

7 Chartered Professional Accountants Act (McIver)

First Reading -- 159 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

8 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (Kennedy-Glans)

First Reading -- 159 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

201 Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014 (Anglin)

First Reading -- 86 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 125-128 (Nov. 24, 2014 aft., adjourned)

202 Safe and Inclusive Schools Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (Blakeman)

First Reading -- 86 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., passed)

203 Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014 (VanderBurg)

First Reading -- 192 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, December 1, 2014

Issue 9

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, December 1, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. Dear Lord, as we labour diligently on behalf of those whom we serve, let us act and speak courageously in support of those who are unable to do so for themselves. Amen.

Please remain standing now for the singing of our national anthem. Today we're very pleased to welcome our leader in that regard, Ms Colleen Vogel, who works for visitor services. Let's join in and participate in the language of our choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Thank you, Ms Vogel. Please be seated.

Hon. members, as you know, it is the tradition of the House to pay tribute to current or former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met and to do so at the very first opportunity. Therefore, it is with deep sorrow that I rise to advise you of the passing of Mr. Henry Woo. However, we have not yet had a response back from his family as to when they might be able to join us. We anticipate doing a tribute for Mr. Woo later this week on some given day, so please stand attentive on that point.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some home-schoolers from Wetaskiwin: 16 visitors, students and their leaders. The leaders today are Mrs. Melanie Krause, Mrs. Maria Chrunik, Mrs. Thérèse Klopfenstein, and Mrs. Corrie Vande Burgt. I would like to invite them all to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 48 talented grade 6 students from Centennial elementary school and their chaperones: Michelle Leong, Marnie Trapp, Sonya Johnston, Christine Oleksiw, and Angel Giovanni. I ask all the students and their chaperones from Centennial school to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, my wife, Janice Dorward, graduated grade 6 from Forest Heights elementary school in my constituency, and we're welcoming them to the Assembly this week through the school. They're here with their teacher Frau Marion Fritz and Fräulein Jessica Arzt. We have 26 students, and I would like them to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. They're in the members' gallery. Please stand up.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

If not, let us move on with other important guests.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you a group of medical students from the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. Each year a group of medical students from both programs visit the Legislature to meet MLAs and share their concerns about health care with elected officials. This year they're hoping to meet with some of the members regarding tanning beds and minors. I ask that the students rise as I call their names and receive the customary warm welcome from this Assembly: Raheem Suleman, chair of the Political Advocacy Committee; Justin Khunkhun; Justine Hames; Jennifer Yan Fei Chen; Kirsten Sjonnesen; Samuel Quan; Sarah Hanafi; Patrick Vallance; Jeremy Christensen; Michelle Huie; Brandon Christensen; Nicole Mensik. And from the University of Calgary: Michael Arget, a senior chair of the Political Advocacy Committee; John Van Tuyl, a junior chair of the Political Advocacy Committee; Adam Burgess; Emily Macphail; Christina Harzan; Eric Campbell; Mimi Tran; Nicholas Monfires.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition, followed by the Minister of Service Alberta.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Elder Walter Bonaire and Mr. Blaine Knott. Walter is a Cree singer and Elder from Little Pine, Saskatchewan. He's travelled across Canada performing traditional Cree songs and dance, many of which have passed through generations. Walter is the author of *Listening to Elders Telling Stories Sitting in a Circle* and the resident Elder of NAIT and a lecturer at the University of Alberta and the University of Manitoba. Blaine is a member of the Peguis First Nation in Manitoba and has spent several years visiting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. I'd like to thank Elder Bonaire and Mr. Knott for infusing us with a greater understanding of aboriginal culture in all sectors of society and ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Khan: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some very important individuals that have been instrumental in the completion of the Condominium Property Act. From my ministry – and I'll ask them to rise as I say their names – we have Beth Jenkins, Kelly Refah, Mark Ammann, and Brent Kornack. All of these people have worked tirelessly through stakeholder consultations that span years to develop the best possible legislation for both condominium consumers and the developers across this province. Condo living is becoming an increasingly attractive option for people of this province, and it's because of

the hard work of these valuable folks here that Albertans are able to have confidence in their choice of condo living.

I would also like to introduce three people from the developer side who have come together with the common goal of making the Condominium Property Act as strong as it can be. We have from the Canadian Home Builders' Association Jim Rivait, and I'll ask him to rise as well. We have Nicholas Carels of Streetside Development, and we have the president of the Canadian Home Builders' Association and also representing the Daytona Group of Companies, Tally Hutchinson, who, Mr. Speaker, is also a valuable member in St. Albert and a tremendous citizen involved in the community in St. Albert. It's these folks who have been consistently involved in the consultations between government and industry with the common goal to create the appropriate framework for the industry to thrive and to produce the best results possible for the consumer. All seven of these folks, as you can see, are in the members' gallery, and I would like to ask all members to provide them with the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Red Deer-South.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my guests Joel and Sapphira Lewin. Unfortunately, Joel's spouse, Jennie, is at home today taking care of Vienna, who's feeling under the weather. Sapphira is in grade 6 and learning about democracy in her school, so she wanted to see first-hand what goes on in this building. Jennie and Joel are also both strong advocates for inclusive education in Alberta, and I'd like to thank them for their dedication and hard work on this. The Lewins, like myself, are proud to call Beverly home, and I'd now like to ask Joel and Sapphira to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the president of Ports-to-Plains Alliance, Michael Reeves. Alberta joined the Ports-to-Plains Alliance in 2009, the first Canadian member of the alliance, and since then Mr. Reeves has been a great friend and ally for Alberta. This unique nonprofit, nonpartisan, community-driven advocacy group, led by Mr. Reeves, is made up of representatives from Alberta as well as Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming. Mr. Reeves has been and continues to be a great supporter of Alberta's position on mandatory country of origin labelling and has helped ensure that the facts about Alberta's responsible and sustainable energy development practices are presented. We thank him for his continued support of our province. Michael is joined today by Elvira Smid, who is also the executive director of the eastern Alberta trade corridor. I'd like to ask Mr. Reeves and Ms Smid to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Calgary-Fort.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really delighted to be able to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a new staff member in my fabulous constituency office of Edmonton-Centre. Angelika Matson is

joining us in the public gallery. Angelika, I'd ask you to rise. She has joined the staff there as the new social media person helping me out. You can imagine, when she started 10 days ago, how deep into the deep end she was thrown, and she is doing the front crawl very nicely, thank you. Please join me in welcoming her.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a special lady who has been helping us to grow our family tree and the Alberta population, of course. She has given us our first grandchild, Dylan. She is Mimi Tran, my precious daughter-in-law. Mimi is here with a group of medical students, her colleagues, to keep us informed of the danger of skin cancer among our youth due to the usage of tanning machines. Now I would like to ask Mimi to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. In the members' gallery is a particularly passionate young medical student, who is passionate about prevention. She is here with a number of other medical students, as mentioned by the Health minister, calling on the government to show leadership in prevention. Tanning beds contribute substantially to melanoma, sometimes a fatal condition among our population, and are banned in most other provinces in the country. I'd ask Michelle Huie to stand and be recognized.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Karina Pillay. Karina is a second-year medical student and also came to talk to us about the dangers of using tanning beds, especially amongst youth. But very special to me is that Karina is a former mayor of Slave Lake. She was the mayor of Slave Lake when we had the devastating fires that went through, and she's the lady that all of us worked with to ensure a great recovery for that community. I would like everyone from this Assembly to extend our warm welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

Members' Statements

The Speaker: A reminder that you have two minutes to offer your statements. Let's start with Calgary-North West and follow up with Chestermere-Rocky View.

Calgary Sexual Health

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize one of the important organizations providing instruction and education to the youth of our province. Calgary Sexual Health has been offering services to Calgary schools for 42 years now, and our kids are all the better for it. Why is sexual health education so important? Health Canada says: sexual health education is a major part of personal health and healthy living; it should be available to all Canadians as an important part of health promotion programs and services. The positive outcomes of quality sexual

health education are self-esteem, respect for themselves and others, nonexploitive sexual relations, informed reproductive choices, and a reduction of disease and unintended pregnancy: all good things, I think we can agree.

So what makes a good sexual health program? It has to be inclusive of the population it targets, it has to be evidence based and evaluated, and it must be a co-ordinated effort between Health, Education, Human Services, and all the other public and nonprofit groups at all levels of government. Calgary Sexual Health is at the forefront of this work, providing school-based education programs, community education, and counselling. They've been providing comprehensive sexual health education programs for 40 years, reaching 8,000 students every year. Their WiseGuyz program teaches young men the importance of challenging stereotypes about masculinity, bullying and homophobia, and intimate partner violence. It is groundbreaking and transformative.

One of my very favourite things about Calgary Sexual Health is that they helped found Camp fYrefly Calgary, Canada's only national leadership retreat for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transidentified, two-spirited, intersexed, queer, questioning, and allied youth. You cannot visit this camp and not come away a profoundly changed person, educated and more compassionate about these issues.

Mr. Speaker, I want to applaud Calgary Sexual Health and its courageous staff for everything they do.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Infrastructure Capital Planning

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, this morning a damning infrastructure report was released about the state of Alberta's health facilities. While facilities are given a priority rating, there isn't much of a link between a building's rating and the choice about which ones get money for repairs. Now, we know what this means, sadly: favouritism and political decision-making. It's clear that this government has grossly overspent and misprioritized in the past and is now sleeping in the bed that it made for itself.

As the Education advocate, Mr. Speaker, I have asked many questions about school infrastructure in this Chamber. Since last election this government has promised 105 new schools for communities all over this province. But in this Chamber when I asked the question, "How many of these schools are currently under construction?" as simple a question as that seems to be, the minister offers no answer. Well, do some research, and you'll sadly learn that the number is somewhere around zero.

Modular classrooms are yet another problem. During the by-elections the Minister of Education announced two portable classrooms for a school in his own riding. This particular school was at number seven on the CBE priority list. Undoubtedly, the queue was jumped to help secure support in the middle of a by-election. Now, we hear promises about a new era of integrity, of management, and trust. This is not integrity.

Wildrose has called and pleaded for a public prioritized list for infrastructure projects. The purpose is so simple yet so crucial. We need to take the politics out of school infrastructure decision-making. We need schools, we need modulars, and we need them now. We must allocate them in a fair and transparent way. Adopt the Wildrose plan for infrastructure and take politics out of the equation. Don't just talk the talk on it; walk the walk. And while you're at it, give some clear, concise answers from the front bench that Albertans expect and deserve.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

1:50

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation for Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's 1:50, and we must begin Oral Question Period, but before we do so today, I want to advise you of some adjustments that will be made to the Oral Question Period and to Members' Statements rotations resulting from the recent changes in caucus membership. The House leaders for the government and the Official Opposition caucuses provided my office today with a memo dated November 27, 2014, that encloses a revised Oral Question Period rotation, affecting only those positions held by those two caucuses in the rotation.

On days 2 and 4 of the Oral Question Period rotation question 16 will now be asked by a private member from the government caucus in the positions formerly held by the Official Opposition. Members should note that this change will affect the questions scheduled for today, which is day 4 in the rotation.

The House leaders' agreement provided to me earlier today is silent with respect to the Members' Statements rotation. Accordingly, I have tried to preserve the intent of the May 2012 House leaders' agreement but have made an adjustment that takes into account the change in caucus composition. It is, of course, open to House leaders to propose an alternative if they wish by way of an agreement concerning Members' Statements.

In the Members' Statements rotation for week 4 on Wednesday the final Members' Statements position will be held by the government caucus, and the Official Opposition will now have only one statement on that day. The current week is week 3 in the Members' Statements rotation, and as a result, this change will not affect the schedule of Members' Statements outlined in the projected sitting days calendar until Wednesday, December 10, assuming I do not hear from the House leaders before that date.

These changes to the rotations are in addition to the changes I announced on Tuesday, November 18, 2014, at page 11 of *Hansard*, changes that were to accommodate the independent member at that time.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Let us begin. Thirty-five seconds max for the question; 35 seconds max for the answer.

The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. First main set of questions.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, world oil prices are crashing through the floor, and we're seeing just how poorly this government has prepared us for what's to come. When energy revenues were never higher, they blew through every penny and then some, racking up \$11 billion in debt in the process. That's like winning the lottery, spending it all, and maxing out the line of credit all at once. To the Finance minister: if his government couldn't manage the budget when oil was \$100, what's going to happen when it gets below \$70?

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just gave the second-quarter update, and we're looking right now at a surplus of \$933 million on our operating budget. We said that we'll balance the budget for the rest of this year, and we will. We'll be working towards balancing the budget for '15-16.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, they're going to be borrowing more than \$2 billion, and that's with oil averaging \$90 a barrel.

Not only is this government lousy at dealing with ups and downs in oil prices; it can't seem to get its own message straight. On Wednesday the Finance minister's fiscal update pegged oil at \$75 between now and April. Forty-eight hours later the Premier issued a revision, saying that oil would actually be between \$65 and \$75 for the rest of the fiscal year. To the Finance minister: how can Albertans trust his government to manage us through this budget crisis when it can't even get its message straight from day to day?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said in the House before, the price of oil is very volatile. When we came out with our second-quarter update, we looked at \$75 oil. It was down as low as \$65; it's now at \$70. So I'm not going to sit here and try and decide what the price of oil is going to be. We're going to budget on a prudent number and make sure that we balance the budget and provide the services Albertans need and deserve.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this government's words and actions over the last week hardly inspire confidence. They can't decide how to budget for oil prices. They won't acknowledge the debt hole they've put us in. They haven't come clean on which election promises they're willing to break to keep the budget from completely falling apart. About the only thing they're clear on is that they want to raise taxes. To the Finance minister: when is there going to be a moment of honesty, when he'll tell Albertans what is actually going on?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I've answered this question numerous times in the House. I have said that we are going to make sure that we have our spending under control. We've asked all our departments to look at their budgets to make sure that we cut any waste out of those budgets. We are going to provide the core services that Albertans need and deserve, that being health care, education, seniors, and the most vulnerable, and we'll work towards that end for the rest of this year and next year.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition leader. Second main set of questions.

Hospital Infrastructure Capital Planning

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, speaking of health care, Wildrose has been asking about the government's mishandling of hospital infrastructure for years. We have asked about mouldy kitchens, sewer backups, mice infestations, and leaky roofs. We have asked about a billion dollars' worth of deferred maintenance. We have asked why hospital infrastructure spending decisions don't seem to be based on objective criteria. We have asked why hospitals with the necessary equipment and staff are mothballed when they could help deal with wait times. Will the Health minister admit that these conditions are absolutely unacceptable for Canada's wealthiest province?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, our hospitals are safe, well run, and well managed. We will spend \$220 million on the maintenance of our facilities over a three-year period. Yes, we have an infrastructure deficit. But you know something? These are substantial costs to build brand new facilities, which we're doing. We're trying to balance expenditures on repairing older facilities with building new ones because the demand in this province is so

great. This is a growing province, a province where hundreds of thousands of people have come in the last few years. We have to make sure that we find a balance between those communities that are growing and those that are staying a little quieter.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, how can the Health minister say that they're well managed when it costs 25 per cent more to run a hospital in Alberta than the average in the rest of the country?

A media report from this weekend highlights what Wildrose has been talking about for years. This government's infrastructure decisions are highly politicized and have no basis in priority. AHS spends millions rating our hospital infrastructure and deciding on priority lists only to have the government make purely political decisions on which projects get funded. This is wasteful, unethical, and it doesn't put patients first. Will the minister agree to publish a public, prioritized project list for health infrastructure?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, each year Alberta Health Services puts together a priority list, a list of projects that we'd like to try to do, but it is not an unlimited budget. As our Finance minister indicated, we're projecting oil to be under \$75 a barrel; hopefully, somewhat more. As a result of that, projects are planned, and we hope to do them, but sometimes they have to be delayed because of the challenges we face with funding.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's about setting priorities, doing it objectively, and actually following the plan.

Albertans spend more per capita on health than just about any other province, but our results don't show it. Our waiting lists are unacceptable. There are solutions like using the extra capacity in rural hospitals. My own home town of High River has an effective, full-service hospital that performs hernia procedures, which takes pressure off the Calgary hospitals, but this model is ignored elsewhere. Last year I visited a rural hospital which uses its operating room for storage. Why won't this government use our rural hospitals to make Alberta's health system work?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We value our rural hospitals and what they can supply. We're just going through a process of evaluating what options we have in order to increase opportunities. We've got to make sure that the right staff is there and ensure that these facilities can deliver the kind of services they're expected to deliver to the people of their area. You know, health care is a very complicated business. As a result of that, it takes a great deal of planning in order to use a variety of facilities to deliver those programs.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this government has been hollowing out services in rural Alberta for years now.

The Speaker: Third and final main question.

School Construction Funding

Ms Smith: When it comes to new schools, it seems that the Premier has written cheques that can't be cashed. In the middle of an election in which both he and his Education minister were seeking seats, the Premier slapped together a commitment for 55 new schools and 20 modernizations. The timing was curious although the news was welcome. Today, however, the Calgary board of education says that it needs an additional \$200 million to

meet the Premier's commitment on just 10 of those projects, this while the Premier is talking about belt tightening. To the Education minister: what does he say to parents now?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have an unprecedented capital build for school infrastructure in this province. We continue to press ahead to build these schools. We have been in discussions with many school boards to see how, in fact, we can expedite the process to build those 55 new schools that were announced just a number of months ago. Our intention is to build them and to build them as soon as possible for the children of this province.

Ms Smith: Well, I can see why the former chair of the Calgary board of education doesn't want to answer the question, but I hardly think that that answer is going to be of much comfort, Mr. Speaker.

The announcement on October 8 is looking less and less like a serious commitment to build schools and more and more like a crass political ploy to win votes. The government has committed a fraction of what it actually needs to get these projects built in the communities that need them, but they did get the headline that they needed in a hotly contested by-election. To the Education minister: why is his government playing politics with our children's future again?

2:00

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, the last thing we're going to do is play politics with the future of our children. I can tell you that during the by-election and during the leadership race the Premier heard very clearly, our government heard very clearly that the number one thing that Albertans want their government to do is to listen to their priorities and to respond to them. Building new schools is exactly what people across the province want us to do, and we're committed to follow through to do just that.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the October 8 school announcement appears intended to achieve one objective and one objective only: to get the Premier and his Education minister their seats in the Assembly. Albertans are tired of this government manipulating them during elections only to be kicked to the curb after the votes are counted. There are only two ways to look at this. Either the government failed to account for how they'd actually deliver on the promise of new schools or they never had any intention of keeping their promise in the first place. To the Education minister: which is it?

Mr. Dirks: Well, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that one thing Albertans are tired of is negativity. One thing Albertans want this government to do is to respond to their priorities. Two hundred and thirty school projects are presently either being built, have already been opened, are in the planning stages, or are in the permitting stages, and we will follow through on every one of them.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Hospital Infrastructure Capital Planning (continued)

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A Liberal government will fix Alberta's broken health system. For over 40 years this PC government has been great at building hospitals to buy votes, but their record at maintaining, staffing, and running them is appalling. Our hospitals are crumbling, and Albertans are suffering. Today an *Edmonton Journal* story says that decisions

about where funding for hospitals should go is arbitrary, secretive, and political, sort of like the school decision in the Calgary-Elbow by-election. To the Health minister: when will this tired, old government stop making decisions based on political gain and start doing what's best for the health of Albertans?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we've invested in hospital infrastructure: 42 major health capital projects are under development; the three-year Health capital plan 2014 to 2017 is \$2.6 billion; maintenance, \$225 million over three years; South Health Campus in Calgary; Kaye Edmonton clinic; cancer centres in Lethbridge and Red Deer; new major upgrades in Lethbridge, Edson, High Prairie, Medicine Hat, and Grande Prairie. I'm not sure what else we could do. We are doing a lot in this province.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, that's interesting. According to the *Edmonton Journal* story, in the last five years of the 38 projects that AHS listed as its most urgent priorities – the Royal Alexandra, University of Alberta, Foothills, and, hey, even the Misericordia hospital would be amongst the top – only a third have received government approval. It's time for this government to come clean, tell Albertans which hospitals are going to get fixed, which are going to get replaced, and in what order. The public has a right to know. To the Health minister: will you publish a priority list for the renovation or replacement of Alberta's rundown health facilities?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, there's no question that some of our facilities need work, and we've done that. The Misericordia hospital: investing \$25 million. I was over at the Royal Alex the other day and went through it. Yes, there's need of work, but we've given them some money to do some planning to see what we need to do there. There is investment in all kinds of projects across this province, and we will continue to do that.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, two-thirds of AHS's priority list is yet to be approved. AHS is an organization that minister is responsible for.

According to the *Edmonton Journal* AHS's deferred maintenance stands at over \$1 billion. It is clear that this PC government has created this problem and has placed the lives of Albertans at risk. To the Minister of Health: when will your Conservative government take action on this issue and follow the Liberal lead and commit to spending the \$1 billion federal health transfer on the billion-dollar maintenance problem your government created?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we're investing 220 million plus dollars on maintenance and projects. Yes, there is deferred maintenance, and we'll try to catch up. But, you know, there are responsibilities we have all over the province to make sure we improve places throughout Alberta. I realize there is a challenge in Edmonton with the Misericordia and the Royal Alex, but I know there are other issues we need to deal with. That's why we're spending \$220 million. We'll continue to do that to make sure all hospitals across the province are treated equally.

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

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday this government announced it will be introducing its own version of Bill 202, claiming that their bill will balance parental rights with student rights. Now, the PC version of this bill ensures that school

boards that choose to block gay-straight alliances can continue to do so even if students want them. Now, I asked the Premier this question last week, and he didn't answer, so to the Minister of Human Services: will you explain to this Assembly how a voluntary extracurricular club set up to form friendships and create a safe, supportive peer group infringes on the rights of anyone else who chooses not to participate?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'll ask the Minister of Justice to comment shortly, but let's be very careful to not deal with the actual contents of a bill that is anticipated to be up for debate later today.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Pardon my voice; I'm a little bit sick.

That is exactly what I was going to say, in fact, that this bill will be introduced this afternoon by the Member for Calgary-North West. I would invite this member to actually join in the debate on this. You know, Mr. Speaker, we will be having a free vote in this caucus. How about the fourth party?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure you know, it hasn't been tabled, so the rule does not apply here.

Now, students who are victims of bullying are far more likely to drop out and find themselves in at-risk situations. Studies show that up to 40 per cent of Alberta youth living on the street identify as LGBTQ. Surely you understand that the failure to provide the kind of peer support found in GSAs has real and painful consequences. To the minister in charge of child protection: how can you claim to be protecting children when your government puts pandering to social conservatives ahead of child and youth safety?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All Albertans deserve to be treated with respect and to feel welcome in any community and have healthy relationships. One of the things we recently released was Alberta's plan for promoting healthy relationships and preventing bullying. We released that last week. It's a conversation we need to have so Albertans can live, learn, work, and play, and be supported in all of their communities.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister claims that all Albertans deserve an inclusive and tolerant learning environment, yet they plan to single out LGBTQ students by permitting school boards to ban GSAs. Other clubs aimed at supporting marginalized kids are allowed. I'm pretty sure not one single Albertan would publicly defend the notion of banning an antiracism club. To the Minister of Human Services: bullying based on homophobia and bullying based on racism are equally offensive, so why is your government treating them differently?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important to note again that it's about promoting healthy relationships everywhere so Albertans can live, learn, work, and play in environments that are very safe and caring. We know there are issues with individuals that need support, and Human Services and this government will continue to support Albertans who need support. Again, it's about public awareness. It's about conversations. It's encouraging our children and youth to have safe places to be.

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

AltaLink Sale

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Berkshire Hathaway received approval to purchase AltaLink. They will now control 80 per cent of the flow of electricity over Alberta's 21,000 kilometres of transmission lines. Given that Berkshire Hathaway already controls 300,000 kilometres of transmission lines and 28,000 megawatts of generation in the western United States, how does adding to Berkshire Hathaway's market dominance over both transmission and generation advance Alberta's competitive electricity market?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Indeed, the Alberta Utilities Commission has reviewed the sale of AltaLink to Berkshire Hathaway. Prior to that, the federal government reviewed the sale and determined it would likely be in the public interest. Alberta reviewed it from the point of view of the protection of consumers. They determined there would be no harm. I'm grateful that there's a process in place. The process was followed. I'm also grateful that Alberta's electrical system and our energy system are under such scrutiny and are so welcoming to foreign investors.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What assurances can this ministry provide that Berkshire Hathaway will not legally manipulate electricity prices to the disadvantage of Alberta's ratepayers?

2:10

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, the day before the sale transmission is a regulated business; the day after the sale it will be, too. We have excellent processes in place to ensure that Alberta consumers are protected, and they will remain in place.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Anglin: Thanks. Given that Alberta's Utilities Commission has no authority or jurisdiction to review or monitor the electricity market in the United States, knowing that Berkshire has no authority or jurisdiction to review or monitor the electricity market in Alberta, what rules and regulations are in place to stop Berkshire Hathaway from legally adjusting the flow or supply in one jurisdiction only to raise the price of electricity in the next, or the other, jurisdiction?

Mr. Oberle: We're in hypothetical territory here, Mr. Speaker, and I can't answer the question. We certainly don't regulate the electrical system in the United States. We do in Canada. In Alberta we have the Market Surveillance Administrator. We have an excellent process, and we have excellent rules in place. They will be enforced.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Livingstone-Macleod.

Inclusive Activities in Schools

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago school boards across Alberta were asked to provide information

on antibullying clubs, diversity clubs, and gay-straight alliances in Alberta school jurisdictions. My question is for the Minister of Education. Can you tell us what you have heard from school boards with respect to antibullying clubs, diversity clubs, and gay-straight alliances in Alberta schools?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did ask Alberta school jurisdictions if they could report on the number of antibullying clubs, diversity clubs, and gay-straight alliances. I'm pleased to inform you that a hundred per cent of jurisdictions did respond. They have multiple initiatives to support kids in our schools. Based on the combined responses, in Alberta schools what I have at present are 637 antibullying clubs, 665 diversity clubs, and 94 gay-straight alliances, so almost 1,400 clubs in our schools. I'll be tabling this information later.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. member. First supplemental.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Your reply indicates that not all schools have clubs identified as GSAs. How does this information provide you with a level of confidence that schools are supporting all vulnerable students?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we've said a number of times in the Assembly, there is no room for intolerance in our education system, and we continue to make the promotion of safe and dignified and respectful environments a priority. Schools are supporting students, as I've just mentioned, through a wide variety of clubs – antibullying clubs, diversity clubs, gay-straight alliances – and there will be other types as well, hundreds of clubs across Alberta. They may go by different names, but they're all there to support our students.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will this information inform future policies to support students who want to organize a club or GSA in their school?

Mr. Dirks: I thank the member for the question. The information is helpful, Mr. Speaker, in telling us how school boards are supporting students in their schools. As we've just heard, there are many different, diverse approaches that school boards use to support students. I fully support and our government fully supports gay-straight alliances and other kinds of school clubs as well, but we also respect the rights of school boards to make decisions about what is going to be appropriate in their jurisdiction according to their priorities to make sure we have safe and caring environments for all students.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Infrastructure Capital Planning

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A five-month investigative report by the *Edmonton Journal* today, which I'll be tabling later, has uncovered a number of disturbing details about the state of Alberta's hospital infrastructure. That report blames years of PC political manipulation for crumbling facilities, empty departments, secret funding, and a deferred maintenance bill of over a billion dollars. To the Minister of Infrastructure. This

situation is reaching a crisis point for communities across Alberta. What is your plan to fix this mess?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. In fact, our Premier has said that we will take a very planned and deliberate approach and make deferred maintenance a priority of this government. I would say that in the last number of months we have increased school board infrastructure maintenance funding by \$100 million, over \$150 million in the area of seniors' lodges, and I would say we're looking forward to making additional changes as we develop the budget.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that one of the biggest issues this report underlines is this government's use of infrastructure for political manipulation and gain and given that this minister clearly hasn't improved, as evidenced by the recent sod-turnings for untendered projects and queue-jumping of schools, Minister, will you do the right thing and publish a full, public, prioritized infrastructure list like the Wildrose has been asking for for years?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're spending \$2.6 billion in health facilities in our current capital plan – \$2.6 billion – and \$222 million of that is being allocated directly to Alberta Health Services for maintenance projects. Guess who makes the decisions on those projects. It's Alberta Health Services that determines which projects are to be finished at what time.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That same report says that Alberta Infrastructure's method of rating health facilities is ineffective and physical evaluations by private consultants are often manipulated or even rejected by this government in favour of political decision-making. Once again to the minister. Albertans need a health care system that works. Will you start making funding decisions based on need and stop playing politics with our hospitals?

Mr. Bhullar: Once again, Mr. Speaker, we have \$222 million that is being allocated in the current capital plan for maintenance projects with Alberta Health Services. That money is allocated to Alberta Health Services, who then determines which projects they need to fund in which order. That's what we do with our educational funding as well as our postsecondary funding. We allow them to make the decisions on their priorities. That's what prudent governments do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Calgary Buffalo.

Education System Efficiency

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As this Assembly is aware, I've taught children for 36 years. In that time and since then a universal complaint of teachers was the amount of work that our educators are forced to put in outside of the classroom, in particular into administrative work such as report cards and IPPs.

Teachers spend hours on report cards and IPPs, and it takes them away from planning lessons and curriculum. This question is to the Minister of Education. Who decides the structure of report cards and how often teachers have to meet with parents for IPPs, the province or the school board?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, local school authorities in Alberta are responsible for report cards. School authorities have policies related to student assessment. They're responsible for engaging parents and guardians regarding student performance. I have a mandate to look at ways of ensuring that our report cards and other grades are coherent and easily understood for Albertans. Going forward, we make our decisions based on what is best for higher achievement, what research says, and what best practices in student assessment would be.

Mrs. Leskiw: To the same minister: given that teachers are being forced to spend a large amount of time outside the classroom on administrative work, what is being done to alleviate the pressures on teachers to prevent them from spending so much time and effort on duties outside their calling as educators?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that by supporting teachers and doing whatever we can in whatever ways to address their workload issues, Alberta's students will continue to benefit from a world-class education. As part of our current agreement with teachers we're committed to a review of workload concerns, and we're in the midst of a third-party study in that regard. I look forward to continuing a productive relationship with the Alberta Teachers' Association to ensure that all students have continuing access to our high-quality education system.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm also looking forward to that report.

To the same minister. Often differing school jurisdictions such as public, Catholic, and francophone will send multiple buses to the same area. Given that finances are tight and the staffing difficulty when it comes to busing, should we be encouraging co-ordination of busing to make it more efficient?

Mr. Dirks: Well, the simple answer to that, Mr. Speaker, is yes, we should. Student transportation is a valuable part of our education system here in Alberta. We appreciate the work of school boards and our bus operators to ensure students are transported safely. We've tasked school boards to look for efficiencies in student transportation operations, including co-operative agreements with neighbouring jurisdictions, and currently two-thirds of our school boards do indeed have co-operative transportation partnerships.

2:20 **Gay-straight Alliances in Schools** (continued)

Mr. Hehr: The hon. Education minister referenced that there are all sorts of clubs that children are able to join at school – sports clubs, 4-H clubs, and the like – but we continue to hear from our LGBTQ students that they don't have a safe place to discuss issues that are important to them. To the Minister of Education: how many gay-straight alliances, not just diversity clubs, exist in our rural areas and our Catholic and private school systems?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, we are absolutely committed to ensuring that all of our students are provided with a

safe, caring, and respectful school environment. There are multiple – multiple – as I just mentioned, hundreds, indeed almost a thousand different clubs that exist in our schools across the province, including gay-straight alliances and antibullying initiatives and diversity clubs. These are all going to be beneficial for students right across our province.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, the information we've received shows that gay-straight alliances are not in our rural areas, are not in our Catholic schools, and are not in our private schools. Does the Minister of Education believe there is simply no need for them in our Catholic system, in our private schools, or elsewhere in this province where they're currently not at?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier in the House, our side here, our government and myself as Minister of Education, we strongly support gay-straight alliances in our schools and will continue to do so. Albertans expect and it's important that we balance the rights of students, of parents, of school boards. That's exactly what we have done and we continue to do.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of Education support mandatory gay-straight alliances at every school where students request them, or is he going to continue to bow down to some argument on parental rights or nonsense like that instead of doing what's right?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear. I support and our government supports ensuring that we have safe, caring environments for every student in our province. Full stop.

The Speaker: Now the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Electricity Marketing

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This week TransAlta will be brought in front of the Market Surveillance Administrator to answer for a case of price-fixing that resulted from the withholding of electricity from the market in order to drive up prices. The most disturbing thing in all of this is that the practice of economic withholding is supported by this government and its predecessors to, quote, increase investment. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Why does the Alberta government and its regulatory authorities give a green light to power companies to create artificial shortages, driving up prices and allowing consumers to be gouged?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, actually, TransAlta is appearing before the Alberta Utilities Commission this week on an application made by the Market Surveillance Administrator. The MSA alleges certain practices on behalf of TransAlta. That's the topic of the hearing. It's a quasi-judicial process. I'm going to let that process unfold.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Hon. member, first sup.

Mr. Mason: Oh, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Very nice dodge, Mr. Minister, but those rules don't apply to something before the AUC.

Given that in November 2010 TransAlta exported power from the province to create an artificial shortage and increase the price it could get for its product and given that the market was

manipulated by power corporations staging so-called discretionary shutdowns of generation during peak periods in 2010 and '11, costing consumers over \$40 million while boosting corporate profits by millions, to the minister: does the minister see a pattern of power companies . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. minister for a response.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the pattern that I see is that activities, alleged or not, are fully understood, they're public, they're discussed, and they're brought before the Alberta Utilities Commission for due process. As I said, I'm going to let that process unfold. I believe in it.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that electric power is an essential service for Alberta families and businesses and given that the current deregulated system leads to price gouging, power shortages, and a power rate roller coaster, to the Minister of Energy: will he finally admit that electricity deregulation has put consumers at the mercy of big power companies and bring deregulation to an end once and for all?

Mr. Oberle: I'll admit no such thing, Mr. Speaker. The deregulated power system in Alberta has served Albertans very well. When there are issues, they're investigated and prosecuted if need be. In the meantime the member fails to acknowledge that we've had amongst the lowest power prices for the last months that we've seen for months and months. I'm confident in the system and the checks and balances in place.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Health Facility Capital Planning

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few years ago AHS ranked the refurbishment and the replacement of long-term care facilities as their top infrastructure need. They even calculated that they would need \$140 million for new capacity and a billion to replace old facilities. In the latest AHS priority list long-term care has mysteriously dropped to seventh place, but last week the Health minister and the Seniors minister said that long-term care is their top priority. Why is it that AHS and this government can never agree on what matters?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier has got us squarely agreeing on what matters here, and that's the seniors of this province and providing for them and their families. We've made some fantastic announcements here recently. Maybe the member has noticed that the Minister of Health and the Premier announced opening up about 750 beds in continuing care, including long-term care beds. We've announced that 1,500 ASLI beds are going to be opened up. At least 300 of those are long-term care beds. All that put together is a significant investment and will help us create space going forward.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Announcing is not opening.

Mr. Speaker, during the last election Whitecourt was promised a new hospital. AHS has not assigned a priority ranking to it except

to say that it might come in the next two to five years. Given that Beaverlodge has also been assigned the same ranking to replace its much older hospital and given that the town of Beaverlodge has even selected a site and invested in site services for the new facility, who will the minister choose? Does the chief government whip or the Transportation minister have more clout with this government?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, Alberta is a very robust province, has a growing population. We're spending \$19.2 billion in our current capital plan. This is a very significant investment. Of that, over \$2 billion is going to health projects specifically. We have major projects going on in places like Lethbridge and Medicine Hat. We have projects going on in Grande Prairie, in Edson, in High Prairie. Because that's what the public of Alberta deserves.

Mr. Fox: Yet they'd rather play politics than put out a prioritized list.

Mr. Speaker, given that AHS ranks the new Whitecourt hospital at the same level as the Northern Lights regional health centre redevelopment project in Fort McMurray, will the minister please tell us which of these projects is more important, the one for the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education's riding or the one for the chief government whip's riding?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, our Premier has been very clear. In Alberta there's one type of Albertan, there's one class of Albertan. We do not pit people against one another: urban-rural, north-south, east-west, young-old. We are making the investments for all Albertans: schools and hospitals and seniors' homes. We're doing what the people of Alberta deserve.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Chronic Disease Management

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General's latest report indicates that chronic disease accounts for more than 75 per cent of the direct patient costs of Alberta's health care system. However, there's a troublesome reference in the same report that the Minister of Health currently does not have a strategy to adopt best practices in this area. My question is to the hon. Minister of Health. As a core member of the Alberta under new management team will you champion a comprehensive chronic disease management strategy to make a difference?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Health.

2:30

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Chronic disease is a major priority for this government. One of the important ways to deal with some of the challenges these people face is through the PCNs, our primary care networks. It's this group of people who can work with the chronic care individual in order to give them the kind of support they need within their home and within their facilities, and we really believe that this is one step. Another step, as the Auditor General said, is about dealing with a better record system. I really think we need to make some investments into a better record system in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Luan: To the same minister: given that the same report referenced a local best practice, which happens to be in my Calgary-Hawkwood constituency, called Crowfoot Village Family Practice, which uses team-based care, shared electronic records, and measured health outcomes, will you promote this model and advance it across the whole province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, the Crowfoot Village Family Practice belongs to the Calgary Foothills primary care network. We're using the best practice from this Calgary practice and all of Alberta's 42 PCNs as we move forward with the next step in their evolution. Now, PCN evolution in the coming weeks and months includes enhanced services such as extended hours and same-day or next-day patient access. The PCN network is really the answer to some of the challenges we face in the province of Alberta. We encourage people to use it.

Mr. Luan: To the same minister: given that abundant research has shown that nontraditional treatments like yoga, acupuncture, traditional Chinese herbs are effective ways of treating chronic diseases, will you consider those outside-the-box solutions as you consider strategies moving forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, Albertans are free to use the treatment options that they choose. However, alternative services such as naturopathy, reflexology, massage therapy, and acupuncture are not covered under the Canada health insurance plan, so we have to be careful. But I have had an opportunity to speak to many of these organizations and look forward to meeting with them to talk about what they can add to the system in order to deliver the services that so many Albertans need. Many of the services they supply are really of great value. We look forward to meeting with them.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Immigrant Nominee Program

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is regarding bureaucratic bungling by the Alberta immigrant nominee program regarding a rural doctor in Drumheller-Stettler. Dr. Walters is a long-time resident of Hanna, but thanks to bureaucrats at the Alberta immigrant nominee program, that may no longer be the case after they decided to revoke his status because of a bureaucratic snafu. We need Dr. Walters as a rural physician, and Albertans need more rural physicians. Will the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour intervene and fix this immediately?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, there was no snafu. The staff there have been diligent on this file and are making decisions both in the best interests of Albertans but consistent with the program that we have available. We'll continue to do that. Immigration is important. Getting doctors into Alberta is

important, and we'll continue to work hard on that very important issue.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that provincial bureaucrats have now taken away the rights of a desperately needed rural doctor to practise medicine here in Alberta, will the minister overturn this so-called final decision, add an appeal process, and get Dr. Walters back to serving patients across rural Alberta, a job he has been doing for nine years?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, on this particular file there are some rules. The good doctor I think identified at some point that he was a resident of British Columbia rather than Alberta. I don't know what the background is on that. But it certainly makes it more complicated for us to approve him as an Alberta resident when the person has self-identified as living somewhere else. If the hon. member has different information than that, I would invite him to bring it forward.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will forward that information.

Given that the director of operations at AHS has expressed a deep concern about the possibility of losing a doctor who has served rural communities for almost a decade and given the desperation of rural communities to retain and recruit these doctors, will the Minister for Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour agree to immediately fix this bureaucracy-made injustice and reinstate Dr. Walters' AINP status so he can go back to practising in rural Alberta?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I understand that rural Alberta and all of Alberta needs more doctors, and we are doing everything that we can. But the one thing about it is that if somebody wants to be recognized as an Alberta immigrant, they actually have to identify as living in Alberta. As I said in my previous answer, I would be happy to take this up with the hon. member and see if we can get to the bottom of this, and obviously if there's any . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Hunting Regulation Enforcement

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky we're having an increasing number of complaints from property owners where hunters are driving by, shooting animals on private property, and then trespassing to retrieve their trophies. To the Minister of Justice: what are you doing to make sure that regulations in these areas are being followed?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our fish and wildlife offices are very active. In fact, there are roughly 40,000 enforcement-related actions through this level of law enforcement. That being said, just like any other level of law enforcement, a lot of it is largely complaint driven, and if this member or anybody else sees something going on, I encourage them to call the 24-hour Report a Poacher line at 1.800.642.3800.

Mr. McDonald: Well, again to the same minister: when is your ministry going to increase the penalties for these indiscretions? I do believe that these are being reported, and I think the penalties need to be severe enough that, you know, there is action taken.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a matter that we do take seriously at Alberta Justice. Currently the violation that this member talks about has a \$50,000 fine and/or a one-year jail term. That's a one-year jail term even just for a first offence. We are not currently looking at increasing these penalties, but I would not rule out that possibility sometime in the future.

Mr. McDonald: Just to the same minister: we are still continuing to hear about not enough members in our communities, so does the minister have any priorities as to hiring to make sure that we're populating rural areas with officers?

The Speaker: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. So far this year we've hired an additional 11 fish and wildlife officers, and there's additional recruitment under way to hire an additional 10 fish and wildlife officers. This is something we do take very seriously, and I thank the member for his inquiry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, followed by Stony Plain.

Supports for Postsecondary Students

Mr. Jeneroux: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. We can all appreciate the strain that college and university can put on students. As such, mental health is a prevalent concern on postsecondary campuses. A Stats Canada report found suicide to be the ninth-leading cause of death for all Canadians, but that figure brought it to a disturbing second-leading cause of death for Canadians of postsecondary age. Given that the three-year commitment to supporting mental health in postsecondary institutions will be up soon, are there future plans to introduce a standard across postsecondary institutions for mental health strategies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for being such a passionate advocate for Alberta's postsecondary students. The funding that the member speaks of is a \$12 million commitment over three years, and it's a very important issue. It's something that I've been talking to students all across Alberta about. They have confirmed what the member has said, that they want to see more and expanded mental health services. I will be working going forward with the Minister of Health to develop a long-term strategy.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: That sounds like great news.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that closer to home 5,000 Alberta students were interviewed last year and that it was revealed that a staggering 8 per cent had considered suicide and that in a 2011 survey over 460 students at the U of A alone said that they attempted suicide the previous year, what is being done to reach out to these students proactively?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you again. Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Students' Executive Council received \$2 million over three years to provide education and preventative outreach. Some examples of the programs include mentorship programs at the University of Lethbridge, stress-free zones at NAIT to give students a break, a Mad Hatter's Tea Party at Keyano College to reduce the stigma of mental illness. While we know efforts have reached more than 60,000 students across Campus Alberta, we know more work needs to be done, and I'm committed to doing it.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now to the associate minister of persons with disabilities: what is your ministry doing to help students with disabilities access services like these, that they need, within our postsecondary institutions?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, this government is focused on ensuring that Albertans have the best quality of life, and education is one of the key ingredients for that. Our inclusive postsecondary education program with disabilities: we have 97 students in 18 of our postsecondary institutions right across this province. The graduates from these programs are having great success at finding jobs, and this program is doing exactly what it's intended to do.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Shingles Immunization

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors in my constituency of Stony Plain have raised concerns regarding health services. More specifically, a number of constituents are concerned about the varicella zoster virus that causes shingles and the cost to get vaccinated. To the Minister of Health: why are the shingles vaccinations not covered for seniors when the cost of vaccination is so low compared to in-patient hospital treatment?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I want to echo my colleague in expressing concern for those who contract the shingles virus. I know my colleague to my left and myself both got the vaccine. We know it's an incredibly painful and difficult disease. We know that the rates for shingles increases with age, and for the general population we see fewer than 5 cases out of 100,000 people. For people between the ages of 80 and 84 we see 13 cases for every 1,000 people. So it's a vaccine that we believe will not be effective across . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is there any way the cost of shingles vaccinations could be reduced for low-income groups such as seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will do all we can to make sure that those who are in need of vaccinations will get them. It's important that Albertans have access to the health care they need, and we will ensure they get that.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: would the ministry consider, at least, waiving the fees for shingles vaccinations if it leads to reduced hospital costs?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we have an immunization committee. They do not recommend waiving the fees or that it be publicly funded. You know, it's one of those things. We can cover everything in the world, but sometimes we have to draw a line. This is where we did.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The continuation shall ensue now of Members' Statements, two minutes each, starting with Red Deer-North, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

Michener Centre

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, on September 19, 2014, our Premier announced his decision to keep Michener Centre in Red Deer open. When he announced his decision to the world at a press conference, he received a standing ovation. On that day our Premier touched the hearts of the residents, the families, and many of the citizens of Red Deer and Alberta. I can't begin to express the thanks and the appreciation of those positively affected by this decision.

The first time I walked into Michener Centre over 30 years ago to take my young children swimming at the rec centre, I was surprised by the people who acted differently and who would walk right up to you and say in a very innocent way, "Hi." It didn't take too long for us to learn that Michener was the home of people with developmental disabilities and that, like the rest of us, they just wanted to say hi and have a little chat. Over the years I became friends with some of the residents. Little did I know that one day I would become their MLA and represent them in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Michener has undergone many changes since it first opened over 100 years ago as the Alberta Ladies' College, considered to be one of western Canada's finest residential colleges at the time. In 1916 the provincial government converted the college into a psychiatric hospital for physically and mentally wounded soldiers suffering from what was then called shell shock. Today we call it posttraumatic stress disorder. It was in 1923 that it became the provincial training school for people with mental disabilities. Today it functions as Michener Services, a residential care facility for persons with development disabilities.

Although Michener went through some controversial times and there are those who dislike Michener because it is considered an institution, Michener is an award-winning facility that provides excellent care for its residents. In fact, it's more than that. It's a well-loved home, a home for almost 50 years for some and a home where the residents are cared for and loved and where they want to live for the rest of their lives.

To these residents and their families, who have chosen to be with Michener: rest assured that the promise made to you in 2008 and in 2014 . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

Major Sporting Events in Alberta

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The eyes of Canada and the world have been on Alberta, watching as our province plays host to one world-class sport event after another.

In 2014 Alberta hosted events like the under-20 FIFA Women's World Cup and the ITU world grand finals. This weekend Lake Louise hosted the Alpine Ski World Cup, where Alberta's own Jan Hudec had a very exciting run in the super-G event, finishing ninth overall. On Wednesday the Canada Cup of Curling begins in Camrose, and even now the excitement is building in Red Deer as they are preparing to host the 2019 Canada Winter Games.

And 2015 is shaping up to be as impressive, with the FIFA Women's World Cup, the Tim Hortons Brier, the 2015 Track and Field Championships, the International Biathlon Union cup races, and so much more ready to go.

Through these major sporting events we are putting Alberta at the centre stage of sports, and the benefits of this attention are felt across the province. Sport tourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the Canadian tourism industry, with domestic travellers spending about \$3.6 billion a year. Perhaps more importantly, our continued presence as a world-class event host contributes to a more vibrant and healthy way of life for Albertans. Hosting both small and large events can inspire generations of Albertans to fall in love with recreation and sport, and that love can lead to more active Albertans through participation, planning, volunteering, or just spectating.

Mr. Speaker, when you take our legacy of hosting successful sporting events at our world-class facilities and venues, our strong volunteer base, and the number of attractive destinations as a backdrop, the undeniable conclusion is that Alberta is a perfect place to host any major sporting event, and I hope we can do so into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Southwest Calgary Ring Road

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to draw to the House's attention a historic event that occurred just over a year ago, on November 27, 2013. On that day an agreement was signed between the province of Alberta and the Tsuu T'ina Nation to allow for the completion of the Calgary ring road network.

Now, this was not an overnight success story. In fact, it was in 1955 that the provincial highways minister first suggested a southwest bypass be planned for Calgary, and in 1956 the roadway first appeared on planning documents prepared by the city.

Mr. Speaker, the completion of the southwest Calgary ring road has been the most important concern of my constituents from before I was elected and continues today. I want to acknowledge their efforts and hard work in learning about and expressing their observations about the project and its impact on their

neighbourhoods. As their MLA I've learned about cut and fill bridge design, how to review hydrologists' reports, how paving materials have an impact on the traffic noise levels, and much more.

The southwest Calgary ring road is an important project for both the province and the city of Calgary. Once open, the roadway will also provide relief to urban freeways and feeder roads that are already under stress within the region. This highway will change traffic patterns in Calgary-Glenmore and neighbouring constituencies. I will continue to work with all involved to address their concerns.

Mr. Speaker, it took a lot of hard work and determination to achieve the agreement signed last year. I would like to thank the Tsuu T'ina Nation for their willingness to partner with the government of Alberta on this project. I honour their historic decision. Also to my colleagues the Member for Calgary-Hays and the former Member for Calgary-Elbow: thank you. To the Minister of Transportation, his office, and his department: your willingness to answer and address the numerous questions of my constituents has been excellent and is greatly appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Hehr: December 3 is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. There are 1 billion people living in the world with some form of disability. Around the globe persons with disabilities not only face physical barriers but also social, economic, and attitudinal barriers. Furthermore, disabilities are associated with 20 per cent of global poverty.

Mr. Speaker, we have work to do right here in Alberta. Oftentimes to be disabled in this province means you are most likely to be poor; you will face barriers to find affordable, accessible housing; you will have lessened opportunities in the workforce; and you may not get the support you need to go to school.

StatsCan notes that at any time 50 per cent of the people who receive Alberta Works benefits are likely to have some form of disability. Alberta has the lowest monetary support for individuals who find themselves in the difficult position of being unemployed. There was some talk from this government of actually investigating why Alberta has the lowest supports in the land when it comes to giving people a hand up when they're unable to find work, but despite this rhetoric, we've seen no movement.

2:50

That being said, we do have many reasons to celebrate. Albertans with disabilities, despite the institutional barriers, are struggling against all odds to create change. Take the MoMo Dance Theatre, a group of disabled Albertans who are changing the cultural landscape by incorporating all forms of disabilities into a vibrant dance ensemble that everyone enjoys. Organizations like the Champions Career Centre are working hard to find Albertans with disabilities opportunities in the workforce. Citizens like Nabeel Ramji are organizing the disabled community around accessibility issues and educating the public and government on the concept of visitability, making every structure barrier free.

On a final note, Mr. Speaker, in my view, it's time for Alberta to strike out a bold path on truly getting serious about eliminating barriers. We have to look at inaccessibility and inequality, work

opportunities and social engagement, and how to get our citizens with disabilities . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Notices of Motions

Mr. Denis: I'm providing oral notice for three government motions.

Motion 11.

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, is resumed, not more than two hours shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in second reading, at which time any question necessary for the disposal of the bill at that stage shall be put forthwith.

Second, Government Motion 12.

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, is resumed, not more than two hours shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time each question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Finally, Motion 13.

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, is resumed, not more than two hours shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time each question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Bill 9

Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce Bill 9, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014.

The bill before you today is built upon the over 50 amendments to the act originally introduced in May 2014 through Bill 13. It reflects the considerable feedback we have received from a very diverse range of stakeholders, including owners, developers, condo board members, condo managers, and legal experts in the condominium industry. Amendments include improved transparency and accountability for boards and developers, enhanced inspection and enforcement sections, rules respecting the regulation of condominium managers, and the legislative framework for a new tribunal system whose focus will be to hear and settle a variety of condominium disputes.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is a significant step forward to ensure Albertans that condominium legislation is modernized and effective. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move pursuant to Standing Order 75 that Bill 9, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Bill 10
An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights
to Protect our Children

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children.

This legislation makes amendments to the Alberta Bill of Rights, the Alberta Human Rights Act, the Education Act, and the School Act. This legislation supports the government's zero-tolerance attitude towards bullying, which is unacceptable. It is unacceptable whether it's related to sexual orientation, race, religion, or any other factor. It also ensures parents' rights are respected, enshrining them into the Alberta Bill of Rights. With this legislation students will have a clear recourse should their request to establish antidiscrimination clubs, including gay-straight alliances, be denied. This bill also proposes a package of tough and thorough antibullying provisions. With this legislation, Mr. Speaker, we are advancing the rights of the LGBTQ community, protecting children, and respecting the roles of parents and school boards.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 75 I move that Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, be moved to the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we go on with this, noting how close we are to 3 o'clock, let me recognize the Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Yes. I'd like to waive rule 7(7) so we can continue this past 3 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Let us move on.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Asia Pacific Relations.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the required number of copies of the Asia Advisory Council annual report 2013-14. I've had the distinct honour of chairing the council since my appointment in June of 2012, and I've been extremely fortunate to work alongside talented and dedicated Albertans who are passionate about enhancing Alberta's connections with the Asia Pacific regions. The document that I am tabling today shares how the council has been gathering information and consulting with stakeholders to explore ways to improve relations between Alberta and Asia. Here are the five reports for the tabling.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of letters of support that the government has received for Bill 7, the Chartered Professional

Accountants Act, from the three currently existing accounting bodies: the Certified General Accountants' Association of Alberta, the Certified Management Accountants Association of Alberta, and the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta. I am pleased to note that the government has received support from all of these associations for Bill 7.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Given that unanimous consent was not given, I am going to take the last 30 seconds to do two important tablings myself, the first of which is five copies of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta's 2013-14 annual report pursuant to section 63(2) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Thank you.

The second is five copies of a memo dated November 27, 2014, from the Government House Leader to the Speaker, which was referenced in my statement earlier today, and it outlines an agreement that has been reached between the Government House Leader and the Official Opposition House Leader regarding the Oral Question Period rotation since it is only those two caucuses who are affected by that regulation.

Noting that it is now 3 p.m., we shall move on. There were no points of order, just for the record, so we can go on.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 201

Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing)
Amendment Act, 2014

[Debate adjourned November 24: Mr. Mason speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you have seven minutes left should you wish to take it. If not, we will move on.

I have the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

3:00

Mr. Hale: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014.

Mr. McAllister: Easy for you to say.

Mr. Hale: Easy for me to say. Not quite so.

Quite often in my constituency one of the major concerns I get is on electricity bills. The cost of electricity is a huge issue. There are many, many low-income seniors that are having trouble with the costs that we see. I do feel in reading this bill – and I look forward to the member's comments on closing second reading – that it is important that these bills are more understandable, and I think this goes a ways in helping that.

One of the issues he is trying to fix in this is when we talk about the regulated rate option. Now, when you think of regulations, you think those are fixed costs, but they're not. I think there is some confusion that if you don't take the regulated rate and you sign a contract, those costs are fixed, but in the regulated rate it's the default. So you get whatever the market is in that time frame. His choice to change it to a variable market rate, I think, is a step in the right direction. It shows that if you don't sign a fixed contract,

if you go to the regulated rate, which is the default option, then you get charged the rate at the time. And those will fluctuate. I think a lot of people that hear “regulated rate option” think that, you know, they’re fixed, that that’s what they’re going to be charged. Then when they get their bill, it is confusing.

One of the concerns I do have with this bill is that when we list out all the charges that are going to be incurred on these bills, it’s going to cause more confusion because in transmission there’s a variable cost, which fluctuates, plus there’s a fixed cost, that stays the same. So from one bill to the next your transmission costs are going to fluctuate a bit in that variable section of it. Distribution also has a variable rate and a fixed rate, so from bill to bill the variable rate has a possibility of fluctuating. Also, the taxes on that bill are going to be different because of your consumption rate of electricity, the more you consume or the less you consume. It’s going to affect your taxes. Also, in some cities there are consent and access fees. Those may be different.

So when we want the bills to all look the same, they’re not all going to look the same because there are different charges on the bills. I think the theory behind Bill 201 is correct in making them easier to understand, but in this process I’m not so sure that they’re going to be easier to understand. There might be lines and lines and lines of numbers that will be confusing to some people.

Mr. McAllister: Like the new math?

Mr. Hale: Kind of like the new math. Yes, hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mr. Anglin: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre on a point of order. Citation?

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Anglin: Yes. Mr. Speaker, 23(b), questions under discussion here. We’re not talking about the Education Act or education; we’re talking about billing. So if you could direct the member to the subject of billing and the transparency of billing, I would appreciate that.

The Speaker: Thank you. It’s a point of relevance then, is it?

Mr. Anderson: I would just like to note the unbelievable irony of this member pointing out that we need to stay on point and remain relevant to the subject matter of the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Hi. I was listening to the member, and he was talking about billing, so I don’t quite understand why there is a protest from the sponsoring member. But I would like to hear the rest of what the particular member is talking about.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I was actually sending a note around to a few people to just trim down the noise because I was having a little trouble hearing him. But I didn’t see anything totally out of order.

So why don’t you continue on, hon. member, and note the concerns that have been expressed?

Debate Continued

Mr. Hale: We were just talking about the addition of all the different lines on the power bills, so I’m just going to carry on. I’m just going to carry on. I am speaking in favour of the member’s bill, so I’m not sure why he would want to stop me when I’m actually supporting what he’s put forward.

As I continue on talking about the lines on the bills, it’s going to come down to the AUC and working with the minister to figure out what to put on these bills, how to make them look the same. You know, that might be quite a bit to ask. Are we now going to be telling companies what they can print and what they can’t print and how they have to run their business? That is a bit of concern to me.

You know, when we are talking about transmission and the costs associated – I’ve been meeting with quite a few of the companies – we’ve heard lots in the last few years about the Bill 50 power lines and the transmission and the transmission costs that are going to be passed on to the consumer. I was actually happy to hear that there’s one projected line up north that they’re taking bids on, and that will be a one-time bid. In saying that, I mean that when the company puts the bid in, that’s what they’re going to get paid. I think that’s been a huge problem with the lines we’ve seen being constructed in the province, that there are no cost-control measures put in there. I’ve mentioned that to some of the transmission companies.

I think there need to be some measures put in place so that the costs stay within. We realize that there’s going to be some fluctuation, but to see some of the huge charges to the province and to the ratepayers on these lines, you know, billions of dollars extra – every company wants to make money. That’s what makes the world go around. But we have to be diligent, and we have to ensure that when we’re giving the authority to someone to charge ratepayers, they walk within a certain bounds. To not have any measurement in place is not good. I think we definitely need to see some cost control in these contracts, and we need to ensure that there are needs assessments done.

The AUC and AESO. I mean, when they’re making these decisions where these power lines go now that the government has taken that power away from themselves – you know, I think it was Bill 8 that they passed a while ago saying that cabinet can’t make those decisions. That was a good step. We need to leave it to the experts.

One of the questions I asked last week was on the cogeneration lines up north. We see in my area especially, the constituency of Strathmore-Brooks, and heading into Cypress-Medicine Hat that there are massive power lines. I actually had a meeting with the Property Rights Advocate last year, and one of the questions he asked me was if I was still getting concerns over these power lines that are getting built. My answer was that I’m still receiving huge concerns. People are upset that we have these huge lines. I’m not saying that lines aren’t needed.

Mr. Anglin: Point of order again, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre on a point of order. Citation, please?

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Anglin: Standing Order 23(b). Mr. Speaker, again it goes to relevance. We’re not talking about property rights here. We’re not talking about Bill 50 and transmission lines. We’re talking about transparency in billing. If the member could keep his statements to

transparency in billing, particularly when it comes to things like cogeneration, which is a ridiculous argument. The cogeneration is already connected to the transmission grid. I'm not sure what that does to transparency in billing. So that is my objection.

3:10

Mr. Anderson: Well, I duly note the member's commitment to keeping discussion relevant in this Chamber. That's fantastic. I think that the subject matter that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks has been dealing with so far actually is relevant to the bill. In order to understand this bill and understand why it's needed or not needed, you kind of have to understand some of the facts surrounding the electricity industry and the transmission industry, so I think that it is relevant.

I would also ask, Mr. Speaker, if I could get a point of clarification. Are these points of order that are being called in any way taking away from the time that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks has? He's being interrupted. I'm assuming not. You know, hopefully, he can get through the rest of his remarks without being interrupted on such grounds.

The Speaker: Quickly on the point of order and the question you raise for clarification, please note that when a point of order starts, the clock stops. The member will get his full time.

I'm going to the Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Page 438 of the 24th edition, 2011, of *Erskine May* points out there under relevance in debate, "The precise relevance of an argument may not always be perceptible." It is expected that the person would have enough time to develop the argument before you could be calling them on relevance merely because they mentioned another topic in the sense of a sentence.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: What page number was that, hon. member? I just missed it. Did you close it?

Ms Blakeman: Page 438.

The Speaker: Page 438. Thank you.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to weigh in here. I recognize that relevance is not particularly clear always and that a person may need to venture afield in order to make an argument. At least the member, I guess, has confined his remarks to the electrical system, which is encouraging.

But I would argue under (j) and (k) that if a member does venture afield that he should at least be factual in doing so; otherwise, it builds the base for an incorrect argument. In this case to talk about the fact that we have a transmission system build that has, in the member's words, absolutely no cost oversight is factually incorrect, and it's not helpful to the debate in here and is likely to create some disorder if he persists in the argument. It's not true. There is a cost oversight management system. There are rate hearings that determine which costs are allowable and which ones aren't. There is cost oversight, and that's a simple fact.

I would argue that it's probably best to build our argument going forward based upon fact, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, the point of order is on you. Just let me hear your argument briefly.

Mr. Hale: Yeah. I'm going to speak to the hon. minister's comments about this point of order. When there is a cost overrun on these transmission lines – and there is a cost overrun on the lines – that goes to the AESO. The AESO says: okay; there's a cost overrun. They take it to the AUC to get it approved, and the AUC generally approves the cost overrun.

So I don't know. I would have actually liked – you know, the minister and I could meet after and talk about this, but if he could show me any areas where any of these cost overruns were denied by the AESO or AUC, I would actually appreciate that. Then I would make some corrections in my statements. But from what I know, from what I've seen, and from what I've read and learned, any of the cost overruns are automatically approved. Please correct me if I'm wrong.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Perhaps you could follow that up on your own time with the Minister of Energy. In the meantime let me just say, hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, that I did find you straying a little bit from the main subject, but you were clever in bringing it back and being relevant, so I didn't see a need to intervene. However, this is the second reminder, so please refresh your memory on what it is that you really want to say about this particular bill, and let us move on.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hale: Okay. Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be very clever right now, and I'm going to talk about transmission lines. I'm going to talk about cogeneration. I'm going to talk about the costs of transmissions lines. I'm going to talk about generation. And it all comes down to what's on your power bill. Every one of those points is included on your power bill. That is what the member wants to have listed line by line for the people to see. I'm speaking about the costs, which will be on these power bills. Hopefully, I can deter the member from bringing up any more points of order on my roundabout talks on his bill.

I was speaking about the costs that are projected on our bills and how they want to be broken down. I was speaking about the power lines in my area and the costs of those power lines. I've met with many companies up in Fort McMurray who are going to be looking at doing expansions, and they want to put in cogeneration. They want to put in their boiler units that will, you know, in turn provide electricity for the province. It's great. It lowers carbon emissions, it helps reach our goal of what we want to get, but the infrastructure isn't there. They need the assurance that the infrastructure is going to be there, and that infrastructure costs money. There have been some questions: where do we build it?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I show the following three speakers: Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Let us start with Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 201, Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. I would like to begin by thanking the hon. member for his work in bringing this bill forward on behalf of his constituents and all Albertans.

The Alberta Utilities Commission regulates the utilities sector to ensure that Albertans receive safe and reliable service at reasonable rates. Bill 201 would ask the AUC to provide a report on two things: first, transparency in billing, and second, the format of bills sent to customers. The AUC would also be asked to consider "replacement of the term 'regulated rate' with 'variable

market rate'." Bill 201 would then compel the minister to implement the recommendations put forward by the AUC within six months from the day the report is provided or take the steps necessary to implement these recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, let us remember that the AUC has many roles, including establishing mandatory requirements and standards of practice for the retail electric and natural gas markets. This is accomplished with procedures involving a consultative process with stakeholders and interested parties. In summary, the AUC makes certain that Alberta's utility providers provide a fair and high-quality service to Alberta's public. A part of providing a quality service is ensuring that consumers understand clearly how they are being charged. The government of Alberta has provided Albertans with tools to help understand their utility bills, and our government remains committed to a high level of transparency in billing.

Mr. Speaker, utility bills contain a lot of information. In fact, my household bill is four pages long. A Calgary residential energy and utility statement has several lines in the electricity section alone, detailing the energy charge, the administration charge, the delivery charge, the distribution charge, the transmission charge, the balancing pool allocation, rate riders, and the local access fee. In the case of Calgary Enmax customers there's even more information on the bill, with the water, the waste-water and drainage, the waste and recycling billing sections.

So, Mr. Speaker, in our quest to assist Albertans, are there other models out there? We can consider the federal government, which has legislation that directs regulatory authorities to clearly explain aspects of bills to their consumers. Section 4 of the User Fees Act states that regulatory authorities must "explain to clients clearly how the user fee is determined and identify the cost and revenue elements of the user fee." This must be done before a regulating authority can expand the application of fixes or increases. They must "take reasonable measures to notify clients, and other regulating authorities with a similar clientele of the user fee proposed to be fixed, increased, expanded in application or increased in duration." Federal regulatory authorities must "give all clients or service users a reasonable opportunity to provide ideas or proposals for ways to improve the services to which the user fee relates." Furthermore, they must "establish an independent advisory panel to address a complaint submitted by a client regarding the user fee or change." From these few regulations we can see that it is possible to have measures in place to promote transparency.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, let us return to the Alberta situation. In our legislation, bill formatting is not specifically addressed in this act. It is important that all fees be explained clearly so that Albertans can easily understand the charges and take action against false or mistaken billings. Bill 201 aims to simplify electricity bills to better assist Alberta consumers. We are proud to see a diverse and expansive deregulated market-based electricity market in Alberta and will do our best to support both producers and consumers in our province.

The language used on utility bills can be incredibly complex. We must ensure that the language is simplified whenever possible. The Alberta government has taken steps with the Electric Utilities Act. It outlines how a bill prepared for a customer must indicate the amount charged by the retailer for electric energy in dollars, the amount charged by the retailer for administration of the customer's account, the amount paid to the owner's distribution tariff for the account of the customer in dollars, and under the heading Local Access Fee any amount levied under section 45 of

the Municipal Government Act or schedule 1, section 21, of the Metis Settlements Act or by bylaw under the Indian Act.

The Alberta government has provided Albertans various resources located at the Ministry of Energy website that can help assist Albertans in reading their utility bills. This website helps consumers understand the administration fee, transmission charge, distribution charge, and local access fee. At energy.alberta.ca there are even more resources available to help with understanding the language of your electricity bill. There is also information on measuring usage, charges from your retailer, and charges from your distributor.

Another matter for our Legislature to consider is reviews made by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission of cellphone bills. Their reviews have brought about significant changes and provide evidence of the impact commission reviews can have on bill transparency. Alberta utility providers also hold themselves to the highest standard of integrity, and it is prudent for a commission to review processes.

Mr. Speaker, periodic reviews of an industry by a commission often lead to real and positive change. In 1983 the CRTC announced a public process to review and where appropriate revise the general regulations for four telephone companies: Bell Canada, British Columbia Telephone Company, Northwestel Inc., and Terra Nova Telecommunications. In fact, on September 8, 1983, the commission published a document entitled Review of the General Regulations of the Federally Regulated Telephone Companies discussion paper. The commission then required that single-line billing be implemented monthly and that detailed itemized billing be required at least once per year or after an install or change of service.

Mr. Speaker, the CRTC since then has taken additional steps to improve transparency in telecommunications billing. In 2002 the commission noted various policies in regards to billing frequencies amongst local exchange carriers. The CRTC then directed companies to show cause as to why they should not provide monthly itemized billing. This is an example of how a commission can regulate an industry to engage in more transparent practices.

When companies are able to hide behind complicated language or infrequent itemized billing, consumers lose. Changes to our billing processes and statements will not happen overnight, but transparency slowly gets better over time and is continuing to evolve. Bill 201 will help build upon the strategies already in motion. The province of Alberta has had a number of strategies implemented to help Albertans clearly understand their bills. However, as we have seen with the CRTC rulings, the processes are ongoing and can be improved upon. Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government is prepared to adapt to changing challenges. We are proud to offer unparalleled service to all Albertans.

Thank you to the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre for your hard work on the bill, and I look forward to supporting it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by either Edmonton-Calder or Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to speak to this private member's bill. I have reviewed it, and for many of the reasons given by the former speaker, I think this goes a long way to increasing our openness and transparency when it comes to electricity bills. When Albertans receive their bill in the mail, they often have a convoluted assessment of various rate charges – what programs there are, how much the electricity costs, how much the

administration costs, and the like – and we have to try and simplify the process in order that Albertans can make informed decisions about the electricity packages that they are purchasing and whether, in fact, they are getting the best value for their dollar.

If we look at the energy market and the energy that people are receiving at their homes, oftentimes, you know, we Albertans have just simply chosen to go on the regulated rate option. I've been informed that oftentimes this may not be the best choice, that people should be looking at other options like the spot energy price and those types of mechanisms that can actually reduce people's monthly bill and would allow them to save on their energy. If we look at how the bill is presented and if they get some clear direction on what energy actually costs – what they're paying and what their providers are bringing into their homes and at what price – I think that would go a long way to ensuring that Albertans are making the proper choices to get the energy that they need at a reasonable price.

So not to belabour it any further, I will be supporting the hon. member's motion. I think it goes a long way to assisting people with some clarity on their electricity bills.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll keep my comments fairly brief, other than I'd like to rise and show my support for Bill 201. I think it's very important for Albertans to understand their bills. This bill, Bill 201 – I'm being redundant here – simplifies their bills and makes it a lot easier for Albertans to see exactly what fees and costs are associated with their electricity bills.

I would like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that, you know, the cost of electricity in Alberta has gone up significantly since this PC government decided to deregulate our electricity system. I think it's important for Albertans to understand where their dollars are going and how they're being applied within a bill. I find it fascinating that even if there are folks who use zero electricity in a month, they still face a significant bill. It's, you know, put under the category of either administrative fees or however else the companies decide to hide certain fees or to show fees on a bill. Providing some clarity and transparency to this, I think, is a step in the right direction.

I'm not sure if this bill goes far enough as far as protecting Albertans from gouging, from high prices of electricity, and from spikes. You know, it would've been nice to see the bill go further, but as a baby step in the right direction – I think this bill takes that, and therefore I will be supporting it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

We're going to follow a strict rotation for this particular bill. I have Wildrose next, followed by a government member, followed by a Liberal member, followed by an ND member, if you wish. I have numerous notes and some speaking lists to abide by.

Let's move on to the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

3:30

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Thank you very much. I, too, rise in support of Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014, and I commend and congratulate my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre for introducing a bill that is going to improve transparency, is going to improve clarity. Our province of 4

million Albertans is continually looking for the opportunity to understand better how their \$45 billion a year of taxpayers' money is being spent, so I relish the chance to have the greater transparency.

I've heard some of the members of the House talk about how there's different taxation and, of course, generation is not regulated but distribution and transmission are, so it's going to lead to some situations where it may be a bit hard to have an actual standardized consumer utility bill that's exactly the same. I think that's why it's a good reason to give the Alberta Utilities Commission six months to have a look at this. I think it's especially important in part of the constituency I represent, Medicine Hat. Of course, Medicine Hat has its own utility department, providing tremendous low-cost utilities to the citizens of Medicine Hat for a hundred years now plus a dividend for our taxpayers and our ratepayers to, you know, have this money spent on other quality services.

The importance of transparency, the importance of an electrical system that has clarity really hit home to me about a year ago. I was looking at a bill from Montana, from Hill county in Montana. The ranch was about a township. The utility bill was \$650 for a month, and only \$35 of that was for what we call our ancillary charges. Of course, in Alberta, unfortunately, as the Member for Strathmore-Brooks was alluding to, the costs of transmission, the costs of Bill 50 without a needs assessment, the costs initiated somewhere at \$16 billion possibly going to \$30 billion: these costs are going to be borne by Alberta ratepayers.

Mr. Anglin: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre on a point of order. Which citation are you citing, please?

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Anglin: Again, Mr. Speaker, it's on 23(b). It goes to the relevance. Here we are back talking Bill 50 and transmission lines and \$16 billion of infrastructure. It's got nothing to do with Bill 201 that's being brought forward today that deals with transparency in retail billing.

The Speaker: Hon. member, we've been dealing with this off and on throughout the afternoon, and I've therefore refreshed my memory with Bill 201. What we should be talking about is what Bill 201 contains: issues to do with the Alberta Utilities Commission; the Electric Utilities Act; specifically, improving transparency, the billing of customers, the format of bills, fixed and variable costs related thereto, regulated rates, variable market rates, and so on.

Perhaps, Cypress-Medicine Hat, you could bring the point around to that because I'm sure that's where you were going.

Debate Continued

Mr. Barnes: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. Clearly, if we're going to come up with a standardized bill that outlines the costs of electricity, the regulated rate option becoming the variable market option I think is a very, very good idea. The regulated rate option, I think, is misleading in the terminology, in the words, and makes people think that, in fact, electric generation is regulated when we all know it is the element of Alberta's electric system

that's not. So calling it a variable market rate will go some distance.

Mr. Speaker, my point when it comes to the transmission lines was, again, around a standardized bill. Let's fully outline these costs. Let's fully outline these costs for all Alberta ratepayers, for all 4 million Albertans, as to what the costs of our electrical system are. I heard it argued here on a point of clarification and a point of order that there was a cost oversight process and there wasn't a cost oversight process. Well, my goodness. What better way to get Albertans involved than to put it on their bill or at least to give them the option of seeing where their hard-earned tax dollars are going.

So I would suggest to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre that possibly we look at how this \$16 billion to \$30 billion of transmission lines that our government is forcing onto the ratepayers of Alberta – let's put it on the bill, too. Let's look at a situation where it's clear as to what we're all paying for, and Albertans can decide on their own if it's worth the value.

Again, back to the bill in Hill county out of Montana. It was absolutely clear that only \$35 of this was ancillary charges, and the rest of it was absolutely clear as to where the fees were, the usage, the cost. Instead of the case in Alberta, where if you have \$600 of electric, you're going to have at least \$600 of ancillary charges, it was nice to see, first of all, a jurisdiction that honours, you know, low-cost, competitive, stable electric prices to build their ranching and their irrigated industries and the fact that the bill was so nice and clear. Electricity is an important element in industry, in agriculture. We do exist in a competitive world. We compete with our neighbouring provinces. We compete with our neighbouring states.

Again, back to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, the idea to have a bill that's more standardized, that has a lot more clarity, that's more transparent will go a long, long way to help Albertans understand what they're paying for, will go a long, long way to help Albertans understand if their government is making the right decision for them.

It was interesting. In one of the debates that I had back before the election, members in the crowd actually brought up that on their bills they'd like to see an understanding of why they were hearing stories about how suppliers of products and men and equipment and commodities on the transmission lines – they were hearing this rumour that they were actually being asked to increase their bills, that their bills were too low. They were hearing stories that sometimes trucks were hauling gravel 300 miles or more when gravel was available a lot closer. One of the defining moments for me in that debate was when the PC MLA admitted that there wasn't a competitive bid process for the Bill 50 transmission lines, spending \$16 billion. That was incredible.

Again, I like what the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre is doing here. I support the bill and the idea that we can have a standardized bill or at least the option of a standardized bill with a lot more clarity. Be interesting to see in the next six months what the Alberta Utilities Commission comes up with that can make this, you know, work for everybody.

In Medicine Hat, again, it's an interesting situation, owning our own utility company down there. I always kind of wondered if we were subject to the ancillary charges that go with the Bill 50 lines. I'm told that initially we weren't, before only a small portion, and now we're going to be subject to them to give us the opportunity to sell into the grid. I'm thinking of the 61,000 people in Medicine Hat, the 17,000 or 18,000 that I represent. My goodness. Wouldn't it be great to have that amount on the bill so that they could clearly see if the elected officials in Alberta, if the elected officials in Medicine Hat have made the right decision for them to do this?

Electricity. It's crucial that a province like Alberta has stable, predictable electric costs to grow our agriculture, to grow our industry. As we saw in the uproar over the modular schools being moved from seven to one and the push-back that that has caused, the unfairness in the by-election and the unfairness of not having their priority list . . .

Mr. Anglin: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you have a point of order again?

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Anglin: Again, Mr. Speaker, 23(b). Here we are talking about modular schools. It's not in the bill. I mean, I know what's going on. I just would like it, if they're going to speak to the bill, that they speak to the topic of the bill. I'm not against any leeway or flexibility that you might provide. But, clearly, speaking to schools, modular schools, and the funding of modular schools is just not part of this private member's bill.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would agree with you to a point.

Now, Cypress-Medicine Hat, unless you're using these other external points to make a point relative to the bill, I would ask you to please refrain from straying too far away here.

3:40

We do allow considerable liberties in this House, but this is the fourth point of order already, so let's get on with the proper debate on this. I don't want to hear any more points of order, and I don't want to hear any more arguments right now. Let's just finish off. Let the member finish off his point, please. If it's necessary, then I'll come back to Strathmore-Brooks who wants to speak, I'll come back to the Deputy Government House Leader who wants to speak, and others. But in the meantime let's narrow this down to the bill itself, please, or I'll be the next one interfering.

Debate Continued

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is where I was headed, to narrow it down. I swear. [interjections] Yeah, and it's just wasting my time.

In the two and a half years since I've been elected, I've had at least 20 or 30 people, mostly seniors, walk in with their utility bills in their hands and say: "I can't understand this, but I can understand that I can't afford it. Please help me." So, again, I like what the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre is doing. This will go a long way.

My point with the schools was that when I opened up the *Edmonton Journal* a week ago, two letters to the editor were clearly – they wanted to know why the priority jumped from seven to one. It's Albertans wanting to know what we're paying for. It's Albertans wanting to be more involved in our system.

When you look at only 28 per cent voting sometimes, it makes you wonder why. And, guys, maybe this is the reason why. Not having a clear, transparent utility bill with clarity, maybe it's driving business away. Maybe it's driving people away from moving to our great province. We know we're at a disadvantage already in some respects when we don't have the cheap hydro that other provinces have. It's important, I believe – one thing about Albertans is 4 million intelligent, educated people, and I think the more information that we can provide them on a clear, transparent basis will go a long, long way to their involvement in our process, whether it's electricity or government or voting. It will go a long,

long way in our process as to how we spend their hard-earned tax dollars. It seems like we forget that so easily.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I'm going to go to Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Fenske: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It truly is an honour to be able to rise today in debate for Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

You know, I'd like to personally thank the hon. member for bringing forward this bill because by doing so, he is encouraging the House to consider the matter of electrical utilities billing, something of wide-ranging interest. Indeed, this topic is important for Albertans across this great province. Homeowners and renters alike pay electricity bills, so I'm sure interest on this bill, as I said, is very widespread.

Now, Mr. Speaker, on to the bill specifically. Bill 201 is intended to call on the Alberta Utilities Commission to draft and put forward a report on billing transparency. This report would be submitted to the Minister of Energy. Furthermore, it would contain a proposal for a standardized bill for utility customers.

Now, I listened as my counterpart the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore was going through her bill. She lives, of course, in an urban area. I have, I would say, the great advantage of being a member of an REA, a rural electrification association. In looking at her bill, she cited it is four pages. My bill, of course, is just one page double sided. So I know that there is a discrepancy throughout the province with respect to how people have their bills presented.

The new proposed bill format would list all variable and fixed costs. So upon receiving this proposal, the minister would then implement the commission's recommendations, and this would occur within six months from the date on which the report is provided.

In addition, the minister could also introduce amendments in the Legislative Assembly here on the process of implementing those particular recommendations.

Finally, the commission would implement the standardized bill as initially proposed in its report to the minister. This is, of course, the essence of Bill 201, Mr. Speaker. I applaud this member for representing the interests of Albertans in trying to ensure that their utility bills are presented as clearly as possible because if we can clearly understand, it certainly helps us as a more educated consumer to make some decisions on our part. And, happily, this government also has an initiative in place to ensure that Albertans are able to read their utility bills accurately. So we're all on the same page here.

The commission regulates the utilities sector, including the markets for natural gas and electricity. Its aim is to look out for Alberta's economic, environmental, and social interests in order to cover any gaps left open by the forces of the competitive market, which, of course, we've been discussing here, that some of my colleagues earlier this afternoon have been bringing forward. It is the commission that is responsible for establishing mandatory requirements and best standards of practice for retail natural gas and electricity markets. By engaging in a consultative process with stakeholders, the commission sets practices that reflect the interests of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to note that existing legislation also pertains to how these bills are reported. The billing regulation

from 2003 under the Electric Utilities Act has a direct bearing on this. Section 4 of the act states: "A bill prepared by a retailer" – and we are talking about the retail electrical market – "or an owner for a customer must indicate separately" four different sets or types of charges. Now, these four categories of charges are:

- (i) the amount charged by the retailer for electric energy, [given] in dollars;
- (ii) the amount charged by the retailer for administration of the customer's account;
- (iii) the amount paid to the owner under the owner's distribution tariff for the account of the customer [again given] in dollars;
- (iv) under the heading "local access fee" any amount levied under section 45 of the Municipal Government Act . . .

I believe that my colleague from Calgary-Glenmore also brought that up.

. . . or Schedule 1, section 21 of the Metis Settlements Act or by bylaw under the [federal] Indian Act.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Then clause (b) of section 4 requires that the customer's bill

- (b) include the customer's site identification number or numbers as specified in the ISO Rules for load settlement, but if the retailer and customer agree, the site identification number or numbers may be provided in electronic format to the customer when the bill is sent . . .
- (c) specify the customer's consumption of electric energy . . .
- (d) specify the period for which each of the amounts referred to in clause (a) is calculated, and [finally]
- (e) indicate the name and telephone number of the owner, or a person authorized by the owner to act on its behalf, to answer customer inquiries about distribution access service.

Thus, we see in the original legislation that there are stringent requirements governing how information on these bills must be reported to customers.

We have since taken measures to strengthen this. In the interests of electricity consumers the government undertook an effort in 2013 to reduce the volatility of electricity prices from one month to another.

I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I have a copy of one of my electrical bills here, that I was going to table earlier today, but I certainly will table it tomorrow. We, of course, had to make a decision on how we wanted to have our bill, if we were going to just be on a demand or if we were going to go for a contract. So we as a family sat down and made some decisions, and we think that we have a very reasonable contract of 8 cents a kilowatt hour. I see on this particular bill that if people were not on a contract for September – this is an October bill, by the way, so this was for energy consumed in September. If you were not on a contract under my REA, your RRO rate for September would have been .0882 per kilowatt hour. So I would say that we made a very good decision in choosing to go on a contract.

3:50

I know that with the family business that we had when this all rolled out and people were looking at contract prices, we were a little leery at first. I have to say that that's a decision that was made with a great deal of thought, and we accepted a contract. So now as farm customers – I guess that's what we would be – we have been on a contract for at least two years, maybe even longer. Time seems to fly. Anyhow, that helps reduce our volatility from one month to another.

This was done with an aim of empowering consumers to make more informed retail choices. While not bearing directly on the reporting format for customers' bills, these measures did improve predictability and helped to minimize surprises for Albertans paying their utility bills.

In addition to this, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to say that this government has endeavoured to assist Albertans in understanding the contents of their bill. In particular, the Ministry of Energy has made resources available online in order to make this as clear as possible for anyone who may be unclear about the information on their bill. Information from this online guide covers a number of categories about which people may have questions. It tells you that your energy fee is based on the rate you are charged in cents per kilowatt hour multiplied by the amount of electricity used. The rate you are charged is either the default or regulated rate, which you have agreed to with your retail supplier, which I explained just a little earlier. The regulated rate is calculated in advance for each month and is approved by the Alberta Utilities Commission.

It also explains the administration fee to customers. As the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre explained, that is part of what he wants to make absolutely clear. This fee is charged by your electricity retailer to cover the costs of billing and other customer services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Following the rotation, I would have a Liberal member, an ND member, and a Wildrose member. So where shall we go? We'll go, then, to who I see on their feet. Let's go to Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 201, and I thank the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre for helping to edify us around billing. Certainly, the billing is sort of the access point, or the gateway, by which we can see where our consumer bills are. Of course, the vast majority of the bills that are issued by power companies are for individual consumers. I know that every month, especially in the wintertime, people open these bills and are struck with at least two different feelings: first of all, confusion and then often anger at the electricity rates, that are so inordinately high, that we pay here in the province of Alberta.

Confusion, though, is the part that I think this bill is trying to address, and I do support that idea. Of course, at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, then you end up making a more transparent, more clear bill that shows you exactly how you're being gouged. I think that's going to be the end result of this. So if that does help to educate people about how, in fact, we pay more than we should here for consumer electricity and for commercial and industrial electricity, too, then perhaps the end result of this long and winding road is that we will in fact move back to a more regulated way of distributing electricity here in the province and get on with giving people a fair price for an essential service, right? It's not as though you choose to use electricity either for your own personal or for commercial or industrial or agricultural use. It's a necessary part of a modern industrial society. So it's incumbent upon us, for things that are mandatory and essential, to ensure that there is a price that meets the capacity for people to pay – right? – here in the province of Alberta. We're not doing that now.

We've seen all kinds of tricks and subterfuge around billing. Of course, the allusion around deregulation was that we would have a more competitive system with more players and more generators and so forth. But, you know, exactly the opposite happened. We still end up with the main five major producers of power that were around before deregulation, and they just come up with innovative

ways to gouge us even more. Try shutting your electricity off, even – let's say you have a cabin or another place – and lo and behold you still end up with a substantial bill every month, right? You know, in a place like, let's say, an older neighbourhood, where you've been paying for those lines and all of those service charges, you've paid for those lines several times over in your own lifetime and probably even more so over time by the previous owners and so forth. This whole notion of deregulation to create a more competitive environment in sort of a fixed thing, an essential service like electricity, is patently absurd.

I appreciate, you know, that if we shine a light on a consumer or an industrial commercial bill and people can see with utter transparency what that bill is going to be, maybe it'll lead eventually to a more reasonable regulated electricity rate that we can count on. The irony of debating this on Monday when on Friday we had a huge sale of our electricity transmission network to one of the wealthiest people in the world, Berkshire Hathaway – it's no coincidence, Mr. Speaker, that they announced that sale approval at 4 o'clock on a Friday afternoon, hoping: oh, well, Albertans won't notice that we just sold off a major chunk of essential line service to an American corporation. Of course we noticed it, and we'll notice it on our subsequent bills that will come forward in the coming weeks and months.

Mr. Oberle: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has risen on a point of order.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I rise under Standing Order 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I allowed earlier that under relevance, clause (b), we're going to allow some latitude about where a member goes in order to build a case, but I don't allow that we should be allowed to just state a complete misfact in a manner that I find insulting. I let it go just a moment ago when he said that we have only five retailers. We have 25 retailers offering 40 different contracts in Alberta today. That's a matter of fact, and it's right on the website.

Right now what we're talking about is that we're impugning the proceedings of a quasi-judicial body in Alberta, and he's questioning when they did their news release because they apparently did it for some sneaky reason. That's a creation of our government, of this Legislature, and I don't think that kind of language should be allowed to continue.

Mr. Speaker, if he has anything factual to add to the argument, I invite him to go ahead and do so.

Mr. Anderson: I don't even necessarily disagree with anything that the Deputy Government House Leader said in this regard; however, I think we do need to realize that this is a debate. Who's the judge of what's true or not true? The public is the judge of that. There can be disagreement on facts. Maybe he was referring to five major retailers instead of 25.

I mean, we've got to have some latitude in this House to have a discussion. We're not going to agree on all the principles, but we can't be standing up and calling everything irrelevant. Obviously, I disagree with, you know, 99 per cent of the things that member says over there, but I will die for his right to say them. I think that it's important that we accord each other that respect.

Also, on questioning quasi-judicial bodies, Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day one of the jobs of opposition is – obviously, we

don't want to impugn the people on the those judicial bodies unless there is great cause to do so, but we can disagree with their decisions. If we feel that they're becoming too much of a rubber stamp, as potentially is the case right now with some decisions that have been made, I think that it's not only the right but the responsibility of opposition to bring that up and to say: "Look, this is looking like a bit of a rubber-stamp process. Perhaps we should take a look at it." I think that's part of our role. I don't think we're impugning the people on it. We're just saying that, obviously, it needs to be improved and strengthened because it's becoming a rubber stamp.

Let's give each other some latitude in this House to have a good debate moving forward and not clutter our House with points of order on relevancy and so forth.

4:00

The Speaker: First we have Rimbey-Rocky Mountain-House-Sundre. Do you wish to chime in? Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Anglin: Just one point, Mr. Speaker: it is prudent to have a difference of opinion around the debate, but where I disagree with the member is that no one is entitled to a different set of facts. The facts are the facts, and that's what we should be debating. Misrepresentation – it doesn't matter whether it's erroneous or whether its deliberate – has to be corrected to have an intelligent debate.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, did you wish to clarify the point that the hon. Deputy Government House Leader has been making?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate both the comments from the hon. member from across the way and others. Certainly, I'd have to look back on the Blues, perhaps, to see whether – I don't usually say the word retailer even. I'm thinking that I was talking about producers of electricity – right? – major producers. If I did say it incorrectly, then certainly I would change it. What do you do when you go back on the thing that you did? Retract it.

Otherwise, certainly, it's important for us to cast a light on what is happening, and that's kind of the theme of this private member's bill, to cast a light, more transparency, on the actual bill that people receive. All things flow into, you know, creating that bill and creating the price point that someone has to pay. I believe that there's a problem with our electricity generation and the prices that we pay through deregulation. I'll have to look back and see exactly what I had said in regard to five major producers, which is what I usually say when I'm talking about it, not retailers.

Anyway, thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, there are two very long and well-known traditions of this House. One is to allow the maximum amount of latitude during debate, and the second thing is for the Speaker to oftentimes have to accept two different versions of the same account. Now, I'm going to have to review what was said there as well because I've received a flurry of notes up here during your comments, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. I'm going to review those and see if there's any need to follow this up further.

In the meantime let us zoom in on the bill itself, please. Bill 201 is what we're debating. Carry on with your debate. You have five minutes and 38 seconds left.

Debate Continued

Mr. Eggen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I can, in sum, rest my case by saying that I'm interested in voting for this private member's bill. Once again I thank the hon. member for bringing this forward.

The Speaker: We're going next to the Wildrose, followed by a government member, and that means the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is next.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand up and support Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014. I'm really going to try and get through this bill without having some interjections from the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, whom I actually like, and, hopefully, from the Minister of Energy, whom I also actually quite like. I'm going to really try and... [interjection]

Mr. Anderson: Whoa. Wait a second, Frank.

He is pretty debonair. You've got to give it to him.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Calgary-Fish Creek has the floor, so let's give it to her, okay?

Carry on.

Mrs. Forsyth: You know, the nice thing, if there's anything nice about being hearing impaired, is that you miss all the conversation that's going on around you. I, quite frankly, can't hear it unless I'm wired in.

Anyhow, Mr. Speaker, if I may, on Bill 201 I am going to stand up in support of it for many reasons. I just want to start with – the member talks about the purpose for the bill, which is to increase transparency in billing, but more importantly it proposes to standardize consumer utility bills so that retail consumers can be better informed about market options. I think that's something that, quite frankly, in the year 2014, December 1, actually needs to be done. I think the public is sometimes confused about determining the difference between fixed rates and variable rates, and the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville started talking about trying to explain the difference between the fixed rates and the variable rates. You know, I'm not exactly sure, if we went out and spoke to Albertans, how many of them could really determine the difference between fixed and variable rates and why it's important to know what you're doing.

What I like about this bill is the report on transparency in billing.

Within 6 months from the day this section comes into force, the Commission shall provide a report to the Minister that contains recommendations to improve transparency in the billing of customers and the format of bills sent to customers.

The bill will certainly make electricity bills across the province look the same regardless of the company. The Electric Utilities Act will be amended under Bill 201 so that six months from the amendments coming into force the Alberta Utilities Commission will provide a report to the minister that contains the recommendations for the improvement to the transparency in the billing of customers and the format of electricity bills sent to customers.

I don't think there's an MLA in this Legislature that hasn't had a constituent come in and talk to them about questions that they have when they receive their bills monthly and the complications that arise, especially when we're talking with seniors who are on fixed incomes, low-income earners that are on fixed incomes and

not understanding all of these different billings that are on the particular bill that we're trying to decipher.

I as the MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek have struggled through trying to explain to people that have come in to see me the difference between fixed rates and variable rates. One of the things that I've learned over a period of time – the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre sat down and explained to me all of the differences between fixed rates and variable rates. He also talked to me a lot about the market price for electricity and how the markets fluctuate depending on how the electricity prices are influenced by supply and demand and how Albertans will see an increase as the population increases. Of course, electricity increases because of the demand. We talked about the regulated rate option, or the acronym RRO, for regulated electricity rates, that is available to everyone. I just think that what he's trying to do and what he's proposing in this bill, in what I consider a very short bill, is something that truly needs to be done.

He talks about:

(2) The report of the Commission shall include, not may but “shall,” and there's a great difference when we talk about shall and may in legislation, which I've learned,

- (a) a proposed standardized bill for customers that lists all fixed and variable costs, and
- (b) proposed amendments to this Act and any related enactment, including the *Regulated Rate Option Regulation*, *Alta. Reg. AR 262/2005*,

which I referred to just briefly,

which shall include the replacement of the term “regulated rate” with “variable market rate”.

Then that tells you that the variable rate plan allows your electrical rate to change from month to month based on the fluctuations of the market. Because of the market, it will show that your bill fluctuates every month.

I think that what he's proposed in this bill is quite simple, actually, for a very complicated process that's out there, and I would like to say on record as the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek that I will be supporting this bill and will be looking forward to the conversation as we proceed further.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and then we'll see where we go for other opposition parties or back to the government side.

4:10

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got an opinion on mobiles for schools, but I'll try and keep on the topic here.

It is my honour to rise to speak to Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. Before I begin, I would like to recognize the hon. member for bringing this matter to the attention of the House during an exciting session at the Legislature.

Prior to 1996 Alberta had a Crown electrical utility company in place. Following the privatization of this sector, a handful of companies developed to provide consumers with more choice. Currently the Alberta Utilities Commission, or the AUC, regulates the utilities sector in Alberta. They do so by creating mandatory requirements, the standards for electricity and natural gas markets; furthermore, the AUC engages in consultative processes that allow them to speak with stakeholders and interested parties about these standards.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 asks for a commission to provide a report to the Minister of Energy on transparency in billing for customers. The commission would be specifically asked to include proposals

for standardized billing for fixed and variable costs. When the commission tables their report in the House, Bill 201 would require the minister to implement the recommendations contained in the report within six months. It would also require the minister to introduce any amendments that might have arisen from the report. The legislation could follow on the heels of previous government policies intended to protect and inform consumers.

In 2013 the government took action to protect Albertans by increasing the scrutiny of transmission costs, reducing volatility in month-to-month electricity prices. They did this after consulting the Retail Market Review Committee. This committee put forward two key recommendations: scrutinizing a regulated rate option and extending the regulated rate option from 45 to 120 days. These steps made it easier for consumers to exercise better judgment in their retail choices.

However, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are not the only people worried about their electricity prices. Doing a little environmental scan on this issue, countries like the United Kingdom have begun to utilize alternative methods of reporting as well. In the U.K., similar to Alberta in that there are several companies that compete for consumers, their government has recently passed legislation that would ensure that these providers follow a more accountable and transparent reporting process.

Similar to the AUC in Alberta, the U.K. has an organization known as the office of gas and electricity markets. An acronym that doesn't really ring, it's called Ofgem. This organization is considered a nonministerial government department and is an independent national regulator. This organization is independent from government, industry, and stakeholders and operates within the mandate of several pieces of legislation. Ofgem recovers its costs through licensed companies that it regulates. The organization is run by a governing body known as the Gas Electricity Markets Authority. The governing body is comprised of experts who are appointed by the secretary of the state from the Department of Energy and Climate Change.

Ofgem differs from the AUC in that it focuses specifically on the interests of gas consumers. Four points make up their key focus: promoting value for money; promoting security of supply and sustainability for present and future generations of consumers, domestic and industrial users; the supervision and the development of markets in competition as well as the regulation and delivery of government schemes.

Mr. Speaker, the first point is most relevant to our discussion today on Bill 201. The value for money refers to the costs that consumers pay for electricity. Ofgem does not control the end-consumer energy price. Instead, they regulate the specific charges that can be passed on to the consumer. Ofgem works to create clarity for end users, allowing them to know what they are buying much like the hon. member's bill intends to do. This regulation enables consumers to be more diligent and mindful about the choices they make. It protects them from hidden costs, which help consumers know exactly what they are purchasing. For families this is of key importance because it allows them to properly set expectations of their bills. Surprise is not a good thing.

Ofgem has conducted numerous reviews of their electricity market so that new regulations can be created to make it more simple, clear, and fair for consumers. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, consumers must be duly notified when electricity prices change. This includes any changes to the market that may undermine consumers. Ofgem has proposed to further protect consumers by conducting a review of domestic automatic rollovers and contract renewals.

After discussion with stakeholders this project is currently undergoing revision but would promote the following: an estimate

of the consumer's annual consumption. It would require consumers to give no more than 30 days' notice to leave the end of a contract. Finally, it would require a receipt of termination notice within five working days. Rules like these allow Ofgem to appropriately consult both industry and consumers. At the present time they are not banned from automatic renewals but are attempting to prevent hidden costs from showing up when their contract is automatically renewed.

Ofgem has been able to take other steps to protect consumers from the practice of what is referred to as misselling. This is a practice of misleading a consumer about the price of their bill and levying higher fees after they have purchased. However, Mr. Speaker, Ofgem does not currently have any way of forcing companies to reimburse consumers for wrongdoing. Instead, it has created an \$8.89 million fund to help reimburse those who have fallen victim to hidden fees, overcharging, and misselling.

Ofgem promotes consumer rights rather than limiting the competitive nature of the company. However, it also recognizes that companies cannot serve the needs of individuals without some regulation. In doing so, it provides clarity and consistency to consumers. Mr. Speaker, I think it would be beneficial to examine and investigate practices like these to see if there are ideas that will pose benefit to our system.

Bill 201 appears to share many similarities with the current U.K. strategy in that it asks for a more in-depth look at how these companies are regulated. In doing so, it protects customers and lets them know what they are purchasing. Mr. Speaker, a review of this nature could align with the work that we've already done and can help us better understand how to help Albertans. As exemplified by the United Kingdom, there have been moves towards more transparency, clarification of prices for these electricity consumers. In 2013 the Alberta government followed a similar action, leading the way for consumers to better access information.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 is an important part of the debate surrounding our electrical sector, and I encourage all members to take part.

Finally, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre for all his hard work and tireless efforts to promote focus on this issue, transparency for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, anyone from the third party or the fourth party wishing to speak?

If not, let me move on to a government member, Strathcona-Sherwood Park. I'm sorry. We'll go to Airdrie. My apologies for not catching you quicker.

Mr. Anderson: No worries.

The Speaker: Airdrie, followed by Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and support Bill 201 and my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. I think that this bill does something that I believe is something we should be striving for in a whole bunch of areas, and that is increased transparency. Giving consumers information so that they have it at their disposal so they can make informed decisions and understand what they're paying for, whether that be in their utility bill or whether that be in their taxes or anything else, frankly, I think is a good thing.

You have to obviously do this carefully and step-by-step. You don't want to make, you know, the burdens of paperwork and increased bureaucracy by doing that, but I think this is a relatively small change that would help consumers understand what they're paying for when they pay their utility bills. I think that's very important.

4:20

Obviously, Bill 50 is essentially water under the bridge right now. It's done. It's been repealed. Obviously, the damage was done prior to it being repealed. I think that we all understand here the process whereby a needs assessment was skipped and that these transmission lines were built and therefore in a lot of situations, I would say, without need. Certainly, there were other alternatives that would have been much cheaper. This, of course, has caused a great increase in the cost of our electricity bills, as was predicted by the Wildrose and other parties in this Legislature at the time. I don't think that's in any doubt, and I think that there are, obviously, regrets when you talk with people in the industry, when you talk with people in the government. They certainly even heard these same things from the current Premier, that mistakes were made, and there's no doubt of that.

I think we have to separate the two issues a little bit in that, you know, we have these extra charges on our bills that weren't there before because of Bill 50. Going forward, consumers still need to understand what they are paying for, and they need to understand it clearly. I think that doing so will allow them to – I think that when they make decisions with regard to the electricity costs, it will be a little bit more clear for them on how to make those decisions.

The other piece is that they can hold the government accountable for their decisions on electricity and whether they are agreeing with the current state of affairs with regard to electricity deregulation or if it could be improved. I think that just giving people more information will help them make that decision, and I know some information is already available out there. I mean, I look at my bill every month, and there are some things in there that, obviously, separate out different aspects of the bill, but I think that this would go further in achieving that end.

I think it's important, too, that we understand, you know, that with these property rights bills that we often talk about – the one that kind of, I believe, indirectly relates to this one is Bill 50 – this is certainly not just a rural issue. I think some people like to think that all those bills and the big fights and wars that were waged in this Assembly over those bills were just about the rural folks and that we were just people in rural Alberta, in 12 constituencies, who were just really ticked off because people were building power lines through our constituencies. It was so much deeper than that, Mr. Speaker. It's an issue that doesn't just affect our rural constituents in Alberta. It affected literally every single person that pays a utility bill in the province of Alberta. In fact, it affected way more urbanites than it did folks that live in rural Alberta, and I think that sometimes that was a bit lost in the discussion because this wasn't about NIMBY.

Obviously, part of it was that we don't like to build ugly power lines through pristine landscapes – that's obviously one part of it – but I actually think that was actually, you know, a pretty minor part. Another part was the way it was done, the way the land was chosen, without adequate feedback and consultation. I think a bigger issue, in fact I think by far 95 per cent of the issue, was the fact that all of our constituents now have charges on their bill that could have been easily avoided or decreased, could be a lot less

today if we had built the least possible number of additional transmission lines, just the ones that were needed rather than the ones that were asked for by the transmission companies.

Of course, it was a sole-source contract, which I understand is, hopefully, being addressed going forward by this administration. I hope so. I've heard those words before, but my hope is that that will be addressed. We just heard a little bit from the Minister of Energy, and he's right to say that we do need to place confidence in some of these quasi-judicial bodies, but, Mr. Speaker, that was just the point of why Bill 50 was so egregious, because we completely circumvented that process with regard to assessing which lines were needed and which ones were not. That, to me, was the ultimate disrespect for our quasi-judicial agencies and tribunals that we have to regulate electricity. The name has been changed so much that we'll just call it the electricity board. It changes every few months or so, it seems. So that's a big issue.

With regard to this bill I think that anything that will improve transparency, specifically with regard to an issue as complicated as transmission and electricity generation, is something that we as a House, you know, need to look to support. It doesn't make a whole lot of sense, in my view, to not support that in this regard.

Now, this is certainly a good bill, and I will support it. I hope that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre will – I mean, he was, obviously, a member of our party for a while and has communicated a lot of different things that need changing in the electrical system and the transmission system. I would like to see more bills like this come forward but maybe ones that are even more substantive as it pertains to lowering the costs of electricity for Albertans. I know it's something that he feels passionate about, and I certainly feel passionate about it. Are there ways we can deal, you know, with some of the price spikes that we experience in this province on a fairly regular basis? Is there a way we can do that that will help consumers while still maintaining the spirit of a free-market system and the market signals that are there? Are there ways we can control that?

Some of the spikes that occur: you know, I don't think they're reasonable, especially when there seem to be some questionable decisions regarding the timing of taking plants on- and offline and so forth that lead to these spikes, which, of course, have been widely reported in the news. How much of that is factual and how much of that is speculation I don't know, but I would like to see a way, going forward, that we can limit these spikes for consumers.

Also, on transmission in the future I would like to see, you know, some ideas from the member on recovering some of the costs of the transmission lines for power that is going to flow through to the United States. Perhaps there should be some rules with regard to that and some things put in place to recover some of those costs. I understand there are some rules in that regard, but it's pretty murky, and I'd like to understand that better and see if there are ways that we can deal with that transmission, with recouping some of those transmission costs, and to take some of those costs that are on our power bills under transmission and decrease them.

So there are all sorts of things. I think a deregulated system certainly has some merit. It has, I think, done more good than harm, but I think there are some things wrong with it, and we've gone through enough years now where those need to be corrected.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I have Strathcona-Sherwood Park next.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014. I'd like to also thank the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre for all of the work that he's put into this bill. I would also like to thank him for not raising a point of order yet at this point, 30 seconds in.

I've also heard from my constituents, as many of us have, that simply don't understand the utility bill, Mr. Speaker. I think also that many of us have had a look at it and all the ancillary charges and bits and pieces that we don't fully understand, and I think it does need to be simplified. I think of all our seniors in Alberta, half a million seniors, many of which are homeowners, that have talked to many of us. They also don't understand their utility bill and what they're really paying for and what the value is or isn't. I know some are even talking about reregulation of the industry in Alberta.

4:30

But we're fortunate in this province. We've got deregulated electricity prices, and they actually have fallen significantly since the regulated rates that we had in 2008. I think the difficulty is that we don't fully understand what these charges are, and that takes us back to, I think, the importance of supporting this bill.

Currently we've got the Alberta Electric System Operator, the AESO, that does the planning for our electrical system in Alberta, and there's a whole process that goes into that. I know some have raised questions about that, but it does require extensive consultation before any applications are even submitted for a transmission project in the province. So the consultation with AESO, and AESO is responsible for the safe and reliable and economic planning of Alberta's interconnected electricity system and the wholesale electricity market, which is extremely complicated.

I was listening to the hon. Member for Airdrie earlier here talking about power being exported to the United States. Now, it's my understanding that Alberta is actually a net importer of electricity, although I know that a number of other provinces, including British Columbia, where there are significant amounts of hydro generation, certainly, are in a position where they can afford to export electricity to the United States. My understanding is that with co-fired generation and natural gas generation and very, very limited hydro in the province of Alberta our cost of power generation is too high, in fact, for us to export.

Just talking about British Columbia, there are a few jurisdictional comparisons perhaps I could talk about with respect to their billing procedures. Specifically, getting back to British Columbia – and then, time permitting, I'll talk about Ontario – today protecting the interests of British Columbians is the B.C. Utilities Commission, BCUC. They're another independent regulatory agency, somewhat similar to the AUC in Alberta, and they're administered under their Utilities Commission Act. Their responsibility is also the regulation of their natural gas and electric utilities market. So that particular body, Mr. Speaker, is responsive to the need for energy across the province. They're also responsible for the needs determination as the AUC is here. Their responsibility is also to protect B.C. utility customers and all of their stakeholders.

Bill 201 would also protect its customers and stakeholders by allowing for transparency in their electricity bills and just ensuring that there are no hidden costs, not just hidden costs but explanations for what the other costs are or, I think ideally, essentially like a bill we get for a number of other utilities like water, which in most cases is somewhat simpler depending on the municipality that you live in and the supplier of your water.

The BCUC regulates a variety of different interdependent activities, including integrated resource planning, construction and expansion of power facilities, utility revenue requirements, rate design, and then also contracts for supply. The regulated utility companies operating in B.C. are B.C. Hydro; the British Columbia Transmission Corporation, BCTC; and, a familiar name to us, FortisBC.

Mr. Speaker, in an article released earlier this year, it was stated that deregulation of the retail electricity markets in Alberta has been strikingly successful. I know many would dispute that. Consumers now have the power to choose between a number of retailers and contracts. I believe the hon. Minister of Energy referred to about 25 different options that consumers now have. I think that choice is extremely important. I think choice definitely, just by market forces, would have kept our electricity costs down. But the point is: how do you know when you don't actually understand your bill?

British Columbians have also enjoyed some of the cheapest electricity rates in North America just because of, as I mentioned earlier, their low historic cost of hydroelectric generation. Hopefully, the river runs all the time and the turbines run all the time. That's got to be a good thing. I don't think there's really much of an off switch in hydro generation, as I understand it, so the more, the better. Because of that, people in British Columbia and, I believe, in a lot of the northwestern United States, customers, have certainly benefited from that. Again, they have benefited from deregulation as we as Albertans have benefited from deregulation.

Now, the regulated electricity rates in Alberta, as I've mentioned before, were consistently higher than the deregulated ones, as cost of production, as I understand it, was earlier. Of course, going back to those market forces, there simply was no competition. The bill was the bill. You had no place to go unless, of course, you decided that you didn't want to use any electricity or you put a generator in your yard or a windmill or whatever it happened to be. So you didn't really have a choice.

B.C. has this low cost of heritage resources. I know there's a lot of electricity trading that goes on, that I had mentioned, and a lot of kind of energy efficient projects that they've been working on also. Their competitive process allows them to require new supplies, that are used in the conservation of power, and that helps them to also preserve their competitive rate advantage. The greatest advantage in British Columbia is, again, that they've been able to generate significant revenue from the export of electricity. As I've mentioned, over the past decade their generation facilities, their hydro, their grid, which, of course, allows them to sell to us and, I would assume, other provinces as well as into the United States, has certainly been a considerable benefit to them because of their flexible hydroelectric system.

Their electricity sector also contributes revenue to the provincial treasury: property taxes, school taxes, grants, and . . .

Mr. Anglin: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, the bell just rang at that time, so we're going to move on in the interest of time.

I would recognize anyone from the third or fourth parties at this time. If not, someone from the Official Opposition, and if not, then let's move on to the next speaker.

Seeing no one else, I am going to Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to participate in the debate on Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forth by

the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. I can't tell you over the last number of years how many constituents of Edmonton-Decore have come forward trying to interpret their electricity utility bills, so I am very pleased that this hon. member has brought forward this very important issue with the reason that it is on the minds of many Albertans.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 speaks to a number of strong principles which are foundational items for any government institution or quasi-public or private business organization, namely transparency, which promotes accountability and public disclosure. In our modern society these are pillars of democratic governance which are very critical for the efficient and effective functioning of a modern economy and for fostering openness and public trust. For example, in regard to public organizations like the government many powers are delegated to our public authority, and assurance must then be provided to the delegators – that is, society at large – that this transfer of power is not only effective but also not abused. Transparency ensures that information is available that can be used to measure the authority's performance and to guard against any possible misuse of powers. In that sense transparency serves to achieve accountability, which means that authorities can be held responsible for their actions.

Mr. Speaker, without transparency and accountability trust will be lacking between government and those whom it governs. The result would be social instability and an environment that is less than conducive to economic growth. Today there appears to be an increased commitment by organizations to undertake reforms aimed at enhancing transparency, which, as mentioned, promotes accountability. Also, it allows for stakeholders and citizens to garner information, to have a clearer understanding about the activities of an organization, and at the same time makes the organization more accountable for its activities. It has been suggested that opening a window to the internal workings on the inside creates a greater level of trust. Truth be told, many might say that you won't be trusted unless you are transparent.

Many governments, quasi-public organizations, and private organizations are taking appropriate actions very consistent with law- and policy-making to disclose information in forms that the public can readily find and use. Further, new technologies are being developed to put information about operations and decisions online and readily available to the public. For example, on June 25, 2013, the Rt. Hon. Francis Maude, Minister of Cabinet Office and paymaster general in the United Kingdom, indicated in his speech that the United Kingdom's government in 2013 had the largest data resource web portal in the world, with over 40,000 data files available to the public; further, that the U.K. government's plan is an ambitious one which is committed to working with the public to publish more data sets.

With specific reference to Bill 201 the hon. member is asking the Alberta Utilities Commission to provide a report on transparency and billing to the Minister of Energy. Further, Bill 201 asks the minister to implement the recommendations of the Alberta Utilities Commission within six months of the day the report is provided or to take the necessary steps to implement those recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, engaging parliamentarians on these issues is especially important. I support initiatives which increase transparency, whether it pertains to government or quasi-public or private organizations because, quite frankly, that's what the public expects. Furthermore, I support addressing that utility corporations be required to provide transparent information to their customers as it pertains to all sections of a utility bill. Alberta consumers

deserve to receive utility bills that are transparent in category and meaning and easily understood. Alberta consumers need a radical change regarding the information provided, and they need reassurance that the charges being levied by the utility corporations are not excessive.

Mr. Speaker, in 2003 the Electric Utilities Act was amended under the billing regulation to increase the proper standardization of bills prepared by a retailer or an owner for distribution to a customer. Amounts charged to clients are to be displayed in dollars, with little room for ambiguities. In 2013 the government further protected consumers by establishing new regulations where the onus would be placed on electricity transmission companies to provide that the cost of transmission lines is reasonable. Also, the power of scrutiny for transmission projects would be placed under the authority of the Alberta Utilities Commission.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Utilities Commission operates independently and is committed to ensuring that every Albertan whose rights may be directly and adversely affected by the proposed utility application to the Alberta Utilities Commission is informed and has the opportunity to have their concerns heard, understood, and considered in the review process. The Alberta Utilities Commission is a trusted and valued commissioning body, and the people of Alberta can be assured that their best interests are a guiding force in the decision-making process of this organization. Under the watchful eye of this commission Albertans are assured that they are not and will not be paying for unqualified costs associated with building additional transmission lines. Transmission lines are to be built with a high and reasonable standard of due process.

I believe that this speaks to the lengths our government will go to for the people of our province. Transparency is critical for the effective functioning of our modern economy, and as Alberta grows in population, Mr. Speaker, and in opportunities, this becomes more important than ever before for all Albertans. That is why this government has continued to function under transparency initiatives and will do so moving forward.

Bill 201 will include a proposed standardized bill for customers that lists all fixed and variable costs, which could in fact add value to the utility billing process as it pertains to transparency, accountability, and public disclosure.

Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that the information that is available to consumers regarding their utility bills, as highlighted by those hon. members before yours truly in this debate, includes an explanation on charges to buy electricity, administrative fees, transmission charges, distribution charges, local access fees, and rate riders. In addition, information can also be found on how Albertans can measure their electricity usage. This information is provided by the Ministry of Energy, outlining their priority of fair and just pricing and utility bill understanding.

The Alberta Utilities Commission, as the Ministry of Energy has done, also provides a transparent resource on how Albertans can better understand their utility bill. The Alberta Utilities Commission explains that while Albertans may choose their retailer, they are not able to choose their distributor, who delivers the energy commodity to their home. This explanation is easy to understand and fairly straightforward. Albertans are advised that distributors have separate charges from the retailer and are identified separately on their utility bill. Retailers have terms and conditions, Mr. Speaker, regarding their service that are approved

by the Alberta Utilities Commission, which provides guidelines and rules for billing practices.

Mr. Speaker, the reason I highlight this for you today is to point out that the Alberta Utilities Commission and the government are continually serving the best interests of Albertans by providing information.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Opposition members?

Seeing none, let us move on to the next speaker, then. Vermilion-Lloydminster, you're next.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014, that was brought forward by the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, a member who certainly in his time here in the House can be described in many ways: at times incorrigible, perhaps at times impertinent, and at times irascible. But one thing we can always say about him is that he is indefatigable about the issue that we're talking about today.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, transparency in billing is truly important to all Albertans, but it is also important to the people of Vermilion-Lloydminster. As was just mentioned by the previous speaker, we receive many inquiries in my office in the constituency asking for an explanation with regard to power bills, and it is indeed important that consumers understand completely what they are being charged for. My own personal experience in professional life is that if you present someone with a bill and they don't understand it, they're less likely to be happy about paying it. Especially when we're dealing with something that is an essential need of all Albertans, electrical power, we really can't be in a position where people in any way don't understand what it is they're paying for or why they're paying for it.

Now, various methodologies have been used to try to increase the understanding that Albertans have of their electrical bills, but unfortunately there remains an information gap between what people understand about their bill and what, in fact, the bill is trying to explain. So I'm certainly in favour of Bill 201 in terms of its attempt to make electrical billings more clear, more transparent, and more understandable to the consumer. I think these are important initiatives that are being undertaken by this bill, and I do applaud the member for bringing this forward.

I think that what he's doing, essentially, here is allowing consumers a better understanding of what it is they need to understand to be responsible consumers. Certainly, when I was in professional life, that was something that we encouraged amongst the consumers about the services we provided, and I'm pleased to do that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt your speech; however, under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides for up to 5 minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I am now obligated to invite the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre to close debate at this stage on Bill 201.

The hon. member.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first thing I would like to say as an ex-Wildrose Party member is that real men wear pink in support of the next bill that is going to be presented here to this Assembly, and I want to make sure it's known, no matter how angry the Member for Edmonton-Centre may be at me. I will get

to some of the facts and the misrepresentations that have been made in response to this bill. First off, the clarity of the bill, the idea that the bill should provide clarity to fixed and variable costs. As the Member for Strathmore-Brooks brought out, he finds it difficult because variable costs change; hence, the name “variable cost.” They do change – that’s why they’re called variable – but the standardization is quite simple. If you know how the costs are calculated and if you know what they’re based on, if you know that they are based, or premised, on the cost of electricity or some other factor, then you as a consumer can manage that knowing the information that you have at your fingertips.

If you were to compare electricity bills today, particularly from the three major retailers of electricity, the formula for incorporating some of these variable costs is not clear. The formula, or the cost on how they’re broken out, is not clear. I presented this when I introduced this bill, that the variable cost for line loss – depending on whether you’re an EPCOR or an Enmax or an ATCO customer, you could have one charge for line loss, or you could have two charges for line loss or three charges and not understand what that means when you’re comparing bills.

I’d like to point out that the Market Surveillance Administrator just published a report called State of the Market 2014: The Residential Retail Markets for Electricity and Natural Gas. That report came out on November 27. What the Market Surveillance Administrator said is that retail competition is not uniform across the province because some customers clearly lack the ability to choose, and that’s based on information. So to have some sort of standardized bill so consumers can make a choice is absolutely paramount to a functioning system.

The Member for Medicine Hat was kind of interesting to me when he mentioned the comparison between utility bills in the market-based system to the utility bills in Medicine Hat. Medicine Hat is a fully regulated, city-owned utility and has no competition. It has a complete monopoly. It is apples and oranges. There is no comparison. When he makes the comparison to the Montana utility, which is a fully regulated, monopolized co-operative, again, there is absolutely no comparison – it is apples and oranges – unless the member wants to go to a fully regulated system again. I haven’t heard that, so I don’t understand the comparison. [interjection] To the Member for Airdrie: I didn’t quite hear that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please address your comments to and through the chair.

Carry on. You have precious little time left.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Market Surveillance Administrator in the same report referred to the barriers to competition in the retail market because of the lack of information that’s available. That’s what this bill is intended to do. It is intended to standardize the reporting of variable- and fixed-rate costs, how they are shown on these electric bills, particularly in regard to the regulated rate option or what’s referred to as the DFOs, or distribution facility owners. That’s your default rate. You ask customers: “Where do you get your electricity from? Who are you buying your electricity from?” Many don’t know.

When you get to the default rate and you’re dealing with the RRO, there is a merging or a bleeding over per se between the distribution facility owner and the retailer. It’s called cobranding in the electricity industry, and it’s interfering with the competitive market.

Again, when the members from the Wildrose Party brought up this issue, they didn’t understand this aspect. The point is simply

this. The distribution facility owners have a competitive advantage to misrepresent and whether intentionally or unintentionally, it doesn’t matter.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

The Speaker: We have some members rising for a division.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, it was already read into the record.

The Speaker: I’m sorry. I did not see them rise at the time.

Clerk, had you already started your speech by the time they rose? Did somebody notice?

Well, in any event, I saw members rise, so that usually calls for a division. It’s not the first time that it’s been a split-hair second late. Summon the bells, I guess.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:58 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I’d invite you to take your spots quickly, please. Thank you.

A division has been called, requiring a standing vote for second reading of Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014. [interjections] Hon. members, please. We have a very serious aspect occurring right now, so drop the conversations, and let the table continue on with the official recognition.

For the motion:

Amery	Fraser	McAllister
Anderson	Fritz	McDonald
Anglin	Hale	Notley
Barnes	Hehr	Oberle
Bhardwaj	Horne	Olesen
Bhullar	Jansen	Olson
Bilous	Jeneroux	Quadri
Brown	Johnson, L.	Quest
Cao	Kang	Sandhu
Cusanelli	Kennedy-Glans	Sarich
DeLong	Khan	Starke
Dirks	Klimchuk	Strankman
Dorward	Lemke	Swann
Eggen	Leskiw	Wilson
Ellis	Luan	Woo-Paw
Fawcett	Mandel	Xiao
Fenske		

5:10

Totals: For – 49 Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 201 read a second time]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Boat Inspection and Cleaning

503. Mrs. Leskiw moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the

government to introduce mandatory inspections and cleaning of boats entering Alberta in order to protect our lakes from harmful and invasive organisms.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour and privilege to rise today and open debate on Motion 503. This province is so fortunate to contain some of the most majestic natural wonders. Alberta is crossed by rivers, dotted with countless lakes, has one of the most spectacular mountain ranges in the world. That also means that we play host to a rich and diverse set of flora and fauna that inhabit these spaces. Embracing nature has always been a core element to Albertans and our communities. This province has gotten to where we are now by harnessing what we have been provided with, tending to farmland, nurturing vast fields of livestock, and fishing in our lakes and rivers.

One factor that plays a large part in our being able to maintain this relationship with nature for such a length of time is our ability to maintain a balance. This often involves limiting the use of our resources in various ways in order to ensure that we do not harm or destroy these natural assets. It is vital that stability is preserved so that future generations are not negatively impacted by actions taken now. However, overuse of our natural resources is not the only dynamic that causes shift in this balance. With an ever-increasing population and one that is highly mobile, Alberta has more people travelling in and out of our province than ever before. This enhances our lives greatly as we're constantly taking in new individuals, new ideas, and proving how incredibly accommodating and welcoming Albertans are.

Unfortunately, these same factors have also greatly increased the risk of this province being overrun by a variety of less welcome guests. Invasive aquatic species can have a devastating effect both environmentally and economically. Once an invasive species is introduced into our natural habitat, it can be nearly impossible to reverse. Invasive species compete with native species for the resources that they need to survive. They can seriously degrade water quality by increasing the concentration of toxins, altering nutrient flows in the food web, reducing the oxygen levels, and increasing its turbidity, or, in essence, its cloudiness.

The impact from this can be widespread in an invasive species altered environment, putting pressure on native species, that are often ill adapted to cope with them. Native species are pushed out of their natural habitat, lose food sources, and are exposed to new bacteria and organisms that can be harmful to sensitive species.

The impact is not confined to environment. Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development estimates it could cost Albertans up to \$75 million annually if the invasive aquatic species were to establish itself in our province. They clog irrigation lines and water infrastructure, hurt tourism, fish, and many other industries that rely on our aquatic spaces.

The time to act is now, before the infestation actually happens. It is vital that everyone travelling in and out of our province is properly educated on this issue. Education is the key. The primary means by which invasive species enter this province is on recreational aquatic vehicles and trailers. Boaters need to be aware of the proper procedure for inspecting, cleaning, and drying their water vehicles as well as of the potential impact of failing to do so.

Currently all boat inspections are voluntary. ESRD and ARD monitor several lakes, irrigation districts, and water bodies throughout the province, but this is woefully inadequate in offering such assurance that we can prevent an invasive aquatic

species outbreak. The fact remains that without organized and enforced protocols and procedures and without a more comprehensive invasive aquatic species strategy, we are at a much greater risk of taking in an unwelcome guest that we can never get rid of.

Mr. Speaker, I am greatly encouraged by the increased awareness surrounding this issue that we have produced as of late, but I also think this still falls short of what needs to be done in order to offer some reassurance that we are fully prepared. It cannot be understated that once an outbreak happens, it can be all but impossible to eradicate any invasive aquatic species. The time to act is before this takes place. That is why I am asking all my colleagues to join the fight against invasive species by supporting my Motion 503.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Well, thank you. It is my pleasure to stand and speak to the member's motion to "introduce mandatory inspections and cleaning of boats entering Alberta in order to protect our lakes from harmful and invasive organisms." This is a huge concern all over Alberta, especially in southern Alberta and the area I represent, Strathmore-Brooks. We have two huge irrigation districts, the Eastern irrigation district and the Western irrigation district, who have spent a lot of time learning about these invasive species. I was at a seminar put on by ESRD in Brooks during the EID's annual general meeting. A lady came down and gave a very good explanation of what is happening and what needs to happen.

I think it's so important. You know, I was talking with my colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View. They have Chestermere Lake, a beautiful lake. It feeds the WID irrigation. Along with many other of the irrigation lakes and reservoirs in my riding, they have lots of recreation. They are dual purpose. They allow the farmers and ranchers to irrigate; plus, they allow recreational users to bring their boats for fishing.

The member who proposed this motion stated that the annual cost would be about \$75 million if we allow these mussels and species to enter our waterways. I don't really know if that's enough. I think it could have the potential to be more than that. They're very, very hard to control. Once they get in, they just take over. The ecosystem in our lakes will be devastated. The cost is not only to the government to look after these issues, but it's also the cost to the individuals.

You know, I'm an irrigation farmer. I've got a couple of pivots that irrigate grass and crops. Man, if my pipes all of a sudden get all clogged up with these mussels, I've got hundreds and hundreds of metres of main line that I've got to rip out of the ground and replace.

It's something that will be tough to get a handle on and make sure that boats coming in – I think education is huge. We have to continually educate the recreational users bringing their boats in and out of the province. I listened to a video clip this morning, that, actually, I shared with caucus, about one of the lakes – I think it was in Minnesota – that they had. They showed underwater pictures of the bottom of the lake, and it was solid mussels. They just said: you know, we can't control them. The girl that came to Brooks to the EID AGM had pictures of a shopping cart they pulled out of the lake. You could kind of tell it was a shopping cart. It was totally covered. I mean, they just stick to everything.

5:20

You know, I support this motion. I think it's something that we all have to advocate for. I hope the government takes this one step further and implements some sort of inspection stations. I think they had four this past summer, and they were voluntary inspections. I know they have dogs trained that can smell the boats and tell if they have these mussels. It's so important.

The cost: you know, that's something we're going to have to look at, if there are user fees or some sort of cost control measures. It may enhance people looking after it themselves before they leave a lake if they know: okay; if we go through an inspection, it's going to cost us to have our boat cleaned if it isn't clean. That's something that we can definitely work on together with the government and all the different agencies in Alberta that are affected by this.

In closing, I'd just thank the member for bringing this forward. It's a huge, huge issue. If you don't know much about it, I suggest you do a lot of research and find out how bad they actually are and how important it is to keep them out of the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

To the fourth party. Let's go the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, this is a necessary motion. It's a problem that we're seeing move across the country and move across the continent, really. I mean, of course, these species or any organisms don't necessarily respect national boundaries or provincial boundaries. The zebra mussels are moving east and north and south at the same time, I suppose, and there is a direct economic and environmental impact because this is an invasive species, that is not native to most of or, really, any of North America. A lack of predator control makes it pretty obvious. Of course, it does plug up your infrastructure in regard to water pipes and so forth and creates levels of toxicity in lakes and other bodies of water, so it's pretty obvious.

I think that we can work to perhaps combat these invasive species like zebra mussels in conjunction with other invasive species as well such as the more long-standing problem of the Eurasian water milfoil. We know that this has been a problem in other parts of the country longer and in the province to a certain extent. It's clear that washing boats really does make a difference. Most people don't necessarily do that. Of course, I think that we need to make sure that we provide a way by which people can do this, right? It's one thing to make a law, and then it's something else to actually have a mechanism by which people can actually follow the law and wash their boats and remove invasive species or seeds and/or remnants of organisms that can get into the next lake.

As New Democrats we certainly are supporters of environmental protection, and we know that there is an ongoing problem with things such as algae blooms in this province right now. I mean, we hate to correct the hon. member that introduced this bill, but we don't have countless lakes. We have a very limited number of lakes, and you can't presume that without stringent protection they will just remain as good as they were before, right? I mean, that's important to consider. We know that, let's say, the blue-green algae problem is growing, and it's not just from invasive species, Mr. Speaker, but from fertilizer and from animals adjacent to lakes as well.

Certainly, this is an issue that needs to be dealt with. We have to make sure that we do put people into actually enforcing this

motion, but in the balance certainly I do support this motion, and so do the Alberta New Democrats.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I first of all would like to thank the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for bringing forward this motion. I think it's a very appropriate motion at this point in time as there is certainly some work that we've been doing in Environment and Sustainable Resource Development that follows along this line, particularly knowing that this is a particular issue that has been getting closer and closer to our borders and is something that we must all be aware of and that we must on behalf of Albertans take action on. That action would be aiming to protect our aquatic environments and infrastructure from invasive species like these particular mussels.

What happens, Mr. Speaker – I'll just go through a brief overview of why this is a problem – is that when these mussels become introduced into our aquatic ecosystems, they start competing with the native wildlife in the ecosystem. They start to filter out vital nutrients, they start to clog infrastructure such as irrigation and municipal water systems, and they are linked to toxic algae blooms. Essentially, these types of experiences have caused billions and billions of dollars in damage across the world up to this point, and this is something that is a significant financial risk to this province and something that we must do everything within our means to avoid.

As I mentioned, jurisdictions outside of our borders have already been experiencing negative onsets of invasive species in their aquatic ecosystems for years now, and it's estimated that that financial risk to this province is about \$75 million per year, again something that I don't think the Alberta taxpayers are particularly interested in footing the bill for if we can possibly prevent it.

As I said, jurisdictions closer to our borders have recently experienced the invasion of these species into their lakes and water systems. It was in October of 2013 that zebra mussels were identified in Lake Winnipeg. This was the first time invasive mussels have been found in a prairie province, and, Mr. Speaker, once an infestation begins, it can be almost impossible to stop. The potential solutions can have their own environmental trade-offs. This is why we are working hard as a province on preventing invasive species from crossing our borders.

Part of this work is public education, Mr. Speaker; that is, encouraging boaters to clean, drain, and dry their boats every time that they remove them from the water. These simple steps are critical to ensuring these particular species are not present in Alberta's lakes and infrastructures.

Another step that we are taking is the monitoring for invasive species and encouraging Albertans to report to our hotline any evidence of mussels that they might see, and we have a particular number. I want to highlight that. It's 1.855.336.BOAT. That's 1.855.336.2628. Perhaps one of the most important tools, though, Mr. Speaker, that we can bring to bear on this issue is about inspections, which is of the nature of this particular motion from the hon. member.

5:30

Last year between the month of June and the end of August we completed 2,500 inspections of boats entering into Alberta. As a result, there were two boats that were headed for Alberta's lakes that were found to have zebra mussels attached to them. One of

the contaminated boat owners admitted and expressed extreme thankfulness for the inspection because they didn't want to be the person responsible that would bring these mussels into an Alberta lake. There were another 99 boats of the 2,500 that were deemed high risk, and by high risk we mean those that were coming from states that have had infestations of mussels or they were coming from states or provinces where there were no inspection or monitoring programs in place.

To help strengthen this program, one of the things that we've started to utilize is sniffer dogs. These are highly trained dogs that are able to sniff out zebra and quagga mussels that are attached to the boats. These mussels, in fact, at times are so small that you can't even see them, and these highly trained animals can actually sniff them out. Of course, all of the actions that we've taken at this point around inspection have been voluntary, Mr. Speaker, and with only about half of the boaters stopping to have their watercraft inspected last summer, we are thinking that stricter measures may be necessary to protect our waterways.

Today's motion asks our government to implement even greater proactive measures to prevent invasive species from getting a foothold in Alberta. I'm proud to say that our government is giving consideration to a number of improvements to these preventative actions, including making boat checks mandatory. Aquatic invasive species are a serious matter that must be dealt with in a proactive manner, and if Alberta were to make boat checks mandatory, we would be the first province to do so.

Since Manitoba discovered mussels in Lake Winnipeg, they have outlined early detection and rapid response as critical priorities for saving habitats from invasive species. You know, upon early detection in Manitoba species are placed in one of two categories that outline minimum management criteria used to begin steps of action. If feasible, eradication is the first option if species are detected. A lead agency is quickly formed, and a management committee develops an eradication strategy. Education and awareness initiatives are also implemented there so that the public are able to become proactive leaders in assisting with the containment, detection, and extermination of these species.

In 2012 Ontario established an invasive species strategic plan. The current threats posed by invasive species in Ontario are significant, Mr. Speaker. Compared to other provinces, the number of invasive species in Ontario is actually the highest, with Quebec and British Columbia trailing only slightly behind. The Ontario government has been able to utilize a national program that provides a strategic invasive species framework under which provincial plans can be developed. It's the Ontario ministry of natural resources that has taken a lead on this. The objective of their strategic plan is to prevent new invaders from arriving and surviving in the province of Ontario and to slow and, where possible, reverse the spread of existing invasive species. The steps of the action founded in Ontario's strategic plan are: one, to prevent; two, to detect; three, to respond; four, to manage; and, five, to adapt.

I want to thank the hon. member for bringing forward this motion because in doing so, we can prevent and detect and do those first two action steps and, hopefully, never have to get to the last three: respond, manage, and adapt.

Ontario's strategic plan also highlights the importance of working with neighbouring jurisdictions and the federal government, specifically on research, monitoring, and enforcement. [interjection] One more minute. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I believe today's debate speaks to these relationships and urges our province to become a clear leader in preventing invasive mussels. Certainly, this is something that I

brought up with the Minister of Environment from Saskatchewan, who I've had the opportunity to chat with. This is something that interests both of our provinces. They've been very helpful in working towards our strategy in holding back the mountain pine beetle because they have a very keen interest to ensure that it doesn't move eastward. I think we have the same interest in ensuring that invasive mussels don't move westward. So working with other jurisdictions is very, very important.

Again, I'd like to thank the hon. member for her leadership with this motion. This is something that our department is taking very seriously. We must act now, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

A member from the Wildrose? Yes. Cypress-Medicine Hat, please.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to take a brief minute and, first of all, thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for her motion. I thank the ESRD minister for his words and his understanding around the situation. I, too, very, very much support the motion for all the reasons that everyone mentioned, how invasive these species are. The cost, I think, is \$75 million. It could be underestimated if our lakes had a huge problem or our irrigation pipes all clogged up.

I just wanted to stand and, you know, reiterate my support. The costs around it: I'm glad to hear that you're going to be having some discussion on that. After all, we are a rat-free province, and the costs of keeping us rat free are usually accepted. That's okay from the taxpayers' standpoint. I'm not sure if boating would fall into the same category or if a user fee would be more in line. It seems to be.

I think that this motion is well on the way to handling what we have to handle, to make sure that this invasive species doesn't cost our economy millions of dollars. I, too, will support it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Third and fourth parties? Anyone wishing?

If not, let me move on to the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to just make a few comments on Motion 503, which I plan to support. I'll keep it brief because a lot of it has been said. I think that there's no way to underestimate the risk that these invasive species could mean to our waterways. I thank the member for bringing this forward. I know that she has a lot of pristine lakes and so on in her part of the world as we do throughout the province. Strathmore-Brooks, of course, mentioned the catastrophic impact it could have on irrigation systems in southern Alberta. I think it's good that the member has brought this forward to profile it up, and I thank the hon. minister of environment for his comments.

I think my only question or concern would be how the inspection process would work. I understand that coming across the international border from the United States, there's obviously a very thorough process for dealing with traffic. The traffic coming in from our neighbouring provinces and territory to the north: I'm not quite sure how we will catch that. But those are things that can all be dealt with between the environment ministry and, I would think, the Solicitor General, Transportation, and others, so we'll leave that up to them.

I fully plan to support the motion and would encourage all of the other members here to do the same. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Any other opposition members?

If not, then let me move on to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my pleasure to get to say a few words relating to Motion 503, which states: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce mandatory inspections and cleaning of boats entering Alberta in order to protect our lakes from harmful and invasive organisms." I also want to acknowledge and thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for bringing this forward. This is a very important issue, and it's very important that we raise the awareness of all Albertans about it.

5:40

I would like to speak for a minute or two regarding the agricultural context to which this applies. This is not a theoretical issue. It is something that is of great importance to our agricultural industry, which is the second-largest industry in Alberta. I'll just provide you with a few facts, Mr. Speaker. My comments are going to be focused on our irrigation infrastructure.

Irrigation in southern Alberta supplies water to some million acres of land and 50 reservoirs. We have infrastructure that includes 8,000 kilometres of canals and pipelines, and they're worth an estimated \$3.5 billion. Each year my department provides grants to irrigation districts in southern Alberta, which then partner with them the money that they raise. The contribution of government at this point is around \$20 million, \$21 million a year. I also would say that a figure like \$75 million in costs to us seems light when one thinks about the devastating effect that damage to our irrigation infrastructure could have.

It should also be noted that Alberta has about 70 per cent of the national irrigation infrastructure, and those acres support 55 different crops, a very diverse collection of crops, many of which people don't really even think of when they think of agriculture in Alberta, and some of them are very high value. As a matter of fact, 20 per cent of the total food production in Alberta comes from these irrigated areas. Also, as has already been mentioned, it's not just for agricultural production, but it's also for recreation and the life of many rural communities. Some 50 rural communities rely on irrigation infrastructure.

I was in Lethbridge some time ago, and one of our staff in my department showed me some cutaway pipes and what they look like once they've been affected by these invasive species such as mussels. It really is a powerful thing to see when you see a pipe that's completely closed off, and one can imagine the concern that our agricultural producers and many people who live in the irrigated areas have when they contemplate the kind of damage that could be done.

I want to acknowledge the work that's being done by my colleague the Minister of ESRD and his department for the work that they are doing. He has mentioned the voluntary inspections that have already been undertaken. We can see, I think, clearly that preventative action is what is so important here. We can't wait for it to hit us and then try to react. I suppose the challenge will be to come up with things that we can do that are practical in their application. As has already been mentioned, that may be easier in some parts of the province than in others, but I think this is a very valuable conversation for us to have. It will lead us towards a greater awareness, greater education, and also some more effective steps that can be taken to prevent very significant damage to Alberta and its infrastructure.

Once again, thanks to the hon. member for bringing it forward, and I look forward to hearing further debate.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I have Calgary-Bow, followed by Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Ms DeLong: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to thank the MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for bringing this forward. As Canadian vice-president of PNWER, Pacific NorthWest Economic Region, this is something that we have been working on for a few years. The Pacific NorthWest Economic Region is five states and five provinces and territories that are the only part of North America that is not infected by the quagga and zebra mussels. Pretty well the whole rest of North America is infected.

Now, they came from Russia decades ago, actually, into the Great Lakes and have since spread from there. Where they come from has very low calcium in the water, so back there they are not especially a problem. But here we tend to have high calcium. The sedimentary basin that we live in produces an awful lot of calcium coming through. Because of that we are especially vulnerable to these.

They are wonderful creatures. They take the water, which, you know, looks a little bit murky maybe because of all the stuff in it, and totally clean it. Totally clean it. You have beautiful water. You can see down 20 feet, 50 feet. Unfortunately, nothing else can live there because, essentially, the mussels eat everything except for blue-green algae. They will not eat blue-green algae, unfortunately. If it gets into a lake, you end up with the mussels everywhere, these sharp mussels so that you can't, especially, walk in bare feet. So your lakes are rather yucky around the outside. But the blue-green algae just wonderfully blooms there. So they are really bad. You know, we've already talked about effects on agriculture.

By the way, we are looking right now at control measures that cost \$1 million, \$2 million, \$3 million, but the actual cost once they come is about \$50 million per year – per year – to try to control them. Now, they used to be – our biggest vulnerability actually was Lake Mead down in California, and it's totally infected. So the idea was to protect our southern border, and that's what we were working with in PNWER, protecting the southern border, but then we got the infection in Lake Winnipeg. Now, we sort of had this hope – this hope – that massive doses of fertilizer might kill them off. That was the idea. What we did was that we put potash in there, and we put enormous amounts of potash just in the bays where they had found them. Unfortunately, it didn't work. There has been in the world – they have not yet found a way of controlling them. Essentially, all you can do is put a border around them, and we've been working on the outer border, but of course that is not good enough. We need to work also on our border, on the Alberta border.

So I urge you to support this motion, and hopefully we can up our game a little bit and make sure that they never do come here. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to offer some perspective from the point of view of my experience as a veterinarian and also from the point of view of animal disease control. I'd like to thank the hon. member for bringing forward this motion. It is a very important issue. The potential damage has already been well laid out by my colleagues on both sides of the House. My comments don't mean to minimize this in any way, but I do want to state that control of this particular organism, of these

two species of mussels, is going to be a lot harder than I think we realize.

From an epidemiological standpoint – epidemiology is the study of disease patterns, and we really have to consider these organisms as disease organisms. We've already talked a little bit about the hardness of these mussels: their ability to spread, their ability to survive outside of water, their ability to escape detection because, in fact, they reproduce through veligers, which are a tiny larval form, which are microscopic; they can't be seen. The work that the hon. Minister of ESRD described with regard to dogs that can actually smell these mussels is incredible work, and these are incredibly sophisticated dogs. Nonetheless, the control of this organism through visual means alone is inadequate.

Really, it was mentioned in the hon. mover's motion that education is the key, and she is right. Truthfully, to rely only on an enforcement mechanism to prevent this mussel from entering into our province is, I would suggest to you, doomed to failure. Our border simply cannot be guarded in a way that is practical when you consider that a good chunk of our Alberta-Saskatchewan border has crossings every two miles.

5:50

Mandatory inspection, while it sounds like a good idea, would truly require that all watercraft be funneled into specific inspection stations along the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. This year we had voluntary inspection at the Vermilion weigh scale, for example, and in fact one of the two cases that the minister mentioned was actually determined at the Vermilion weigh scale. But the Vermilion weigh scale is 60 kilometres into Alberta, and there are a lot of places where people driving watercraft can drive in on highway 16 and then drive either north or south before they ever reach the Vermilion weigh scale. So if we're going to be realistic about controlling this organism and preventing its relocation into the province of Alberta, we have to set up these inspection stations right at the border or, even better, talk to the Saskatchewan government and establish them in Saskatchewan.

The truth of the matter is that when you're talking about disease control and when you're talking about, you know, making sure that organisms don't get into our province, we are dealing with a very, very difficult situation given the mobility of populations and given the multiple routes that you can go through. In fact, when we talk about disease control from a point of view of other diseases that we have to watch out for from an animal health standpoint, if the province of Saskatchewan is infected, the province of Alberta is essentially considered as infected as well. Diseases like foot-and-mouth, rinderpest, bluetongue, anaplasmosis, or any of the other foreign, reportable diseases that we have to be worried about that would have an equal or greater economic impact as zebra and quagga mussels: Alberta would already be considered as an infected area.

So while, again, I applaud the member for raising the awareness of this – and it is extremely important for anyone who is involved with any sort of aquatic recreation. In fact, it's not just boaters. Scuba divers, your scuba equipment can be a mechanical vector for these organisms. Fisherman, if you use live bait and transfer live bait from one body of water to another, they can act as a mechanical vector for these organisms.

There is a lot of additional information we need, and when we say rinse, clean, and dry your boats, in fact, you should be rinsing

the boats with high-pressure sprayers, with 200 psi sprayers, or you should be soaking them with over 40 degrees Celsius water. That's how you have to kill these organisms. They are extremely tough. They are extremely hardy. So with the investment that we have to make, I would suggest, in some form of mandatory inspection, while I understand the desire for that, I will tell you that from a practical standpoint, quite frankly, I don't think it will work.

I think our best investment and our best way to summon our resources to try to prevent this is to provide as high a level of public education as we possibly can as to the gravity and the consequences of introducing these organisms into our province and to let recreational watercraft owners and other people who frequent lakes outside of the province of Alberta that might be infected with these organisms know the kind of measures that they have to take to make sure that they aren't the ones to bring this organism into Alberta.

The consequences are devastating. There is no question about that. That has been well covered by other colleagues, but I will tell you that a mandatory inspection program alone, without a thorough education program, will not work. I'm supportive of this motion because I'm supportive of the direction in restricting these organisms from getting into our province, but, Mr. Speaker, a mandatory inspection program alone, in my opinion and based on my experience in terms of health control of foreign diseases in our country, would not work.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake to close debate.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all my colleagues for speaking on this very important motion. Doing nothing is not an option. We need to do something. Doing nothing, we're going to devastate this province, and education is a start, and just by bringing this motion forward, we in this room are already a little bit more educated than we were before this motion was even introduced. I live in an area that is the Lakeland area. If this got into our lakes, that's a lot of our bread and butter for tourism, for our beauty, and so on.

The only thing that I have to say is that I trust that our Ministry of ESRD will bring some sort of measure forward to help protect this. I agree with the minister there, that we need to educate. We need to educate our boaters, our fishermen on the devastation of this. I urge all my colleagues to vote for it if for nothing else than to bring this topic forward and to educate the Alberta public about it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until the evening session, which starts at 7:30 tonight. Thank you.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, December 1, 2014

Issue 10e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, December 1, 2014

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Motions

Committee Membership Changes

10. Mrs. Klimchuk moved on behalf of Mr. Denis:
Be it resolved that the following changes to
- (a) the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services be approved: that Mr. Hale replace Mrs. Towle;
 - (b) the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved: that Mr. McAllister replace Mr. Amery;
 - (c) the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future be approved: that Mrs. Towle replace Mr. Lemke.

The Deputy Speaker: This motion is debatable.

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing none, the question has been called.

[Government Motion 10 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 3

Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014

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

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today at third reading to discuss amendments to the Personal Information Protection Act. The proposed changes will ensure that the Personal Information Protection Act authorizes trade unions to collect, use, and disclose personal information for matters related to labour relation disputes. Those amendments will address a trade union's right of freedom of expression under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms while maintaining key protection for Albertans' personal information under the act. For this reason I have no hesitation in supporting the proposed amendments.

With that, I move third reading of Bill 3, Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the first speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm certainly very interested in rising to speak about Bill 3. This is something that we've been watching for for quite some time. You know, we were very pleased, in fact, when it first came forward that this was going to be in the fall session of this year's legislation. Indeed, I just got back from the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, speaking to the Privacy Commissioner. Again, she expressed her sense of urgency about ensuring that these amendments were made to the Personal Information Protection Act. I think that

everyone knows that the Supreme Court ruled on the constitutional inadequacy of our legislation here in the province of Alberta, so we were watching and hoping that, of course, we would meet the deadline, which I guess we technically have, to ensure that we follow the order and the ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada in regard to fixing our PIPA legislation.

I must say, Mr. Speaker, that we were quite disappointed when we actually saw Bill 3. It's a bare minimum sort of bill, that I don't think necessarily even achieves the most important objective, which is to make Alberta's personal information legislation constitutionally compliant. I think, you know, that we need to check back on that because, of course, if we're building something here that maybe the Supreme Court will hit back to us, then we are really not doing the job. I think that the Supreme Court made it fairly clear in their ruling last year that there are far too restrictive problems with our current legislation to pursue a fair and legitimate objective.

We're seeing a number of problems that we would like to, I guess, point out here. First of all, the Supreme Court was fairly clear that the problems with PIPA extended far beyond the restrictions on freedom of expression by the union in the midst of a particular strike, that only apply to that strike. Rather, PIPA represents much wider, far-reaching infringements on the rights to free expression by everybody. In fact, the court saw fit to strike down the entire piece of legislation instead of just severing this one part that prevented unions from collecting, using, and disclosing information in the midst of a strike.

So it seems fairly clear that by only addressing that narrow issue, Bill 3, in fact, does not improve PIPA in a meaningful way but actually ignores the findings and the spirit of the Supreme Court ruling, which leaves us, Mr. Speaker, with a piece of legislation that's ripe for future conflicts and future challenges of the Charter, using government and court resources to deal with litigation that will arise for many, many segments of society that are affected by expansive restrictions on free speech. That's what the essence of our concerns are around, free speech and restrictions placed on that.

The basic idea that a union has the right of freedom of expression, communicating with the public, trying to persuade them is a fundamental and general principle of the objectives of the collective bargaining. The court hardly ever even needed to reiterate this, right? Paragraph 17 of the Supreme Court ruling:

... the Adjudicator's finding that none of these exemptions applied to allow the Union to collect, use and disclose personal information for the purpose of advancing its interests in a labour dispute, we conclude without difficulty that it restricts freedom of expression.

I mean, I don't think it can be any more unequivocal than that, Mr. Speaker, the ruling of the Supreme Court.

As we know, for unions to be effective in protecting the rights, interests, and well-being of their members, they need to use a number of measures to represent those interests. Amongst those, communication – in other words, the ability to express themselves freely – is one of the most important elements. For example, the unions need to be able to communicate with the public or the government about unsafe workplaces. They need to communicate with the public in order to influence pressure and public opinion in the context of labour disputes and negotiation processes as well. We know that this is a fundamental exercise that takes place in the midst of a legal strike, and we know that it's essential to communicate your position both to your members and to the general public as well.

The Supreme Court also saw the same thing, certainly, and was unequivocal in stating:

PIPA imposes restrictions on a union's ability to communicate and persuade the public of its cause, impairing its ability to use

one of its most effective bargaining strategies in the course of a lawful strike.

That's paragraph 37 of their ruling.

Further, Mr. Speaker, in paragraph 29 they say:

This Court has long recognized the fundamental importance of freedom of expression in the context of labour disputes . . . "For employees, freedom of expression becomes not only an important but an essential component of labour relations."

The court has also been clear over the years that picketing is a legitimate form of expression, not just in cases of lawful strikes, which is the only narrow exception that seems to be carved out in this particular draft of legislation that we have here today. Certainly, picketing is important. Communicating what is taking place on a picket line is absolutely essential, and a union or individuals should not be restricted from that. We know that to be the case, and the Supreme Court has reiterated that loud and clear.

Again, picketing is far from the only important communication method that unions use. Take, say, for example, the tainted beef scandal at XL Foods in 2012. The union raised concerns publicly about the issues in the plant that were leading to contaminated meat. That's a case where the union was engaged in expressive activity not just for the purposes of a strike but for food safety issues and workplace health and safety issues. Bill 3 does nothing to address those potential restrictions on these types of activities by unions or by anyone, really. Certainly, in the case of XL Foods the UFCW was actually doing a great public service to both expose poor practices in the slaughterhouse processing plant but also to forward an agenda that actually helped to clean up the issue, which was good not just for public health and public safety but for the meat industry in general here in the province of Alberta.

7:40

We still are recovering from that, but we are still feeling the positive effects of that action, too. If we restrict the capacity of individuals or of unions to point out health and safety issues, then, of course, we are doing that same situation a disservice, right? These rights of expression, Mr. Speaker, don't just benefit unions. As I said, the major purpose is to address political and social issues of the day and then work for social justice for all Albertans. So the specific work that a union might do to, as I said before, express and talk about health and safety issues but also workplace standards, wages, and so forth indirectly and directly affects positively the larger society as well. Anyway, by denying a key right necessary for individuals or unions to communicate and achieve these objectives, this bill is too restrictive, and we think that the well-being of all Albertans and, in fact, democracy is adversely affected as well.

It's interesting that the power imbalance between an employee and an employer was cited as a reason for excepting the collection, use, and disclosure of personal information from the typical prohibition in the context of the employment relationship. Since the employer needs the information and the employee might not feel that it is truly voluntary, the act allows for the collection, use, and disclosure of information without consent. They also noted that it would be inefficient and impractical to require consent in all cases.

So it seems that on one hand that this PC government understands the practicalities of a power imbalance in an employment relationship when it's convenient for them but not when it comes to the need of unions to engage in advocacy and in public discussion as well. Certainly, while we saw the historical need and, in fact, the immediacy and urgency for Bill 3 to come forward here in this fall session, it ends up falling short for the

purposes that it was subscribed for. We certainly are not in favour of the bill as a result.

Thank you. We'll have more discussion on it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak to Bill 3, Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014. Now, this bill became necessary as a remedy to a judicial review that ultimately resulted in the Personal Information Protection Act being declared unconstitutional and struck down. The bill is intended to make PIPA compliant with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Bill 3 will hopefully make PIPA compliant with the two sections of the Charter of Rights and fundamental freedoms respecting freedom of expression.

If we look at the situation that was arising, this bill came before the Supreme Court as a result of a labour dispute here in this province. It went to court, and on November 15 the court struck down the Personal Information Protection Act in its entirety and granted a 12-month stay to the Alberta government and an opportunity to replace the law. The Charter application resulted from a 305-day strike at the Gateway casino in West Edmonton Mall, which started in 2006. What was utilized there was the collection of information by the union where it was trying to express its opinion on what was happening at the work site. They were trying to utilize this information to get out to the general public what was happening at the location, what the strike was about, what their workers were faced with and were trying to send that information out to the public.

The Alberta Court of Queen's Bench, the Court of Appeal, and the Supreme Court of Canada all declared PIPA to be unconstitutional because it was too restrictive on freedom of expression in the context of a legal strike. In fact, in their decision the Supreme Court stated:

But the Act does not include any mechanisms by which a union's constitutional right to freedom of expression may be balanced with the interests protected by the legislation. This Court has long recognized the fundamental importance of freedom of expression in the context of labour disputes. PIPA prohibits the . . . expressive purposes related to labour relations. Picketing represents a particularly crucial form of expression with strong historical roots. PIPA imposes restrictions on a union's ability to communicate and persuade the public of its cause, impairing its ability to use one of its most effective bargaining strategies in the course of a lawful strike.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court found:

This infringement of the right to freedom of expression is disproportionate to the government's objective of providing individuals with control over the personal information that they expose by crossing a picketline. It is therefore not justified under s. 1 of the Charter.

At the end of the day, the court was balancing rights. They understood that what a union is supposed to do is to organize their workers, to get information out to the public for them to understand their position, and that the employer uses the same opportunity to do so for their cause. Also, the union recognized the power imbalance that exists between employers and unions in the way they go about their business and understood that in order for us to have freedom of association and to give it some real teeth, the ability of people to join a trade union or a workplace union is paramount under our Constitution. In order to give that any meaning, it has to have respectful ways for it to get its message across. That is also balanced with the freedom of

expression. The unions are allowed to use their information and use the ability to get their information out to the press.

We also understand that there's a second component to this, that the current amendments may – and I stress “may” – be able to meet the requirements of the Supreme Court. It appears that they are also still infringing on what the unions' obligations are to the rest of society and to situations that may be outside of a direct legal strike. While these amendments speak to the right of unions to collect information in the service of their freedom of expression during a strike, it ignores the vital role that unions play in speaking out against social injustices. More generally, this is the role that the Supreme Court referenced in delivering much of its commentary in the decision about it in the first place.

There is no doubt that trade unions have made many public service announcements, whether that's in regard to workplace conditions, whether that's in regard to inequality, whether that's in regard to other instances that happen in society. In my view, it is important that they be allowed to adequately comment on issues that are of concern both to them and to society in general.

We look at other cases where an expanding exemption could have been useful, and that would have been the 2012 tainted beef scandal with XL Foods in Brooks, Alberta. You know, we can look at a whole lot of situations where we could have an ability to allow really constructive social commentary on what we're doing and whether it's in the best interests of our society going forward. I think the union movement deserves that right and that ability to be able to go forward on that front.

7:50

If you look at this, I believe we're keeping in a minimalist mode here in Alberta, only protecting what we need to do for the temporary time being. I think we should have expanded it more broadly to enable trade unions to be able to promote different aspects of society that may be in our best general protection and to go from there.

In the main, I think that the government has done some good here by putting forward these amendments to get basic compliance with the Personal Information Protection Act. It remains to be seen whether these amendments, which appear to be of a bare-minimum nature, will hold up in a court should they be tested and the like. We may have to see another lengthy legal debate as to whether we in Alberta are holding up our end of the bargain when it comes to constitutional protections and fairness and the balancing of freedom of association and freedom of expression because we understand that we have these abilities and nothing is clear.

There is no doubt that both of these elements have reasonable limits in a free and democratic society, yet erring on the side that would protect society and allow people to have as large a voice as possible, in my view, is in the best interests of our society. When we try to shut down expression, shut down people's ability to communicate legitimate concerns on the way society is formed, is shaped, is running, in my view that's counterintuitive to the way we would want information to be received by the public.

The more information the public gets, Mr. Speaker, the more ability they have to gauge and dissect the information for themselves and make an informed opinion. I think this is something we should try to strive for, getting the public more information from various sources, whether they be from an employer, a trade union, government front benches, or opposition parties. This should be deemed a good thing, and we should try to expand that in all cases where it is warranted and where it is legitimate and where it is moved for reasonable purposes. In my view, you know, the government has had first crack at it, and we'll see whether it goes

far enough to recognize the fundamental importance of balancing historical rights and obligations going forward in this province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Those are my comments to this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to third reading of PIPA. I appreciate the previous two speakers sharing some of the background with the members in the House here on the relevance of this legislation and where it's coming from. Knowing our history is very, very important before we move forward.

Before I get into the legislation, I just want to mention my frustration with the fact that we are already in third reading. I think it does need to be iterated, you know, that the government has a tradition of following what they put on the Order Paper as far as Orders of the Day and government business and what we do, and unfortunately Bill 3 was not on the Order Paper to go through Committee of the Whole when it did. We actually had amendments with Parliamentary Counsel on this bill, but because the government broke with tradition and decided to force it through, our amendments got stuck at Parliamentary Counsel's desk.

I think it's really important to note this, that, again, as members know, Committee of the Whole is the opportunity for opposition parties to put forward amendments to try to strengthen a bill. Our abilities are severely limited when the government moves forward when we're waiting for approval from Parliamentary Counsel on amendments. I found that to be extremely disrespectful on the side of the government, trying to rush forward legislation, as we often see in this House, and ramming it through, again without acknowledging consequences that come with that. There are 87 elected members of this House. We represent roughly 4 million Albertans from all over the province. When you shut out or disallow, through whatever means, members from getting up and speaking or adding amendments and having a robust conversation, we're seriously infringing on the democratic rights of not just the members of this House but the people that we represent.

Having said that, now I will move into my interpretation of this bill, Mr. Speaker. Now, as the previous two speakers have said, you know, part of where PIPA and this conversation are going – our original intention was to support the bill. But once we had some time to go through it, seeing that there are significant challenges that I have with this bill – I mean, the original act of PIPA all spawns from 2006 at the Palace Casino strike line. The UFCW were filming people crossing the picketing lines and using that in their information. Basically, the adjudicator first found UFCW had contravened PIPA but that its collection, use, disclosure of the personal information was an expressive purpose, which are some of the functions of a labour union.

The Privacy Commissioner can't make findings on constitutional issues, and the case instead proceeded to a judicial review and up the courts, all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. Now, the Supreme Court of Canada didn't just overturn the ruling of the adjudicator; it actually threw the whole act out. It ruled that sections in question violated the UFCW's freedom of expression and that other sections of the act were more restrictive than necessary, and the act needed to be struck down in its entirety, Mr. Speaker.

You know, what members of the House need to know and acknowledge is that picketing is an important form of expression for unions and therefore part of their freedom of expression and

part of their right to collective bargaining and informing the public, and I'll talk in a little bit about the duty of unions to go beyond just informing their members about issues to informing the public and therefore serving the public interest.

Specifically on PIPA here, as I said, Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court ruled PIPA unconstitutional and struck it down. Now, this bill currently, as it's written, is problematic for the fact that the way it's written, we've already got issues or concerns with future court challenges, future Charter challenges. You know, as many members of the House may realize, what it does when there are court challenges: it gets tied up in the courts; it costs a lot of money; it wastes time.

As you're going to see, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to recommend that members vote against this bill so that we can get it right. There is a desire to get it right. We acknowledge that there are time restraints and that it's time sensitive. However, I think that just passing a poorly written piece of legislation that's going to be challenged is irresponsible, quite frankly.

The background on this freedom of expression is that, again, unions have a right to freedom of expression by communicating with the public in their efforts to persuade the public. You know, when we look at the example from the Supreme Court, specifically at paragraph 17,

given the Adjudicator's finding that none of these exemptions applied to allow the Union to collect, use and disclose personal information for the purpose of advancing its interests in a labour dispute, [they concluded] without difficulty that it restricts freedom of expression.

8:00

I mean, basically, Mr. Speaker, unions need to be able to communicate with the public or the government about unsafe workplaces. They need to be able to communicate in order to influence and pressure public opinion in the context of labour disputes and negotiation processes. The Supreme Court was unequivocal in saying that "PIPA imposes restrictions on a union's ability to communicate and persuade the public of its cause, impairing its ability to use one of its most effective bargaining strategies in the course of a lawful strike," which came from paragraph 37 of the Supreme Court's ruling.

Very, very important, Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague the Member for Edmonton-Calder pointed out, is the example of the tainted beef at XL Foods back in 2012. There you had an example of a union raising concerns publicly about the issues in the plant that were leading to contaminated meat. You know, I remember speaking in this House when we had a different piece of legislation in front of us, and that's when we talked about the whistle-blower legislation. One of the concerns that the Alberta NDP had was that it didn't extend to the private sector. When we look at everything that happened because of the tainted meat back in 2012 — from the amount of revenue that was lost, the amount of meat that was wasted, folks that were laid off when the plant shut down — much of that could have been avoided if the private-sector workers were protected in blowing the whistle.

You know, we had dialogues with folks who worked at that plant who said that there were some unsanitary practices going on, but none of them were willing to blow the whistle because they were scared of losing their jobs and they were scared of other ramifications as well. Many of the workers are temporary foreign workers who are afraid of being deported back to their home country. Here's a case in point where when you give and allow individuals and labour unions the ability to act on behalf of the public interest and in the public interest, and they are protected and given the proper tools to do so, it benefits everyone, and that

would have saved many, many dollars, that would have saved time, that would have saved, well, all of the wasted meat and product that occurred, Mr. Speaker.

By denying unions a key right necessary for them to communicate to the public, to their members in order to achieve their objectives, this bill as it's currently written, Mr. Speaker, is quite restrictive, and it's going to affect the well-being not just of those directly involved but, I would argue, of all Albertans.

You know, Mr. Speaker, what's interesting when I look at a case between local 558 and Pepsi-Cola Canada, free expression provides "an avenue for unions to promote collective bargaining issues as public ones to be played out in civic society, rather than being confined to a narrow realm of individualized economic disputes." Now, Bill 3 as it's written, unfortunately, is creating a lot of limitations and narrow exceptions. It doesn't do anything as it's currently written to extend and improve the rights to freedom of expression for most Albertans. In fact, it actually restricts it, especially when we talk about public safety and workplace safety.

You need to consider, Mr. Speaker and all members of the House, that strikes are not the only part of a labour negotiation process — and we've explained this many times, that actually a strike is usually the last resort that unions will go to in order to settle a dispute — but that process requires freedom of expression for unions to advocate on behalf of their members. Again, I would argue that much of that advocacy work goes beyond the scope of just, you know, their own union members and serves the public good.

From the beginning of the process to the end unions need to be able to communicate freely in order to advance their interests and, as I've said, also to advocate on behalf of the public good. By extending the right to collect, use, and disclose personal information only in the context of a labour dispute, which is how Bill 3 is currently written, Mr. Speaker, it flies in the face of the Supreme Court findings and advice because of that restriction to gather information only when there is a labour dispute and not when, obviously, there isn't one.

Now, the Supreme Court wrote very clearly that freedom of expression is crucial in all parts of the labour context, not just in the event of a lawful strike. So this narrow interpretation of this bill that the government has taken actually contravenes or goes against what the Supreme Court had ruled just a few years ago. You know, we very much would like to have seen the scope broadened a lot more. As I mentioned earlier, we had amendments that would have done that, but again sometimes I guess courtesy is not being displayed. The way it's currently written it doesn't deal with the underlying nature of PIPA that the Supreme Court found unconstitutional — okay? — that PIPA unreasonably restricts the free expression of many parties in legitimate contexts.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta NDP realizes the fundamental importance of freedom of expression in democracy and the need for all government legislation to restrict it as little as possible and preferably not at all, but I would argue not just in legislation but also for all members of this Assembly. I won't bring up what occurred before the break. All constitutionally protected activity, including the rights besides freedom of expression — like freedom of association, for example — should be exempted from the restrictions that are currently contained in PIPA.

Another issue of concern here, Mr. Speaker, is that this bill adds the ability, when we're talking about privacy and information law, to adjudicate matters that are essential questions of labour law and labour relations. So it's taking the ability of the Labour Relations Board, which is more appropriate when dealing with concerns, and moving it over to the desk of the Privacy Commissioner.

Now, I found it interesting, Mr. Speaker, that just this evening in the committee the Member for Edmonton-Calder informed me that there were proposals to cut the Privacy Commissioner's budget. That, in addition to adding more work and responsibility onto the Privacy Commissioner's plate, is . . .

Mr. Mason: A typical Tory move.

Mr. Bilous: Well, it seems to be something very typical of this PC government. Unfortunately, you're adding more work and cutting a budget and adding more responsibility. Clearly, that's not going to work, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell you that our concern with moving this to the Privacy Commissioner's desk from the Labour Relations Board is that it's going to lead to less than ideal applications of the law, which may lead, in turn, to inconsistencies in interpretation and application and, ultimately, stifle freedom of expression in the context of labour relations. Last time I checked, I don't know . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. I would like to ask my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview if he can elaborate a little bit on some of the reasons that he's put forward on why this is perhaps too narrow in scope and continue his most excellent and enlightening speech.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, let's allow him to do that. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for his question. I was just getting to the final points of my arguments. Needless to say, with the Privacy Commissioner not ideal to be handling these disputes, they're better left in the hands of the Labour Relations Board, which to my knowledge is one of their purposes of being, really, to look at settling labour disputes.

8:10

Mr. Speaker, what we need is more of a balance. Again, I find this bill a little too restrictive, partly because it does the bare minimum to allow a union and only a union on strike to collect, use, and disclose personal information for expressive purposes but only in the context of a strike – and that's where it is extremely limited – as opposed to collecting and using information in a broader context, maybe for the public good, maybe for an educational campaign, maybe to teach new employees, maybe to teach future workers. But this is being very, very limited, and as well it limits the bill as it's currently written. This isn't applicable to other unions that may not be on strike but may be also working at serving the public interest or expanding the scope of their information, and therefore it could stifle other unions' ability to participate.

I'm going to wrap up shortly here, but I just wanted to read something very briefly, and I'm looking for it as we speak. Regarding the Supreme Court of Canada's decision not only did it declare PIPA unconstitutional, the legislation's prohibition on the collection, use, and disclosure of information violates freedom of expression as protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. With respect to unions, Mr. Speaker, the court noted the fundamental importance of freedom of expression in the labour context and that, again, picketing is a crucial form of expression with strong historical roots. By restricting the union's

ability to communicate about the strike and persuade the public to support its cause, the legislation impairs the union's use of its most effective bargaining strategies. That's an excerpt taken from the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada on November 15, 2013.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that I've been able to explain the reasoning behind my position on this bill, that we should not pass it through. It needs to be broadened. It should come off the Order Paper. Let's get it right. Let's write it up and get it right the first time before we pass this through in the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Others under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak for the first time to Bill 3. I was also stunned that we're already in committee on this bill . . .

Some Hon. Members: Third reading.

Dr. Swann: Third reading. Sorry.

. . . and how quickly it advanced, notwithstanding the plans and our legislative agenda, which left many of us scrambling to get both the materials we needed to speak intelligently to it and to anticipate the speed at which it moved.

We recognized back in November 2013, after the Supreme Court struck down the Personal Information Protection Act governing the protection of personal information by private companies, that there was a huge gap left in our legislation. This was certainly affirmed by the Privacy Commissioner, who was, in fact, quite agitated when in the last couple of months there was still no clear direction on this important bill on privacy information and its protection. It took the Supreme Court to take action and call on Alberta to amend its privacy information protection act, which was in violation of the Charter. Things have been at a virtual standstill since that time until we finally got the bill after the change of leadership here.

Our own Member for Edmonton-Centre wrote to the commissioner to confirm that, among other things, Albertans' privacy protections would now be governed by the federal Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, far weaker and lacking the protection required for companies to inform individuals that their personal information might be compromised. That was an important element to our getting engaged.

I also wanted to raise some of the questions that Doug O'Halloran, the president of the UFCW, raised about the current amendments. It, I guess, adds to the concerns about the narrowness of this particular bill. He was concerned, as he is now, that the proposed amendment was narrow and failed to properly address the criticism levelled by both the union and the Supreme Court. While it spoke to the right of unions to collect information in service of freedom of expression, it ignored the vital role that unions play in speaking out against more broad issues of social justice and health and safety in some workplaces, a role vital to PIPA in the first place.

I was particularly interested in the origin of this and watched as the contention between the casino group and the government played out, with both accusing each other of violating information and privacy. Indeed, it took the Supreme Court to identify that the law needed to change here in Alberta to be compliant with the national values and principles of our Charter.

In connection with some of the issues that the United Food and Commercial Workers raised, I had a particular connection with XL Foods in Brooks and serious concerns about the ongoing challenges they were facing with contaminated meat and the limitations on some of the employees in speaking out on these issues. Obviously, it takes sometimes more than a little courage to identify some of the problems that are occurring in some workplaces that threaten not only individual workers but also the public at large. I have some sympathy, I guess, for both the UFCW and others who are saying that there needs to be much stronger support for the broader rights of workers and citizens in general to collect information of a visual nature and to present it when it represents a health and safety threat to the public or to the workers themselves.

These are somewhat common-sense issues, but they needed to be spelled out. Although this bill goes some way in enabling the kinds of information that can be shared during a strike, as is indicated, it fails, I think, in terms of the broader purpose of this bill. I understand that this will be reviewed in 2015. At least, that's the commitment that the minister has made, to have a full review of this bill and ensure that we do get at some issues relating to the spirit, not just the letter, of the act.

I'm not sure exactly how we'll vote on this. It's clearly moving in the right direction. It doesn't go far enough, but I'm hopeful that the 2015 review will allow us a much broader and in-depth opportunity to discuss some of the important dimensions of the social and political context.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to finally get a chance to get up and speak to this bill. I know a couple of other members of our caucus have mentioned this already, but it truly does bear repeating. I was until very recently the House leader for our caucus, since 2008, and I can tell you without hesitation that the standard practice and agreement between House leaders has been that every morning a note is sent to House leaders which outlines the projected business for that day. That's done so that members of every caucus can organize their critics and also organize their shifts because it's not always the case that everybody is in this House throughout all the debate every day. Based on the projected business schedule of the 24-hour period, we co-ordinate people to be in the House at different times.

8:20

Last week we were told that Bill 3 would go through second reading in the afternoon but that it would be back in the evening, Tuesday evening, for Committee of the Whole. We, of course, looked forward to that because we had a number of amendments that we wanted to make to Bill 3 because, as my colleagues have already outlined, there are some significant concerns that exist with this government's haphazard attempt to fix the Supreme Court of Canada's direction that the bill is otherwise entirely unconstitutional and won't continue. We wanted to have a debate and have a chance to put forward our amendments because, you know, that's what we're actually paid to do.

Unfortunately, what happened was that notwithstanding the agreement between the House leaders and the information that we received about the projected government business, the matter moved on to Committee of the Whole in the afternoon, which is entirely reasonable. That happens if there aren't enough people to speak to things. Then, of course, because the direction in the

agreement had been that it would be coming back in the evening as part of the projected government business in Committee of the Whole, what should have happened is that it should have been adjourned, not voted. Instead it was voted through in the afternoon, contrary to the information that the House leader had put forward to our House leader and through him to our whole caucus. Of course, that raises some very serious concerns about our ability to rely on the Government House Leader's assurances and statements to us because we did rely on them very much to our detriment and to the detriment of those Albertans who also have serious concerns about the way this bill is currently drafted.

So here we are in third reading attempting to deal with a number of issues that we would have had a chance to deal with in Committee of the Whole had the Government House Leader stayed true to the assurances that he had given to our House leader and other party House leaders. We are here instead attempting to debate this as thoroughly as we possibly can very, very late in the day. Let me just say as a former House leader that that is not a standard of behaviour that normally contributes to functional relationships between the parties in the House, and it's certainly not a good indication of the new regime or the new management's respect for our democratic process, Mr. Speaker. That being said, I'm sure, then, that my colleagues will understand why it is we are going to take a bit more time than they might have anticipated on this issue, because that's what happens when House leaders fail to live up to their personal promises.

Bill 3, as others have outlined, is a piece of legislation that was made necessary as a result of the Supreme Court of Canada reviewing our PIPA legislation and concluding that it breached the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and, in particular, the right of freedom of expression. As many people know and as has already been mentioned, this case came to the Supreme Court of Canada because there was a strike at a place called Palace Casino out in west Edmonton in West Edmonton Mall. The union in the course of that strike – it was a long strike – was communicating information about members of theirs who were crossing the picket line. A complaint was made with respect to whether or not that amounted to a violation of PIPA.

Now, it's interesting because, you know, I will say that this was a bit of a storied picket line. It was a picket line which occurred, actually, within the mall itself, and that actually raised another legal issue at the time, the whole issue of whether it was appropriate to have a picket line around a business which existed within the mall and whether the mall was allowed to prohibit people from engaging in the picket line.

It was interesting because I actually remember going there at one point, to that picket line, to offer my personal support to the picketers, and with me was the former leader of Canada's NDP, the hon. Jack Layton. We were on our way to the picket line, and he was asking: well, was there ever any problem with the picket happening inside the mall? I said: well, I think they actually did have to have a legal fight about that because the mall tried to avoid having their picket line inside the mall, and they won. And he said to me with much pleasure, "Well, you know why they did? It's because of a case called *R. versus Layton*," which was actually all about him. It established the right of picketers to picket businesses that were otherwise occupied within other commercial institutions. He was very pleased to go and to exercise the rights that he had won as an activist about 15 years earlier in Toronto, and I was very proud to be able to be there with him when he did it. Needless to say, the picketers at the time were overjoyed to have him come and provide support to the picket line which they had in place. A little bit of digression there.

The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was there, too, as the leader at the time of the provincial NDP. So there was a plethora of NDP supporters there that evening.

Going back to the point, though, the complaint was made about the union's communications around who was crossing the picket lines. It ultimately went to the Supreme Court of Canada, and the Supreme Court of Canada said: this section of PIPA is really far too limiting, and it limits the right to freedom of expression that unions need and deserve. In the course of it the Supreme Court of Canada said: you know, it's not really just about this section; the fact of the matter is that the act as a whole is far too limiting on the right to freedom of expression and with a number of different organizations.

It's interesting, really, to me – I have a personal interest in this – the decision that the Supreme Court of Canada made. I was actually asked by a couple of different unions way back in early 2000 to do an analysis of PIPA when it was just coming in and to tell them what it would mean for their internal operations. It was a very interesting project that I was engaged in because it became very clear to me that PIPA was a bill that had been expanded by this PC government to include organizations that were not originally intended to be covered by this kind of legislation.

Historically this notion of protecting personal information and privacy was a need that arose from a number of commercial organizations and institutions exploiting personal information for the purposes of enhancing marketing and commercial benefits. That's essentially what PIPEDA, which is PIPA's federal counterpart, is geared towards achieving: this idea of protecting the exploitation of people's personal information for the purposes of commercial interest. But when this government got their hands on that issue, they decided to expand it and to also protect people from community groups and member-based advocacy organizations, and that, of course, included unions.

Mr. Mason: What about corporations?

Ms Notley: Well, interestingly, it doesn't. I mean, it certainly applies to corporations in terms of their ability to use people's information to market to them. Corporations, when they advocate, though, have a tendency to just use money to advocate whereas more community-based advocacy organizations tend to communicate with people more in the course of their advocacy, and they tend to engage in a more grassroots form of organization. So that's sort of what a more grassroots, community-based advocacy is.

Corporate advocacy tends to involve high-paid lobbyists, you know, like the folks that have such a close relationship with our Health minister. Tobacco companies, for instance, will pay high-paid lobbyists to work with the Health minister to rewrite tobacco legislation whereas community health groups are more likely to use a member-based approach to write letters to the Health minister to say: jeez, it sure would be nice if you would focus on the individual health of citizens. They do it by way of letter campaigns.

Unfortunately, PIPA has a disproportionate effect. Those corporations which lobby through high-paid lobbyists are not necessarily limited because they don't rely on that grassroots form of advocacy. Less financially incentivized groups that are more community based and member based end up having their advocacy efforts limited by some of the provisions that exist within PIPA. And then, of course, unions are the perfect example of the kind of organization that is – it's like putting a square block into a circular hole. It's just not really designed for this legislation.

8:30

Really, that was kind of the point that the Supreme Court of Canada was trying to make to some extent. They said that the

whole piece of legislation was very awkwardly and inappropriately limiting the freedom of expression and the freedom of communication of, in this case, unions and not just in the one section that came before the Supreme Court of Canada. In fact, they did a holistic evaluation and said: really, there are a lot of parts of this legislation that are problematic. This just goes back to the kind of thing that I saw way back in the early 2000s, when I was doing an analysis of this very piece of legislation and trying to advise a couple of unions about how to continue to ensure the health of their grassroots, member-based communication while still respecting the objectives of the act.

Anyway, then the difficulty that arises from that is that Bill 3 takes an exceptionally narrow and limited approach to correcting the problems that were identified by the Supreme Court of Canada, and that is why we here today have a concern with this proposal, because it really just doesn't go far enough. The fact of the matter is that the same concerns that were identified by the Supreme Court of Canada continue to exist within the act, and it's just a matter of time before further challenges are taken to – we won't even have to go to the Supreme Court of Canada, I suspect, before it's ruled unconstitutional. So that's why we're saying that this proposal really is not adequate for the task at hand, which is to correct the problems within PIPA, to revive the legislation from its having been rendered inapplicable by the Supreme Court of Canada's evaluation of its impact on some very fundamental constitutional rights.

With that, because I don't want to run out of time, I feel that it's really important, then, that we refer this matter to committee so that it can be considered in more detail. I am going to move a motion that this Bill 3 be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 3, Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014, be not now read a third time because the Legislative Assembly believes that the bill does not reflect the spirit and advice of the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in order to render the Personal Information Protection Act constitutionally compliant.

A reasoned amendment is what I am proposing.

If you'd like me to stop for a moment.

The Deputy Speaker: We'll just pause and distribute that amendment, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Sure. You bet.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, this is a reasoned amendment, and we will label this amendment RA1.

We'll start over with the speakers again. Anyone that would like to speak to this amendment can speak to the amendment. We'll deal with the amendment, and then we'll come back to the bill as amended or not.

Ms Notley: Can I speak on the amendment?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. You can be the first speaker, hon. member. You'll just continue with your time. You have 45 seconds, hon. member.

Ms Notley: All right. Oh, 45 seconds. Okay. Well, I will just quickly note, then, a couple of the reasons why this is too limited. It talks about a lawful strike, and since we know that public-sector unions in this province aren't allowed to lawfully strike, for instance, the exception that is currently contained within this attempt to fix PIPA is too narrow. We know that a lot of unions are never going to be engaged in a lawful strike notwithstanding that they will be communicating with both the public as well as their

members on issues related to the negotiations of a contract. I would suggest that that communication would be as protected under the Constitution as would those who are engaged in a lawful strike.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Speaking to amendment RA1, the first speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and leader of the New Democrat opposition in Alberta for her reasoned amendment. I think that it's worthwhile for us to consider carefully whether or not this amendment is actually the best course for the Assembly to proceed in. I submit that it is, in fact, a very good move. Here's why.

The decision of the Supreme Court of Canada with respect to the Personal Information Protection Act was relatively broad. Often the courts will confine themselves to very narrow decisions affecting very specific sections or even specific words. In this case the Supreme Court did not do that. The Supreme Court took the step of striking down the entire act, and they commented in their decision that, in fact, this was not just something that related specifically to the freedom of expression in a specific case, for example a strike, but it was much broader. The court found that the legislation was unconstitutional, and the legislation's prohibition on the collection, use, and disclosure of personal information violates freedom of expression as protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

With respect to unions the court noted the fundamental importance of freedom of expression in the labour context and that picketing is a crucial form of expression with very strong historical roots. By restricting the union's ability to communicate about the strike and persuade the public to support its cause, the legislation impaired the union's use of one of its most effective bargaining strategies.

Mr. Speaker, it's in this context that we need to consider the reasoned amendment put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. She says in her motion that it not now be read a third time "because the Legislative Assembly believes that the bill does not reflect the spirit and advice of the Supreme Court of Canada" in its decision to render the Personal Information Protection Act constitutionally invalid. That, I think, is at the heart of why we need to pass this reasoned amendment.

Now, I also was present on that picket line, not once or twice but a number of times, and there were really two phases to that strike. Initially picketers weren't allowed inside the mall, and it was the middle of winter, very much like it is now, with snow and very, very cold temperatures. Picketers were confined to a small tent with, you know, one of those sort of barrel burners in the middle of the parking lot, and that was all they had. They had no washroom facilities. They were locked out of the building. They were very, very cold.

8:40

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know that many members in the conservative parties present in this house don't have a lot of sympathies with unions or, frankly, anybody that's a bit different, but that's a debate for another day. But in this particular case I do believe that without labour organizations and their ability to negotiate on behalf of their members and, if necessary, withdraw their services, the standard of living for many Albertans would be much lower than it is today and many rights that we have today would not exist.

Certainly, the equality of women and minorities has been advanced tremendously by the actions of labour unions in their collective bargaining and also in other ways through appeals to the Charter, and many social issues have been advanced a long way. For example, it was labour movements that advanced public pensions in this country. Health care, health and safety legislation: if you go back and look at what health and safety legislation looked like 30 or 40 years ago, you'll find that it's almost nonexistent. There was no workers' compensation. If you were injured at work, you could lose your home and your family. They've done a great deal to advance the cause of everyone, whether or not they're union members.

This right has been recognized and protected under the Charter by the Supreme Court, not just in this instance but in a number of other cases. The fact that it is distasteful to some members of this House is no reason to restrict it unduly or, in fact, even to fear it. I think that the Supreme Court of Canada was wise.

Now, eventually the union in that strike won the fight to be able to picket inside. I'm referencing, of course, the case that the hon. leader has mentioned that involved our former leader federally, Jack Layton. I was also there the evening that Jack visited the picket line, and I watched how union members conducted themselves. What they did was to talk to people going into the casino who were prepared to cross their picket line. They didn't do that in an aggressive way, but they wanted to talk to them about what was at stake for them. Many of these union members that were on strike were single parents with kids at home. They didn't earn very much money. They were able to talk about that. They were able to talk about the struggles that they had as working parents and as people who worked, essentially, for very low wages.

You know, it was interesting, Mr. Speaker, because a lot of the regular customers of the casino knew these people. They knew them, and they had a relationship in the casino with them, a friendly relationship. Many people were persuaded that by crossing the picket line they were actually hurting the livelihood of their friends and the people that were working in the casino and that they were not advancing exorbitant demands but were simply trying to make ends meet in their family budget. That's really what it was all about, Mr. Speaker.

Now, some people were rude and dismissive and so on, but many of the regular customers were persuaded, and that's really, I think, at the heart of why employers don't want this to happen. If people won't cross the picket line, if the customers won't cross the picket line, then the strike has a better chance of being successful and the employer may well be compelled to make some sort of compromise. Let's not forget . . . [interjection] Hon. member, did you want to go on the record? No, I didn't think so.

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair, hon. members, please. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has the floor.

Continue, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to compose myself and carry on.

Mr. Speaker, it was, in fact, fairly moving to see this interaction, and I was really quite pleased. But, of course, employers would rather just carry on business as usual, bring in replacement workers, and just leave their former employees out in the cold trying to find some new job.

In this society that we've built, there are many components. There are many, many different types of activities and people from different walks of life and different perspectives, but certainly the role that the labour movement has played goes beyond just arguing for narrow advances in their own paycheck.

to a broad range of benefits for them and their families to important social programs in this country that they fought for and won.

I bet, Mr. Speaker, that one victory of the labour movement that every member of this House appreciates and may not know came from the labour movement may in fact enlighten some members of this House with respect to how the labour movement has touched their lives. One of the shining achievements of the labour movement is the weekend, and I will bet you a nickel that almost every member of this House has enjoyed that benefit at some time in their lives and probably is looking forward to the next weekend after this week because it's going to be kind of a mean week, I think.

I don't know what would happen if we had to operate this place seven days a week, Mr. Speaker, without taking a weekend. I mean, we actually get three days because of a constituency day as well, and I know we're all busy doing things in our constituencies all of that time, but it's still a break from this place. If we had to work here seven days a week, 12 hours a day, I don't think many of us would still be living because I think, you know, we would kill each other. [interjections] We would not kill each other; I was making a joke, Mr. Speaker. But I think we would not get along in such a jolly fashion as we do if, in fact, we had to work in this place seven days a week.

Mr. Speaker, it's pretty clear to me that this bill as it is written attempts to get around the Supreme Court decision in the most narrow way. It attempts to circumvent the spirit of the Supreme Court decision, and as such it opens us up to another challenge. I think that that is why it is a prudent and wise course that's been suggested by the hon. leader of the NDP. It will save the province litigation and whatever damages there might be, the trampling of people's rights, in the meantime.

I think that we should give very careful consideration to actually supporting this reasoned amendment, particularly in light of the unsavoury move of the House leaders on the other side in bringing forward this bill through committee when the agreed-upon business had it finishing at second reading, particularly when we weren't prepared with our amendments because they were still under consideration by Parliamentary Counsel. It took away our right as an opposition party, as members, individual members, to attempt to influence the legislation in a way that would reflect our constituents' views. I think that that has been in the past a subject of points of privilege but has not been found to be valid by the chair, so there's no point at this stage, then, to proceed with it as a point of principle.

8:50

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a great privilege, actually, to speak to this reasoned amendment put forth by the leader of the fourth party. It says: Bill 3, Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014, be not now read a third time because the Legislative Assembly believes that the bill does not reflect the spirit and advice of the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in order to render the Personal Information Protection Act constitutionally compliant.

I would say at this time that this is a very reasonable amendment, that I would urge all members to support given the context in which we receive these amendments. I think it's important to note that the Supreme Court of Canada in their decision in this case didn't just knock out certain lines and

provisions of the Alberta act. Instead, it went through the entire exercise of rendering the entire act nugatory, and as a result it was sent back to this government to fix what, in fact, was broken.

If we look at the situation as it arises, we are dealing with some fundamental rights under our Charter of Rights and Freedoms: the freedom of expression dovetailing with freedom of association, the ability of people to actively organize and collectively bargain and to go ahead and be able to strike in a reasonable fashion, where they promote their aims, their objectives, their goals. We also recognize from the context of the Supreme Court decision that this is not a narrow right that unions hold only in times of striking. In fact, unions should and probably do have the right to comment on a whole range of activities happening in our society, with an ability to try and improve the status of working people, the status of public health, the status of health care, and the status of other things.

We note that unions across this province are doing that on a daily basis. You see unions like the Alberta Teachers' Association advocating on behalf of the teaching profession, on behalf of better results for our students. We see the other associations bringing forth health concerns and how to make our health system better and, you know, workers all across this province bringing forth information on government's running of various bills and amendments that go through this House and others. I don't think we should limit those opportunities for trade unions to speak up about issues that they believe are important, that may be in the public domain and may actually help this province become a better place.

I, too, note the decision that was written November 15, 2013, by the Supreme Court, where it said:

This Court has long recognized the fundamental importance of freedom of expression in . . . labour disputes. PIPA prohibits the collection, use, or disclosure of personal information for many legitimate, expressive purposes related to labour relations. Picketing represents a particularly crucial form of expression with strong historical roots. PIPA imposes restrictions on a union's ability to communicate and persuade the public of its cause, impairing its ability to use one of its most effective bargaining strategies in the course of a lawful strike. This infringement of the right to freedom of expression is disproportionate to the government's objective of providing individuals with control over the personal information that they expose by crossing a picketline. It is therefore not justified under [section] 1 of the Charter.

If we look at one of the key phrases not only in that passage I just read but throughout many of the decisions made by the Supreme Court and other bodies, it recognized the historical role unions have played. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood went through it very well: the implementation of safe workplaces, the implementation of reasonable work hours, the role of unions in providing, I guess, more of a role for women in our society and recognizing pay inequality in this country, the historical role unions have played in moving public health care forward. In fact, they in no small way were responsible for many of the changes in the way we deliver health care in this country that were positive movements for our society at large. They continue to do that work today. If you read these court cases and the body of material that courts across this land have talked about, it's the ability of trade unions to comment fairly on values and roles that they believe are important to the citizenry.

In my view, this would be a good time for us to assess whether or not the narrow amendments we have made here to the PIPA legislation actually correspond with the decisions that have been rendered across this country in regard to freedom of association – the right to join trade unions and the right for trade unions to do

their work and reflect adequately on issues facing society – balancing that with freedom of expression and how they're able to communicate this information to the public.

In my view, this is an eminently reasonable amendment. Why would we want, again, to pass this bill and then have it challenged in court, have the ongoing litigation go up the food chain from Queen's Bench to Court of Appeal to Supreme Court only to have it come back to this government and have the Supreme Court say, "No; you guys have messed this up again, and you have not complied with recognizing the need or the ability to have a broadened context and a broadened recognition of what trade unions and their role is in our society"? It would behoove us, I think, to follow this advice. I think that given what has transpired in regard to this bill and the fact that we didn't get an opportunity as opposition parties to comment fully and fulsomely on the bill, to offer our amendments that would have made this bill stronger, would have allowed us to more diligently get to the bottom of the issues we are now discussing, it would be doubly important for us to get to that point.

Simply put, Mr. Speaker, it seems like there has been a rush to close debate on this issue like we have in other cases both this week and going on next week, where we won't have an opportunity to discuss things that are important to the Alberta people, and that is unfortunate. On this note I think this is an eminently reasonable amendment, one that I would support, and I would urge all members of this House to follow suit and vote in favour of it. It's a good time for us to take this opportunity given to us and to reflect on this, and there is adequate ability for us to do that at this time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

My apologies, hon. members. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available in this segment if anyone would like to offer questions or comments to the member.

If not, then I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Shaw.

9:00

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't present myself as an expert on this legislation. Thankfully, we have one of those. We have the Information and Privacy Commissioner here. She's an independent officer of this Legislature, and I'm going to share with this House the comments that she made via press release, which I will table tomorrow, regarding Bill 3. She says:

I am pleased the government brought these amendments to the legislature quickly as the importance of private sector privacy legislation in Alberta cannot be overstated. I believe the amendments address the issues raised by the Supreme Court while, at the same time, balancing the need to protect the privacy interests of individuals.

It doesn't get any clearer than that. This is why we have the expert.

Further to that, Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleagues to my left may be interested to know that PIPA has in itself, written into the act, a mandatory review by a select special committee that is supposed to take place next year. That committee, based on the legislation, needs to be struck by July 1, 2015. And the reality is that failure to pass Bill 3 now or as soon as possible jeopardizes the exact reason why we're having this debate in the first place, which was to advance this bill, get it in line with the Supreme Court decision, and ensure that we are able to continue to operate under Alberta-made legislation as opposed to federal.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all members of this Assembly to vote against this amendment, and I would also

request that the question be called as soon as humanly possible. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, then I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Caldor.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and certainly I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, that Bill 3 not be read for a third time. It's interesting to see how she did not reflect the advice of the Supreme Court of Canada. Respectfully, certainly, the Member for Calgary-Shaw . . .

Mr. Wilson: I was just reading the Privacy Commissioner's . . .

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, yeah. For sure. There is a level of expertise there. But, I mean, I would defer personally to the expertise of the Supreme Court of Canada – right? – who made it very unequivocal that we needed to enforce this in a much more broad sort of way. So, you know, we're just trying to do a public service here, to give people the sense that, you know, if something's not going to be challenged almost immediately – and we do have the provision for a review in 2015, so I think we're kind of laying the groundwork for the review here as well so that we make sure that we don't move further in the wrong direction. That's all.

You know, it's also interesting that the Privacy Commissioner wrote a letter on this issue and did express similar, in a more circumspect way because, of course, she needs to make sure that she's getting this level of legislation in place – but her letter and advice were also critical of the same areas that we are expressing here today, too. Everybody's got a role, of course, in the Legislature, inside and out and each of the offices and so forth. So it's important for us to make sure that this element of this decision is brought forward in the most clear possible way.

You know, I do have the third and fourth and fifth page of that same letter, where she does describe these sections that are controversial: sections 14, 17, and 20. And, certainly, she and the Privacy Commissioner's office do a great job. We know that this ruling and any subsequent indiscretions around this legislation will end up mostly on her lap, and the Privacy Commissioner's office will have to deal with challenges that come forward. So it's very important and incumbent upon us to make sure that, perhaps, we get it right, not read this a third time, and build a proper budget for the office for the Privacy Commissioner, too, I would suggest. I'm kind of alarmed to hear that, you know, people want to go after the capacity for that office to function at the very time when their workload and the amount of cases coming forward are increasing 125 per cent over the last three years. I found that to be striking, Mr. Speaker, and certainly a lot of it from the freedom of information and PIPA generates more work for that office.

The issue, Mr. Speaker, that I would like to just talk about here a little bit more – people haven't really expressed it fully – is the issue of Bill 3 creating very narrow exceptions for the scope by which information can be revealed. You know, it's not just people in the midst of a strike because, as my colleague here from Edmonton-Strathcona pointed out, there are many unionized workers that, in fact, are not even allowed to strike. We must not preclude their use of information and communication with the public, with their members, and so forth simply because they can't enter that narrow confine that's defined here in this particular bill. We don't need to do that. We shouldn't do that, and – you know what? – the Supreme Court said that we shouldn't do that either. I mean, that's fairly obvious.

Another area that I was thinking about was in regard to groups of workers that are seeking their first contracts and, again, employing exactly the same parameters of communication. In fact, the communication in the first contract is even more critical to the members and to the general public and so forth, so for us to narrow their scope and capacity to use information, again, really gets in the way of best practices for good labour relations.

So yes, I certainly encourage everyone to support this amendment. The personal information amendment brought forward I would encourage everyone to read it very carefully and support it wholeheartedly and enthusiastically.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker. The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm quite happy that my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has brought forward this reasoned amendment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is calling for this bill to now not be read a third time because we don't believe it reflects the spirit and advice of the Supreme Court's decision. I will try to keep my comments to that point, and there are a few points to make.

Having, you know, spoken with various groups that either were involved in the Supreme Court decision or others that have studied that case, again, Mr. Speaker, you can appreciate the fact that when a case does work its way all the way up to the Supreme Court and there is a ruling, it is really a landmark case and one that sets a precedent which future cases will be compared to and used as a point of judgment.

You know, I want to mention the fact, Mr. Speaker, that back in 2013 the Supreme Court of Canada did declare PIPA unconstitutional. This is very, very significant. Basically, that legislation prohibited the collection, use, and disclosure of personal information, which violated the freedom of expression as protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, again, one of the highest pieces of legislation, which all others need to ensure that they don't contravene, these great pieces of building blocks or fundamental rights that all Canadians enjoy.

Now, you know, Mr. Speaker, the issues that this piece of legislation brings forward may be – I mean, they're going to be challenged, I believe, as far as their consistency with the Supreme Court decisions. But what needs to be recognized, first and foremost, is that this bill, as it's currently written, is inconsistent with the spirit of the Supreme Court's decision. Just to reiterate, the court noted the sweeping nature of PIPA's restrictions and their impact within the labour context and not just their impact during a labour dispute, which, to me, seems as though should this legislation continue to move forward, it will be challenged. As I've mentioned earlier, not the best use of tax dollars, of our time, having a piece of legislation that's going to be challenged and challenged probably all of the way up, wasting dollars and time of many folks.

9:10

I think, you know, this current piece of legislation will perpetuate PIPA's inconsistency with the federal counterpart, PIPEDA, which, to remind members, only applies to personal information collected, used, and/or disclosed for a commercial purpose. The unconstitutionality of this legislation stems from its application to all personal information regardless of the organization's purpose in using such information.

This piece of legislation may also invite more litigation from unions, political or social groups whose freedom of expression this current bill will continue to infringe upon.

The other part, Mr. Speaker, is that it will involve the Privacy Commissioner in labour disputes rather than leaving those issues regarding such disputes to be resolved by the Labour Relations Board, which is an expert tribunal on such matters and where, quite frankly, those decisions should remain. I mean, those reasons to me seem quite clear and logical as to why this bill should be referred.

I'll just mention a few other points here, Mr. Speaker, if I can find them quickly enough. You know, I think that the theme of the concern that myself and my colleagues have tried to share with the House is, again, the fact that the current legislation as it is written is quite myopic in scope. It's quite narrow and restrictive and doesn't allow for freedom of expression by unions in a larger, broader context.

As my colleagues have so eloquently described, examples of successes that unions have had which have been shared by all Albertans, regardless of if a person has been employed with a workforce that was unionized or not, examples from, you know, having the weekend off, an eight-hour workday, paid overtime, as far as safety legislation: these have all been front and centre for labour unions in our history. The reason that we have such laws to protect individuals, the right to collective bargaining, et cetera, comes from unions and, if we want the long explanation, really was born out of the Industrial Revolution, when we had numerous examples of abhorrent conditions that predominately children and women worked in. From that was born the labour movement as far as defending the rights of individuals and of workers, one of my more preferred topics to teach when I taught social studies, Mr. Speaker.

I did want to mention that, again, the reason why I am supporting this amendment of mine and encouraging all members to support it is for the simple fact that PIPA imposes restrictions on the union's ability to communicate, persuade the public of its cause, which effectively impairs its ability to use one of its most effective tools, Mr. Speaker, and that's effective bargaining strategies in the course of a lawful strike.

Now, this infringement on the right to freedom of expression is quite disproportionate to the government's objective of providing individuals with control over personal information that they expose by crossing a picket line. You know, I think there's much to be learned from the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada. It's a fairly lengthy document that they've put forward explaining their rationale for their decision. But, as we can see, the current legislation as it's written is quite narrow in scope, and my concern is, Mr. Speaker, among many things, that there will be numerous challenges should this bill go forward. Therefore, I'm supporting this amendment to refer this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, are there any other speakers?

The question has been called.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment RA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:16 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Hehr	Notley
Eggen	Mason	

Against the motion:

Amery	Fritz	Olesen
Bhardwaj	Horne	Olson
Bhullar	Jansen	Quadri
Brown	Jeneroux	Quest
Cao	Johnson, L.	Rowe
Cusanelli	Kennedy-Glans	Sandhu
DeLong	Khan	Sarich
Dirks	Klimchuk	Stier
Donovan	Leskiw	Swann
Dorward	Luan	VanderBurg
Drysdale	Lukaszuk	Wilson
Ellis	Mandel	Woo-Paw
Fawcett	McIver	Xiao
Fenske	Oberle	Young
Fox		

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 43
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[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: We're now back to the bill.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if it might be appropriate at this time that I rise and request unanimous consent of the House to waive for the remainder of the evening Standing Order 32(2) and shorten the length of time between division bells from 10 minutes to one minute.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Deputy Speaker: We are now back to third reading of the bill. The next speaker, who hasn't spoken already, is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When the Government House Leader violates an understanding about which bills will be debated at which time and leaves a small opposition party with amendments that they can't bring forward to a bill, then they trample on the rights of the minority in this House, and there needs to be some sort of price exacted for that kind of disrespect for the democratic rights of the members of a minority party in this House. I just want to make that crystal clear for the hon. members who may be wondering at our vote on that last piece.

9:30

I am going to speak to Bill 3, and I'm going to talk a little bit about the importance of changes that need to be made. Now, the court in its decision when it struck down Alberta's legislation said that it was restricting a union's ability to communicate about the strike and to persuade the public to support its cause and that the legislation impaired the union's use of its most effective bargaining strategies. I've commented on that in terms of the labour context, Mr. Speaker; that is to say, in my comments to the previous amendment, when I talked about the ability of union members on strike on the picket line to persuade patrons of the casino not to cross the picket line because they came to an understanding that, in doing so, they would hurt the interests of people whom they knew and had some sympathy and empathy for. So that's one piece of it.

Mr. Speaker, I think the court is also talking about other activities of unions. Unions do not just restrict themselves to collective bargaining on behalf of their members. They also

represent their members on broader issues, and we've talked a little bit in this House about the role that unions have in terms of bringing about many of the changes in society. Many of the programs and social benefits that we all enjoy have been won by unions and not necessarily by unions negotiating directly with an employer for the provision of certain benefits but benefits that are provided by the federal government or by a provincial government in order to provide some universal benefit for all Albertans or all Canadians. Public health care and the medicare system would be a very good example of that, as would pensions or workers' compensation.

Now, those are not things that they won at the negotiating table. Those are things that they won by representing their members politically to various levels of government and advocating on behalf of not only their members but also non-union members, who also benefit from those things. So to restrict this just to specific union activity by just the union that might be involved in the labour activity, as this bill does, flies in the face of what the Supreme Court has said and what it's talking about. It's talking about the right more broadly of unions to engage with the public on a variety of social, economic, and political activities, and that's a right – a right of freedom of expression, freedom of speech, if you will – that is afforded to unions as it's afforded to other citizens and groups of citizens.

In this particular case I think that the bill is far, far too narrow in its definition of what it's going to allow. It is, in our view – and we have obtained legal advice with respect to this bill, Mr. Speaker – inconsistent with the spirit of the Supreme Court's decision. The court noted the sweeping nature of PIPA's restrictions and their impact in the labour context, not just their impact during a labour dispute.

As well, PIPA's sweeping provisions negatively impact other political and social organizations, not just unions. What would we say, then, for example, if organizations representing GLBTQ youth wanted to picket at a Progressive Conservative policy convention, for example? This may strike other people as far-fetched, but after today I think that it's increasingly likely that things like this are going to start to happen. It may be unpleasant and uncomfortable for Progressive Conservative MLAs and party members. To that I say, Mr. Speaker: good. But I also say that whether it makes someone uncomfortable or they wish they would just go away, if they're exercising their free speech, their right of assembly, their freedom of expression, those are guaranteed under the Charter, whether it's an individual or whether it's an organization, and we ought not to be restricting these kinds of things unduly.

So it's pretty clear – and I'll quote from this – that the sweeping provisions negatively impact other political and social organizations, not just unions. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, this bill will perpetuate PIPA's inconsistency with the federal Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, or PIPEDA, which only applies to personal information collected, used, and/or later disclosed for a commercial purpose. The unconstitutionality of Alberta's legislation stems from its application to all personal information regardless of the organization's purpose in using such information.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, the federal legislation is aimed specifically at protecting people's personal information relative to commercial purposes. So a company operating, for example, may collect information about you in order to market their goods to you. The Internet is probably one of the best examples of this. We see that every time we open up Facebook. But it's pretty clear that there are restrictions and necessary restrictions on the use of people's personal information under the federal legislation for

commercial purposes whereas Alberta's legislation is much more sweeping than that. It's much broader than that, and it attempts to restrict the ability of organizations, for political or social purposes, for example, to collect information.

The Supreme Court has said that that's wrong, yet that's not addressed in this act. That's why we fear that there's very likely going to be another successful legal challenge to this particular act because the provincial government, unfortunately – I know this almost never happens – haven't been listening very well, and they aren't listening in this case to the Supreme Court. That's a little different, a little more serious than not listening to public organizations or the opposition. In the end, I think that we will all be the poorer for it.

The unconstitutionality of Alberta's legislation stems, again, from its application to all personal information regardless of the organization's purpose in using such information and, therefore, contravenes the Charter, Mr. Speaker. Furthermore, this will invite more litigation from unions and political and social groups whose freedom of expression the legislation will continue to infringe upon. That is where we're going to go if we pass this legislation. We'll be back in court, and the government may yet have to face its legislation being struck down by the courts and come back a third time to this House cap in hand with yet another attempt to rewrite the legislation.

Finally, according to our opinion, Mr. Speaker, this will involve the Privacy Commissioner in labour disputes rather than leaving issues regarding such disputes to be resolved by the Labour Relations Board, which is the expert tribunal on such matters. In other words, it's really going to muddy the waters. It's going to be bringing in two commissions now, not just the Labour Relations Board. Now the Privacy Commissioner will be drawn into various political as well as labour disputes, and I think it's going to create all sorts of confusion.

For those reasons and a number of others that I haven't had time to enumerate, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move on behalf of my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Calder that the motion for third reading of Bill 3, Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 3, Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014, be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time this day six months hence." I have the requisite number of copies, Mr. Speaker, which I can send to the table.

9:40

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. We'll just pause while we distribute that. That's a hoist amendment, so we'll call that H1 and give just a few moments so that we can get that distributed.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you have three minutes and 55 seconds. You may speak to your amendment.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of reasons to support this amendment. I certainly think that six months from now is probably a better time, and particularly since the House won't be sitting, then we can make this silly bill just go poof and go away.

I think that there are other more serious reasons why we ought to do this, and I've enumerated them. We don't think that it's consistent with the Supreme Court decision in a number of ways. We think the legislation was struck down for a number of reasons, many of which are not addressed by the current bill that is before us. We think that there are serious issues affecting the rights under

the Charter of organizations and individuals to freedom of expression. We certainly agree with the Supreme Court of Canada with regard to that point, Mr. Speaker.

I do believe that the hoist is an opportunity to dispose of the bill while the government reconsiders what the Supreme Court has said and to give serious thought, instead of trying to restrict the rights of organizations and groups of citizens and unions and other organizations with whom it doesn't necessarily agree, that it wants to do as Voltaire talked about, and that is protect and defend the rights of the freedom of speech of people with whom they disagree. There's a famous quote. I'm not going to do it an injustice by grossly misquoting it here, but it is, in fact, an important concept that it's important for governments to fight for the rights of people with whom it does not agree. We haven't seen that from this government, not in the least; in fact, quite the contrary.

So it would be refreshing, then, if hon. members would actually stand with us and vote against this bill by supporting the hoist amendment that we have just put forward. I encourage all hon. members opposite to do so, Mr. Speaker. It would be good for the soul, and it could exorcise many demons, I'm sure, that are bothering some members opposite tonight.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I'm prepared to take my place and encourage all members to support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Other speakers to the amendment? The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I'm pleased to be able to speak to this amendment because the amendment put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Calder is a good one. As rightly described, were it to be successful, then Bill 3 would fail, and pending this government's more comprehensive and thoughtful remediation of the problems that exist with PIPA, we would be governed by PIPEDA, the federal legislation. So just to be clear, it doesn't mean that we then are no longer governed by private-interest privacy legislation. We would be. We would be governed by the federal act, which becomes applicable in the absence of the provincial act.

I've been asked: well, isn't the provincial act better? In some ways the provincial act is better, but in other ways the provincial act is not better. This is one of those ways. The provincial act has always been an act which has been more aggressive in terms of limiting and impacting in a very sweeping way the activities of other political and social organizations, not just unions but other organizations of the sort. Hence, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood's reference to members of one of those rare gay-straight alliances picketing in front of a Conservative Party convention, for instance. That would be another social organization whose activities could be constrained, and the freedom of expression could be constrained by the same kinds of problems that were identified by the Supreme Court of Canada in their review of PIPA. That's what we're concerned about, that this government is taking an exceptionally narrow attempt to fix the legislation and not dealing with the broader issues.

Now, one of the members took the time to highlight the arguments and the submissions that were made by the Privacy Commissioner in favour of the recommendations which we find in Bill 3. But I think that in one way, as much as I have tremendous respect for the work of our Privacy Commissioner – and I believe that our commissioner has been very effective in her role, and I'm

very pleased with the contributions she's made to public debate on these issues in a lot of different areas over the term of her tenure.

But in this particular area I think that perhaps the concern that we would have around this legislation, in fact, is arguably revealed in the letter to the Minister of Justice that was prepared by the office of the Privacy Commissioner. In that, particularly on page 3, the commissioner reviews the particular components of Bill 3 and argues that that is the best balance between, on one hand, the freedom of expression of the union and, on the other hand, the privacy rights of individual Albertans. As has already been noted, this legislation and the language in Bill 3 really allows for a great deal of discretion and deliberation on the part of the Privacy Commissioner as to what is a reasonable limitation in the circumstances and all that kind of stuff. So there's a great deal of discretion being used by the Privacy Commissioner.

But even in this letter the Privacy Commissioner refers to the issue of how, you know, there is a need to strike a balance. On one hand, what they're doing is striking a balance with respect to the union's freedom of expression during the course of a lawful strike. Again, as others have stated, one of the points of not having the Privacy Commissioner be the person that deliberates on this question is: does the Privacy Commissioner really bring that expertise of labour relations to the table in order to be able to properly adjudicate in this particular case on what is a reasonable balance?

In the letter itself the Privacy Commissioner refers to this notion of a lawful strike, yet as I started to talk about before I ran out of time when I last had a chance to speak about this issue, we know that there are a number of unions certified under the Labour Relations Code and the public-sector employee relations code in Alberta that don't have a lawful right to strike and never have a lawful right to strike. Does that mean that in the course of working collectively, because they are a collective organization, to advocate for the rights of their members in terms of their bargaining and their terms and conditions of employment, they are not entitled to have that balancing act applied in the course of working to achieve those objectives, that only a union that's entitled to lawfully strike gets to participate in that balancing act, and that a union that has no capacity to lawfully strike then must simply become subordinate to the very private interests which feature repeatedly throughout PIPA?

9:50

PIPA is a set of rights that's very individualistic in its articulation, which is fine, but there are organizations and traditions and institutions within our society that don't arise from an individualistic conception of rights, that, in fact, function very effectively, I might add, through the development and the evolution of a collective sense of rights. It's not just unions to which I'm referring. I mean, quite frankly, many would argue that a number of indigenous groups also operate in that way, that their conception of rights is, in fact, collective and that the collective right takes precedence in some cases over the individual right.

There is a balancing act that needs to take place here, but in this particular case we have the Privacy Commissioner engaging in that balancing act and suggesting that using lawful strike as the parameter for that exception is the appropriate way to do that. Yet inherent in that recommendation appears to be a failure to understand that probably 40 per cent of the people who are members of unions in Alberta actually don't enjoy a lawful right to strike because we are Alberta, and we've long since decided to ignore the UN convention on the rights of workers. We have decided to simply not allow a significant number of Alberta's citizens to have the lawful right to strike.

Given that inherent in her very letter there appears to be potentially a failure to understand that for that union to achieve its very, very primary purpose, which is to bargain and advocate on behalf of its members to secure the most favourable working conditions possible, in that objective not every union has the right to lawfully strike. They may still have rights to picket, but, again, based on the language in this legislation, even though they might have a right to picket, that right would be subordinate to the provisions in PIPA because the picketing is not occurring in conjunction with a lawful strike.

Of course, there are lots of times that pickets are appropriate even though they're not a part of a lawful strike. For instance, just a month and a half ago I was at a picket line that was associated with a decision of a private or nonprofit – I can't remember if it was a private or nonprofit – care provider, at the sort of economic behest of this government, to contract out a bunch of the work done by unionized employees to a multinational company, that would theoretically do it cheaper for lower wages and probably to lower standards as well. Those members of the union were picketing because they were about to lose their jobs, but they weren't on strike. They hadn't withdrawn their labour, but they were still picketing to make the point that their work had been contracted out and that it was going to compromise the health and safety of the residents within that place as well as the government's ability to ensure the highest standard of care within that particular institution.

So they were picketing, but under this very limited section which occurs in this piece of legislation, that picketing and any sharing of information that would have occurred within the context of that picketing would not be protected and would not be part of that balancing exercise because it is so artificially limited. Again, I would suggest that it's artificially limited because the Privacy Commissioner, although an expert in issues of privacy law, is not an expert in labour relations. Really, probably it was not the best place to come up with the language that would circumscribe the exceptions to the particular provision which is under discussion, initially in the Supreme Court of Canada case and subsequently in Bill 3.

So that's why, then, with the greatest of respect to the Privacy Commissioner I would suggest that the submissions that are offered, while helpful – very helpful – and worthy of consideration in a more comprehensive deliberation of how to deal with these issues in rewriting PIPA, are perhaps not as effective in terms of coming up with this particular section.

You know, at one point somebody over there was sort of rolling their eyes, saying: "Oh, yeah. You guys are just standing up for the union. Blah, blah, blah. That's all you're really here to do." I mean, it is true. I had the fabulous opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to slip home between this afternoon's session and tonight just to quickly have dinner with my family and to touch base with my son, who's in the middle of working on an essay on the Industrial Revolution in Manchester and what happened to the quality of life for regular, common folk in Manchester during the 19th century. It was interesting, reading through that historical stuff with him to help him with his essay, just being reminded of the degree to which the labour movement significantly improved the quality of life enjoyed or not enjoyed, as the case may be, by the vast majority of citizens in Manchester in the 19th century. A lot of money flowing in, but a lot of folks were having their rights breached repeatedly. There was child labour and a massive fatality rate in the workplace. It reminded me a little bit of the last week here in Alberta. It was just generally speaking not a great place to be, and it was thanks to the labour movement that that trend started to reverse so that regular working folks could start to get

the benefit of all the money that was being made as a result of the Industrial Revolution.

Anyway, I digress, so I will go back to my previous points. I just think that at the end of the day what's really important is to make sure that we get this issue right. My concern is that by accepting what is, in our view, a limited and short-sighted correction to the act as required by the Supreme Court of Canada, we will not devote an adequate amount of time to a more comprehensive review when it comes time for this matter to be reviewed in committee this summer. Whereas if we were to simply not pass this bill and have PIPEDA be the governing legislation for a period of time, there might actually be more motivation for members opposite to engage in a more meaningful way when we engage in the committee review of this legislation.

I've been sorely disappointed over the last eight or nine months at the way in which all-party committees have been functioning. You know, there's been really very little interest in engaging in a comprehensive analysis of the legislation that's put in front of us or asking Albertans to submit their positions or listening to those submissions when they are actually submitted or, heaven forbid, deliberating on what some of the issues were that Albertans raised. That has been kind of lacking from the work of our all-party committees more recently. Rather, they've just sort of been marching in, and the chairs have been given their scripts to read, and everyone votes when told to, and then nothing is really discussed. We all leave the committee really early, and things carry on the same way.

If we were to actually create a motivation to have a made-in-Alberta privacy legislation that meets the needs of the Supreme Court of Canada . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the intent of the motion put forward by the New Democrat caucus. I do have some concerns with voting in favour of this motion at this time.

10:00

Now, I do realize that I did vote in favour of the last amendment because hypothetically we could have gotten this to an all-party committee, where we would discuss this, come up with an adequate discussion, look at the relevant context of the bill, add to it the provisions that may make us more in line with those decisions, and have an Alberta act ready and on the go for, hopefully, sometime in the very near future.

If you look at this act in its entirety, it's simply keeping us from moving forward on the Personal Information Protection Act in this province. What this would entail would be for members on this side to believe that the government on its own is going to go away and do this work and come up with a new bill and implement something at some future date that would more adequately reflect some of the concerns we brought up in this House. And, in my view, that is not reality.

Accordingly, I think that given that the Supreme Court of Canada has sent it back to us, given that I think it's important for this province to at least have some law on the bill, even though it may be a flawed law, it is important for us to go forward.

Furthermore – and I've brought up some points consistently in the debate here tonight – in my view if you look at much of the case law surrounding the context of what brought this issue before the Supreme Court, what caused them to strike down our entire

legislation was the fact that our legislation was narrow. It didn't understand the right of unions to be able to adequately and effectively engage in legal strikes, but also there was much rhetoric in that case and, in fact, other cases about unions' ability to comment on social issues, and much has been made about the contributions of trade organizations and unions to the betterment of our society. No doubt we see that, from national health care to reasonable working standards to the weekend of all things, which you and I both enjoy, and I'm glad that the union movement led the charge on this.

But at this time I think that moving to this would be not in the best interest of our province. With at least the passing of this legislation I think there would be an opportunity to then have it on the record, on the books. Then should some trade union or other interested body actually wish to challenge it, it can start the process of going down the path to eventually get us to a place where it is heard by the Supreme Court of Canada and actually gets back to this Legislature so we can actually make a law that fundamentally would reflect those goals attributed in that Supreme Court decision.

I think this motion is misguided in the fact that not having a law on the books is simply not going to happen at this time; that reflects that the government go away and decide something differently than it has. So given that reality, it's better for us to pass this legislation, to have it go ahead, and to allow us to evaluate it, then, in future court cases.

I will also note that although the Privacy Commissioner has made comments along the way, in various degrees saying that this bill may not go far enough, that they may not be able to actually square all the circles and the like, I think it's important to note that she did support the actual passing of this bill at least to get us a start on where we need to go in this province.

In my view this is redundant, and it will not actually serve the best interests going forward. We need to get legislation on the books so that our trade unions and other people know what their effective rights are in this province. The sooner that's on the books, the sooner we can get to evaluating whether it fits within our court structure.

I'll be urging members to vote against this hoist amendment. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a)? No?

Okay. Then I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and speak to this bill. It's likely the last chance I'll get to speak to Bill 3, the Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014. I just wanted to clarify really briefly that I believe I was a little incorrect earlier when I spoke in that I mentioned that when this bill was in Committee of the Whole, it wasn't actually on the Order Paper. It, in fact, was – my hon. colleague reminded me – but it wasn't on the projected business of the day. So I confused those two, and I apologize for that.

As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona pointed out, it is a long-standing tradition in this House, Mr. Speaker, that when the House leaders speak and the Government House Leader decides what the business of the day will be, it is understood and respected between all of the parties. Especially with the fact that when there are numerous pieces of legislation coming forward, for the smaller parties it is sometimes a challenge, as you can imagine, but we do want to ensure that we're doing the best job possible. It's very restrictive if bills or readings are moved forward when opposition parties aren't ready for them.

In this case we had gone through the legislation, and we had amendments with Parliamentary Counsel that hadn't yet been returned. I will say, Mr. Speaker, that it's important to note that in my short two and half years here as a member in the House never have I seen the government move forward when there are amendments waiting to be approved. It's not that we had said, "Yes, they're coming," and government had no idea. It's that there were several amendments waiting for approval from Parliamentary Counsel, and the bill was rushed through. I mean, that I do take issue with in that it does inhibit or restrict severely the ability of opposition members in this House to do our job.

Now, as has been said a couple of times, the reason I'm speaking in favour of this amendment that the bill be not now read a third time but six months hence and therefore be removed is because we foresee the challenges that lie ahead should we pass this PIPA legislation today. There are going to be court challenges. Likely it's going to be ruled unconstitutional just because it's not constitutionally compliant. In our view we will see that very, very soon, Mr. Speaker. We'd rather get it right.

The good news is that despite what some members in the House may think, that we have to get this PIPA legislation through right now – yes, the Privacy Commissioner did put a timeline on this – the fact of the matter is that if Alberta didn't put forward its own PIPA legislation at this point in time, we would still fit under the umbrella of the federal legislation, PIPEDA. So we're not in as much of a bind as we may think we are. You know, I've always been of the mindset of: let's do it once, let's do it right, and let's get it right the first time as opposed to passing through poor legislation and then having to come back with a series of amendments and waste people's time and the resources of the Alberta treasury.

Mr. Speaker, just to go over some of the points here, you know, talking about the restriction that Bill 3 has on our freedom of expression, the principle that unions have the right to freedom of expression by communicating with the public, not just their own union, in trying to persuade them is so fundamental in general and in particular so fundamental to the objectives of collective bargaining that even the Supreme Court in its decision reiterated this.

10:10

Now, as we know, Mr. Speaker, for unions to be effective in protecting the rights, interests, and well-being of their members, they need to use a number of measures to represent those interests. Among these, communication – in other words, the ability to express themselves freely – is one of the most important tools that they have at their disposal. For example, unions need to be able to communicate with the public or the government, as I mentioned earlier, about unsafe workplaces. They need to be able to communicate with the public in order to influence pressure and public opinion in the context of labour disputes and negotiations processes.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court was unequivocal in saying: "PIPA imposes restrictions on a union's ability to communicate and persuade the public of its cause, impairing its ability to use one of its most effective bargaining strategies in the course of a lawful strike." That came from paragraph 37 of the Supreme Court's ruling.

Furthermore, at paragraph 29 the Supreme Court says:

This Court has long recognized the fundamental importance of freedom of expression in the context of labour disputes . . . "[f]or employees, freedom of expression becomes not only an important but an essential component of labour relations."

The court has also been clear, Mr. Speaker, over the years that picketing is a legitimate form of expression, not just in cases of lawful strikes, I might add, which is the only narrow exception

carved out by Bill 3. Again, picketing is far from the only important communication tool available to unions. I brought forward the example of XL Foods, that took place in Brooks, Alberta, in 2012, and the fact that much of that could have been averted and the fact that, you know, the union raised concerns publicly about the issues in the plant that were leading to contaminated meat.

I just want to say that Bill 3 does nothing to address the potential restrictions of these types of communication activities by unions or anyone, and these rights to free expression don't just benefit unions. I mean, this is the important component for members to grasp here. Obviously, a major purpose of unions is to address the political and social issues of the day but also to work for social justice for all Albertans. So by denying them a key right necessary for them to communicate and achieve these objectives, this bill is so restrictive to the well-being of all Albertans and our democracy, which is affected.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill 3 exceptions are narrow in that it applies to a union that's engaged in a lawful strike, not even other unions or affiliates or those with an interest in the matter, which greatly restricts many different organizations. It does nothing to extend and improve the right to freedom of expression for most Albertans outside of the scope of the individual union that it applies to.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let's consider the fact that strikes are not the only part of the labour negotiation process, which requires freedom of expression for unions to advocate for their members. From the beginning of the process until the end these organizations need to be able to communicate freely to advance their interests and to make up for the inherent power imbalance between employer and employee. By carving out such a narrow exception, that it only applies to strikes, Bill 3 leaves all restrictions on all of these other forms of expression, which are crucial in the labour negotiation process.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, by extending the right to collect, use, and disclose personal information only in the context of a labour dispute, this bill flies in the face of the Supreme Court's findings and their advice. The Supreme Court directly advised against this, broadening the definition, and they wrote very clearly in their decision that freedom of expression is crucial in all parts of the labour context, not just in the event of a strike. So this limited definition here does not serve and actually goes counter to the decision the Supreme Court made.

When this bill, should it pass through third reading, gets challenged in the courts and works its way back to the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court is going to see that they've already ruled on this and that this bill never should have passed through this Assembly. We as members have a responsibility to look at past legislation, look at precedent-setting legislation, and determine if something is going to meet the criteria of past decisions. From numerous examples this piece of legislation does not do that, Mr. Speaker. For those reasons, you know, likely this bill will be challenged and will be thrown out, and I see a need for not wasting this Assembly's time or the court's time.

Now, what I want to mention, Mr. Speaker, is that, you know, the Alberta NDP supports necessary limits to protect individual privacy, so we do support the basic objectives of PIPA. But, similar to the Supreme Court, it seems that it's overbearing and it goes too far in denying Albertans their right to freedom of speech.

We understand the need to strike the right balance between protecting personal information and privacy and the fundamental rights of freedom of speech. Again, PIPEDA, the federal legislation, addresses this balance by restricting the collection, use, and disclosure of information only when it's being used for commercial purposes. PIPA, on the other hand, applies to all personal

information no matter what the purpose or context of its collection. As the Supreme Court points out, PIPA prohibits the collection, use, and disclosure of information without distinguishing the nature of the information; the purpose for which it's collected, used, or disclosed; or the situation or context.

Bill 3 does nothing to change these flaws in the legislation, Mr. Speaker. The exception is so narrow that in the vast majority of cases the collection, use, or disclosure of information will remain prohibited. This doesn't address the issue of unconstitutional restrictions on freedom of expression, nor does it address the spirit of the Supreme Court ruling, which was to broaden and better protect constitutionally protected rights.

Mr. Speaker, it's for those reasons that I will strongly urge members of this Assembly to vote in favour of this amendment. Let's rewrite this legislation. Let's get it right the first time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, are there other speakers? The Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to be very brief in closing. This is my referral. Certainly, I recognize all of the arguments that have been made here this evening. Just, you know, quickly an overview. It's very important that we don't duplicate services and ways by which we can negotiate both information and labour in general. The way that things have been kind of set up here now, I'm just concerned about putting undue pressure on the Privacy Commissioner and having that office adjudicate things that should really be dealt with in the realm of the labour board. I mean, that's one issue that I think bears a reason to review this in the future. Let's not forget that we do have this provision for 2015. I think my referral is very similar to that.

As well, we must always be careful at every juncture that we don't in this Legislature step on people's capacity to express themselves in groups. It's very important that we recognize the means and the terms by which individuals and organizations can in fact communicate with the public to further their endeavours, regardless of what they happen to be up to, within the realms of the law. To communicate, especially in a labour dispute, is probably the best way to dissipate and to seek resolution – right? – as information is usually one of the stumbling blocks in a labour dispute. So if you in fact do have an opportunity to express more information, then the chances are that we end up with more labour stability in the end and fewer strikes and other forms of labour strife.

10:20

Certainly, the privacy office has offered us some interesting perspective on this, but, you know, we have to go right back to the reason that we are debating this here in the first place, which is that the Supreme Court made a very specific ruling on this. It was unequivocal, and it was a very strong ruling as well. I think that always should give us pause as legislators. When the judicial arm of government gives us a direction, we should take it and move through it in the most thorough and complete sort of way possible.

I'm concerned about the narrowness of the legislation that we've formed here today in regard to when there's just a strike on. Right? I mean, as we've said very clearly before, there are many groups that don't strike. They can't strike, it's against the law to strike, maybe they're just seeking first contract, and so forth. We don't want to exclude that either. Ultimately, we want to build legislation that is organic and that can be serving changes in our society and changes to how information is disseminated and

communications are performed over time. Let's not try to restrict ourselves too much.

Mr. Speaker, it's been a very interesting process here, and I do recommend and encourage everyone to vote for my referral if you don't mind.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, are there other speakers?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment HA1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the hoist having been defeated now puts the question on third reading of the bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 7

Chartered Professional Accountants Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 7, the Chartered Professional Accountants Act, 2014. Before us today is a set of proposed legislative changes related to the accounting profession in Alberta. Please let me give you a little bit of background. For the last year our government has been working with three self-regulating accounting professions in Alberta as they approached us to move forward on their desire to merge into one association offering a single professional designation.

Currently we have three separate associations offering their own professional designations. They are the chartered accountants, or CAs, represented by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta; the certified management accountants, or CMAs, represented by the Certified Management Accountants of Alberta; and the certified general accountants, or CGAs, represented by the Certified General Accountants' Association of Alberta.

To be clear, Mr. Speaker, they all do a great job. However, they have said that the time has come for a merger. It's a part of a national and international movement in the accounting profession. The new association would be known as the chartered professional accountants of Alberta. It would issue just one professional accounting designation, the chartered professional accountant, or CPA.

What we have before us is a series of proposed changes repealing the Regulated Accounting Profession Act, the existing overarching legislation that governs all three accounting bodies. The most significant change proposed is the dissolution of the existing three accounting organizations and their merger into one unified association.

As I mentioned a moment ago, unification in the accounting profession is a growing national and international trend. Mr. Speaker, this proposed merger respects the democratic will of Alberta's professional accounting regulatory bodies and their combined 24,500 members. As you can imagine, merging three organizations that previously competed for membership is no easy task, yet all three recognize the benefits of creating one organization with one designation. To make this major change happen, the three associations formed a unification agency, which

went to work to design what a single organization would look like, how it would be governed, and, most importantly, set the rules in place for issuing the new CPA designation.

Geographically you should know that the consolidation of accounting professions began last year at the national level with the merger of two governing bodies, creating a new Canadian designation of chartered professional accountant under CPA Canada. Today every province and territory is working toward the necessary legislative and regulatory changes to enable unification. In fact, more than 50 per cent of Canada's professional accountants are already using the CPA designation.

If passed, the CPA Act will bring Alberta in line with Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia, and Prince Edward Island, where accountants are already using the CPA designation. Saskatchewan and New Brunswick recently have proclaimed their legislation, and several other provinces are expected to introduce similar unifying legislation this fall. Mr. Speaker, this legislation, if passed, will ensure that Alberta accountants remain competitive and have improved professional mobility.

The unified profession's vision is "to be the preeminent, internationally recognized Canadian accounting designation and business credential that best protects and serves the public interest." I wholeheartedly support this vision. By having a single designation and by being onside with our Canadian neighbours, this merger will help Alberta to continue to attract and retain the best and brightest accountants from across this country.

Mr. Speaker, in summary, with a single governing body and a single designation, these amendments support crossjurisdictional consistency, national labour mobility, and effective streamlined use of resources under one educational program. I believe the introduction of a single professional designation marks a step forward for the accounting profession in Alberta. The proposed CPA Act will keep our province in step with the rest of Canada and the world so that Albertans can continue to benefit from the highest standard of accounting services. I'm proud to carry Bill 7, the Chartered Professional Accountants Act, 2014, and I encourage all of my colleagues in the Legislature to support it.

Mr. Speaker, I now move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 8

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014

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

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and speak on behalf of Bill 8, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014. This is a lawyer's bill. It amends several pieces of legislation: the Court of Queen's Bench Act, the Estate Administration Act, the Family Law Act, Limitations Act, Notaries and Commissioners Act, the Oaths of Office Act, the Perpetuities Act, the Provincial Court Act, the Wills and Succession Act, and effects minor housekeeping changes to several other acts. These are amendments to update several justice-related acts to ensure provincial legislation is clear, consistent, and efficient.

I will now provide some details about the proposed changes, the most significant of which are to the Family Law Act. The amendments to the Family Law Act are specific to the child support recalculation program. The program helps separated and divorced parents update their court-ordered child support amounts to reflect changes in their income. It gives Albertans a low-cost and convenient way to ensure their child support amounts are kept current without continually having to go to court.

10:30

The child support recalculation program is a separate program from the maintenance enforcement program, known as MEP, although the two programs do work closely together. MEP collects or enforces child support court orders while the recalculation program adjusts child support amounts. Just to note, the recalculation program has nothing to do with withholding drivers', hunting, or fishing licences from those who don't pay their court-ordered support. Those are MEP sanctions.

Since the recalculation program began in 2010, it has helped many Alberta families avoid having to go back to court, reducing pressure on parents and on the court system. While the program has been successful, there are many opportunities to improve it to help more vulnerable Albertans, enhance client service, and further increase access to justice. Under Bill 8 there are four proposed amendments, which are supported by feedback from clients, lawyers, and judges in response to consultations earlier this year.

First, a mandatory clause will be required in all future child support orders to specifically indicate whether or not the support may be recalculated by the recalculation program. This requirement will create more awareness of the recalculation service so parents understand they have an option to update child support without having to go to court.

The second amendment will allow the recalculation program to always recalculate child support based on the anniversary date of the court order rather than the date specified by a judge or counsel. This will ensure recalculation work is spread over the course of the calendar year. As a result, the program will continue to be available for eligible parents who wish to register their court orders.

The third amendment provides further incentive to parents to disclose their income tax returns to the program. It sets a minimum income for nondisclosing parents based on that parent working 40 hours a week for minimum wage. The recalculation program needs parents to provide their tax returns and notices of assessment so staff can adjust the parent's child support. Currently if a parent doesn't provide their tax information, the program can deem the nondisclosing parent's income to have increased between 10 to 25 per cent the longer it has been since the person's income was last set.

The current percentage formula works well in most cases as a way to deal with parents who don't want to share their income tax information except when the recalculation program is dealing with incomes that are set at a very low level; for example, when the parent was a student or between jobs. These individuals were found in the past to earn an income between zero and \$19,000 per year. Currently these parents have no incentive to provide income disclosure when their earnings improve, so some choose to thwart the recalculation program by withholding their income tax information.

To close this loophole, the proposed amendment will create a minimum level of income based on minimum wage earnings that would be attributed to a parent who does not provide their income tax information. It's important to remember that the new minimum wage income will only be applied to people who don't provide income disclosure and whose current guideline income is extremely low. For the vast majority of cases the recalculation program would continue to use the percentage increases that currently exist and have been effective. This new proposal is an additional tool to manage a very small number of previously low-income clients by bringing them into an earnings bracket where child support would be required.

The fourth amendment clarifies the information a parent must submit to a judge in their court application if they're objecting to a recalculation decision.

I will now move on to the Provincial Court Act. The proposed amendments to this act include streamlining the process for renewing judicial appointments. These amendments are supported by the Chief Justice of the Provincial Court.

Another act relating to courts is also being amended. The Court of Queen's Bench Act will formally recognize case management counsel as officers of the court. It gives the Chief Justice authority to assign duties to them, which will enhance their ability to assist in moving actions to early resolution. Other proposed changes to this act will streamline the process for renewing masters' appointments. Again, these amendments are supported by the Chief Justice of the Court of Queen's Bench.

Next, numerous acts are being amended to ensure consistent language with the statutes and the *Alberta Rules of Court*. Included is an amendment providing the authority to make omnibus amendments to regulations to ensure consistent language within the regulations and the *Alberta Rules of Court*. The other ministries affected by this act have been informed of the amendments, and there are no concerns.

Next, following a recommendation from the Alberta Law Reform Institute a housekeeping amendment is being made to the Oaths of Office Act to make it more consistent with other legislation.

Next is the Notaries and Commissioners Act. Passed in 2013, it updates and modernizes the Notaries Public Act and the Commissioners for Oaths Act. Before it can be proclaimed into force, it requires two minor amendments so the act meets its original intent. Both the Canadian Bar Association and the Law Society of Alberta support these amendments.

Next, housekeeping amendments are required to the Wills and Succession Act and the Estate Administration Act to ensure the two are consistent. A number of minor amendments will also be made, including clarifying the current law that a will revoked under the prior legislation remains revoked under the current act. The Wills and Succession Act provisions apply only to a marriage or divorce occurring on or after February 1, 2012, when the act came into force. In addition, persons who are required to be served with notice of a family maintenance application will be allowed to obtain disclosure of the same financial information available to a family member or the personal representative. The Canadian Bar Association was consulted to identify amendments to the Wills and Succession Act.

Next, the Limitations Act will confirm the time period during which court actions can be started for contribution claims. A discussion paper on the proposed limitation period was posted online earlier this year. Feedback was received from a number of stakeholder groups, including the Law Society of Alberta, the Canadian Bar Association, the Alberta Law Reform Institute, and others. All the responses were supportive.

Lastly, the Perpetuities Act codifies the rules against perpetuities in Alberta. Under this act qualifying environmental trusts, which are special trusts for funding environmental reclamation at the end of a development project's life, are likely to be subject to the rule against perpetuities. The proposed amendments will exempt qualifying environmental trusts and remove an impediment to the funding of environmental reclamation. If passed, the exemption will apply to trusts entered into in 2014 and later to enable pipeline companies to establish trusts in Alberta without special provisions. The amendments were requested by the Canadian Energy Pipeline Association on behalf of pipeline companies. The act is also supported by Treasury

Board and Finance, Energy, and Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments will help ensure our legislation is up to date and reflects the changes in our province. Albertans expect and deserve clarity and consistency, and Bill 8 will help achieve that.

Mr. Speaker, I now move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

(continued)

Bill 1

Respecting Property Rights Act

[Adjourned debate November 26: Mr. Oberle]

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this bill, and I've been waiting six years for this day. What you need to know is that when this bill was first announced, long before it was introduced, I was travelling out in the public opposing this bill with every ounce of energy I could bring to bear. So, for me, this is a pivotal moment, and I will not allow this moment to go unannounced. This minister, this Premier have done more in one hour for property rights than the previous two Premiers did in their whole tenure. I will give credit where credit is due, and I will not tolerate the Wildrose marginalizing this bill and minimizing what this bill has done.

10:40

This bill has come forward, as far as I'm concerned, at precisely the right time as more and more people stood up and were finally heard. The Wildrose actually ran on this bill. They ran on a platform to kill Bill 19, kill Bill 50, kill Bill 36. Those signs are still out in the public today. You can travel to Cypress-Medicine Hat and you can find those signs out in the rural areas. Those signs are out in the rural areas all around southern Alberta still today – Kill Bill 19, Kill Bill 36, Kill Bill 50 – yet I'm hearing that this is not good enough for the people who ran on this. In fact, when you look at what has happened and the progress we are now finally making, somebody has to stand up and say that we're finally making ground. For this Premier to go out into the public and hear this issue and act on it, I think this is a great thing, and I want to commend the party and the Premier for doing this. But I'm going to show some of the inconsistencies and the hypocrisy of the Wildrose, the so-called protectors of property rights, who think that somehow they are the sole guardians, yet they leave this issue behind when they say that this is not good enough.

This is the right step, and I'm going to show this. I'm not going to speak of these other laws, but what I will do is that I will speak in the context of the bill numbers. All they are is contextual, and we need to understand that. You look at things like Bill 50. We've heard a lot about that. Heck, I stood up today and even brought up two points of order on Bill 50. The fact is that when you look at who supported and who did not, the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, if I remember correctly, tabled a letter from one of his constituents very concerned about the cost of those transmission lines and what it would do to the industry. He stood up and he brought those concerns forward in this Assembly.

I will have you know, Mr. Speaker, that two members of the Wildrose voted for the bill when they were on that side. That's an interesting contextual comparison in the fact that one member on that side stood up, and two members on this side who claim that they ran on this actually voted in support of the bill. It's pretty interesting. Yet you still get these members – the Member for Strathmore-Brooks stood up and talked about: why aren't they building the transmission lines for the cogeneration up in Fort McMurray? I can't forget that question because that's a Bill 50 transmission line. It didn't make sense on the property rights issue.

Regardless of that, Mr. Speaker, I noticed that the Member for Calgary-Shaw, when he stood up on property rights, claimed that this was not enough. I made note of the fact that he put on his website that he voted to eliminate a landowner's or property owner's right for a notice of an application, a reasonable opportunity for a landowner to learn the facts. He voted against the landowner having a reasonable opportunity to file a statement of concern, and he also voted against the landowner having a reasonable opportunity to cross-examine evidence. He voted against a landowner's right to a hearing plus for the removing of the public interest test on the property rights issue.

But that's not even the great tragedy here. You heard from every member when they stood up and they spoke about this bill. They all referenced how incredibly bad – how incredibly bad – the Land Assembly Project Area Act is and how that is the most crucial bill. And I will tell you this. They referred to it as Bill 36, but I'm going to quote right out of *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker, from the House leader of the Wildrose when he stood up to support this bill. What he said was: "I am very excited to see this bill proceed. I support it, and I urge all members of this Assembly to support it as well." Now, it is a conflict or straight hypocrisy when somebody says that this is the most egregious bill that they possibly know, yet the member right there that is making these assertions actually voted for it. By the way, he also went on to say, "It is an unprecedented victory for the rights of landowners in this province." Well, you never heard me say that, but some over there apparently have.

Clearly, when it comes to the issue of property rights, they are not the only champions of property rights or the only advocates of property rights. The fact is that it is the duty of everybody in here, and the fact is that finally – finally – we have a Premier that has heard property rights issues from landowners and has taken the first step. He has also indicated that they are taking further steps, and we have a committee that has now been tasked with taking a look at this issue further along, but I want to point out what are some of the major, major issues and why it is important that this bill be passed.

The Land Assembly Project Area Act has been passed into law. No, it has not been proclaimed, but this government could proclaim it at any point in time. They just have not proclaimed it, which is a good thing. I can't show you anyone that has been violated by Bill 36 or Bill 19, but I will tell you that the whole price of Bill 50, in my view, is a price that the public is paying. We don't know if there's a price on that Bill 24. We just know that the government did expropriate four spaces unilaterally across the province. What's the price of that? I don't know. No one knows. If the government actually addresses those issues, then they will have covered the full gamut, the full gamut of the property rights issues that have affected and concerned most property owners.

With Bill 19 what is absolutely important is this. It's the power that the government gave itself. It wasn't that the government abused anyone. It was the power that the government gave itself to abuse. That's why this bill was necessary today, Bill 1, to remove this legislation so that that power to abuse is no longer in

existence on this particular issue dealing with utility corridors, and that's really important.

I want to point out a couple of things in this bill that are absolutely essential. In section 7 of the Land Assembly Project Area Act what it said is that if in the opinion of the minister it appears that a person has done, is doing, or is about to do something, then the minister could issue an enforcement order, and that enforcement order would carry the effect of a judgment of the Queen's Bench, and it could carry a \$100,000 fine in penalties or two years in jail. Now, you think about that in the context of the way it was written. Basically, if you've not done anything but the minister was of the opinion you were going to do something, the minister could issue an enforcement order to tell you to stop doing what you have not yet done, and if you didn't behave and do what the minister told you to do, you could be looking at two years in jail or a \$100,000 fine. It was an absolutely ludicrous piece of legislation, and that's why it is so important that it be removed. [interjection] We'll get the Education minister under control in a second. Don't worry. He's excited about the bill. I know he is.

The whole issue of dealing with utility corridors is now back into the realm of dealing with restricted development areas in schedule 5 of the Government Organization Act, and that's where it belongs. Now, if the government decides it wants to move it elsewhere again, so be it, but what's most important, the biggest single issue for all property owners, is one word: process. That's it: process. What they want is a fair and just process, that they can be heard and that if land is taken, if property is taken, it is taken for a legitimate public interest and that the property owners themselves would be made whole. That's it. They want that consistent process, that they can be heard when property is taken. Once this government achieves it, it will have succeeded in dealing with this issue. That is the most important aspect of what is transpiring here today with the start of restoring property owners' rights. In my view, eliminating the Land Assembly Project Area Act is the right thing to do.

What I would ask the government to do as they say they're moving forward is to revisit the Land Stewardship Act because it cannot be repealed right now because of so many different things that have taken place, but there are provisions in that act that can be adjusted to restore process, a fair process to make property owners whole.

The other issue that needs to be addressed is glaring. It's the whole issue of carbon capture and sequestration, where the government unilaterally expropriated all the pore spaces under everybody's property. What they should do is rescind that and deal with each property owner as required should this technology move forward. I will tell you that I still don't believe that CCS will move forward. I really believe that we need to do something different to reduce our carbon emissions and to show the world that we're going to be a leader in the environment versus just pumping it underground.

With that, I want to point out one last sort of curious contradiction. If you are the so-called advocate, defender, or friend of property rights – we had an incident here, right in our own Assembly, where a member had their coffee cup, personal property, destroyed by the so-called advocates of property rights. That is a terrible thing when you think about the assault on property rights. Granted it's a \$3 cup, but I will tell you this, Mr. Speaker. When they come for my coffee cup, in the words of Kikki Planet: we will make the Vietnam War look like a tailgate party. I will fight to the last coffee bean. They will never get my coffee cup. I'll defend that. I was dying to say that, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I will sit down, and hopefully we can vote on this.

10:50

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, it's always hard to get up on stage after a performance like that, but I just wanted to say a couple of words in regard to Bill 1. We certainly are supporting the bill. It was an interesting about-face that we saw this government do. We knew from the beginning that it was a chance for the PC government here to move to the right and try to absorb some of the lost votes that they had almost five or six years ago now. It was a way by which the Wildrose really built their rural base. Something, I think, had to be done, but it's more of a political move, Mr. Speaker, I believe, than an actual substantial commitment to property rights.

You know, the repeal of Bill 19 is all fine and good, but there's a whole suite of bills that I think really were onerous to the landowners in rural areas and in urban areas, too. It seems as though this was a way to signal not a new management, really, but signal the government's intentions to move to the right. We certainly saw another manifestation of that today. It wasn't pretty, and I think that Albertans will be watching with skepticism as to how really new these PCs are because, in fact, this feels a lot more like 1974 than 2014 with many of these things that we've seen recently.

Yeah, I mean, we're certainly supporting this bill, and it's an interesting part of the political drama more than it is of substantial legislation that actually affects things here in the Legislature.

Thank you.

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

Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, shall be brief. This is speaking on the Respecting Property Rights Act, brought in by the new Premier. I tend to agree with the hon. House leader for the New Democratic Party that this is really a bill more about politics rather than substance. If you look at the Land Assembly Project Area Act, it was never proclaimed when it came before the House in 2009. Nevertheless, the bill, I guess, serves the government's purposes, at least rhetoric on acknowledging property rights in some form and fashion.

I will also note that there were a series of bills that did come through which, at least for a time, had coalesced, I guess, power in the government's hands, to not put too fine of a point on it, and it caused a great deal of concern. I know our party voted against numerous bills that were passed by the government in this House as we saw similar concerns that these powers had devolved to a cabinet decision-making process rather than doing it in an open and transparent fashion and the like.

We still have some concerns out there if you're actually talking about people's ability to be heard under the new regulator. Under our new energy regulator act there's no ability for people directly adversely affected to be heard at a hearing, and it narrows the scope of that. Those types of issues are still out there that allow for Albertans to have a public forum.

Nevertheless, you know, it is what it is. The politics of the day dictated that the government do something. This appears to be their attempt, anyway, to do something even though it's largely symbolic. I think we've always had the ability to do things for the public good when it has come to property as long as fair compensation was given. That's always been provided for under the Expropriation Act. I think that once it's clarified to people

how the Expropriation Act works, how it is in the mix and how it, hopefully, goes forward – I think that's more important than this current political posturing, anything to that effect.

Those are my comments. I appreciate the theatre and the like surrounding this as it is always a great deal of fun and games, but whether it has actually changed anything, I'm not so sure.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Other speakers?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing none, the question has been called.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a third time]

Bill 4

Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to move third reading of Bill 4, Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014.

Bill 4 proposes changes to the composition of Horse Racing Alberta's board of directors to provide greater public representation on the board. These changes are in line with the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. The Premier has committed to merit-based appointments in all government organizations. This ensures that the right people are in the right jobs, and Horse Racing Alberta will be no exception. This bill is part of the Premier's commitment to a stronger public agency board governance, and it will further support the board's accountability and transparency.

I'd like to share a few facts about horse racing in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, horse racing has a long history in the province, and the industry supports over 8,000 Albertans. Studies indicate that the racing sector is connected to nearly \$400 million in annual direct, indirect, and induced economic benefits in Alberta. The horse-racing industry delivers a positive economic impact from gaming revenues at racing entertainment centres as well as from related agricultural activities. The horse-racing industry also benefits rural communities where breeding and raising racing horses is of great significance.

I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks for agreeing with us that the horse-racing industry is important to Alberta. He and others will be happy to know that one of the key reasons we would like more public representation in the sport is to increase the accountability of the board with regard to taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed legislative amendment to the Horse Racing Alberta Act will decrease the HRA's board of directors from 12 members to 11 and increase the number of public members from 3 to 6. These changes will strengthen HRA's governance structure. In consultation with HRA all public members will be selected from an open competition and screened for the relevant experience and expertise. The board will also have five industry-nominated members. These members will be nominated by their respective industry groups. All board appointments, both public and industry-nominated, will be made by an order in council.

11:00

Mr. Speaker, with these proposed changes, more than half of the board will be public members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, and one of these non-industry members will be designated as chair of the board. These changes strike the right balance between public accountability and industry representation. Furthermore, remuneration for board members will be determined by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, and the community remuneration order will apply.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that these legislative changes are part of our commitment to strong policy on agency board governance. I encourage all members of the Assembly to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to adjourn debate.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has moved to adjourn debate on third reading of Bill 4.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Sorry. I take that back.

The Deputy Speaker: That wasn't quite what I heard?

Mrs. Klimchuk: I take it back. I just want to move it, please.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. I'll look for other speakers.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will attempt to keep my comments fairly brief. I'm going to speak on behalf of my whole caucus here with my comments. I'm going to go through a bit of history. I apologize because I'm starting to get a bit of sore throat, as are other members in the Assembly. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I and the New Democrat caucus do not support this bill. I recognize that some of the changes introduced are necessary in order to increase transparency, but there remain considerable issues with the act as it is proposed. You know, the biggest opposition that I have to this bill and that we've had since 2002 and even before then – and I'll go through the history. We oppose the continued subsidization of the horse-racing industry in this province.

The change made in this bill in regard to remuneration, the payment of expenses to board members, we recognize was necessary. We do agree that the ability of the board to determine their own rate of remuneration and payment of expenses needed to be changed. However, the proposed change is not much better. It keeps decisions regarding the remuneration and payment of expenses behind closed doors. For a government that loves to talk about transparency and openness, the proof is in the legislation when it actually does the opposite. This is neither transparent nor accountable for the people of Alberta.

Not only is the government secretive, clearly, by allowing remuneration payment of expenses to be debated and decided behind closed doors, which is quite opaque, the government is showing that it's quite out of touch with the reality of many Albertans in the fact that the bill doesn't end subsidies given to the horse-racing industry.

Now, industry insiders will claim that there are no subsidies for this industry. The Alberta Standardbred Horse Association states in a document about slot revenue in Horse Racing Alberta: "Let's be very clear; horse racing in Alberta is not subsidized by the Provincial Government." However, the annual report of Horse Racing Alberta, the board in question in the bill, shows that more than 50 per cent of revenue from slots goes to Horse Racing Alberta, not the lottery fund. This is compared to 70 per cent of casino slot revenue and 85 per cent of the VLT revenue, which goes to the Alberta lottery fund. Had 70 per cent of the revenue of

slots at race tracks gone to the Alberta lottery fund, it would have amounted to an increase of more than \$8 million more in 2012 and more than \$7.5 million more in 2013. Not only is the horse-racing industry benefiting from their ability to keep more of the revenue generated by slot machines than casinos do, they're also benefiting through the exception that allows them to have these slot machines in the first place, Mr. Speaker.

In 1996 the government allowed horse-racing tracks to have slot machines, going against previous government policy, which stated that casinos were the only place slot machines were allowed. The program gave the same 15 per cent of revenue that they gave to casino owners to the tracks; however, it is the rest of the profit, most of which normally goes to charity, in this industry that is largely kept by the industry.

In 2008, Mr. Speaker, \$35 million from slot revenue at Alberta's three race tracks went to the horse-racing industry; in 2012, more than \$22 million; in 2013, more than \$21 million. Between 2001 and 2011, in that 10-year span, over \$260 million has gone to the industry through shared slot revenue. So it's clear that the industry is being subsidized.

However, what is also clear is that even with the subsidies provided by the government, Horse Racing Alberta continues to struggle, consistently posting annual deficits. In 2009 their deficit was almost \$750,000, in 2012 a deficit of over \$150,000, in 2013 their deficit was \$970,000, and in 2013 their cumulative deficit was over \$320,000. Clearly, despite the subsidies this industry, horse racing in Alberta, continues to struggle, posting considerable deficits in three years between 2009 and 2013. Almost 20 years since receiving slot machines, this government continues to subsidize an industry that is still struggling.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I mean, I can tell you that that is our biggest objection to this, the fact that, you know, the minister stands up and speaks about openness and transparency, which there isn't in this nor in this bill. My frustration is that we continue to subsidize an industry that is losing money, that only benefits select Albertans. This isn't improving the general well-being of all Albertans. Again, had much of the profits from the slot machines gone into the general Alberta lottery fund, which does fund a lot of great projects and programs throughout the province, there would've been millions more dollars gone toward services and programs that Albertans need and rely on.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, we cannot support this bill. It is our contention that Horse Racing Alberta should not continue to be subsidized by the Alberta treasury and by Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Alberta Liberal caucus I, too, will be voicing our opinion as to why this bill should not go forward. Largely, it's very similar to those presented and which we made in second reading here in this House. But, you know, we as a caucus cannot see why we continue to subsidize the horse-racing industry.

It is clear from the arrangement that has been made with this government that Horse Racing Alberta enjoys a unique position of deriving profits from video lottery terminals. That is different than other organizations that are across this province. It has become clear that because of their unique ability to have slot machines at their race tracks that pay out at different rates to this one unique group at the expense of all other groups combined, it is, to me, one of those things that I really can't believe is still happening in this province. It's happened for a long time, Mr. Speaker. I think the

numbers were that over \$200 million has gone into this industry. Really, is it time that this ends? Well, we've said long ago that it should never have started. Really, it should be ending today, but it doesn't look like that's going to happen.

If we're looking at some of the contentious points of the bill, really, there's been no openness and transparency here. We're not able to look into what the expenses are, what the structure is doing. In fact, what bothers me very much so about this bill is the fact that the Auditor General can't even look at what is happening in this organization. Somehow it has stayed out of the financial management act. When everything else is involved in this province, the Auditor General can look at it to make recommendations, to look at whether it's serving the Alberta people, whether we're getting value for money for the investments being made, and the like. I think the simple fact of the matter that this government bends over backwards to keep it out of this act speaks volumes as to, you know, the lack of openness and transparency with this unique group.

11:10

I can also say that I can't see that it is really moving the betterment of society forward. It serves a narrow group of interest. In fact, if we look at whether this revenue would go back into the lottery fund as it, in my view, should, you'd have \$8 million, which would do more for the public good. As indicated, there are lots of good charities supported by the Alberta lottery fund that could use our support, that deserve our support, and the like, and we ought to be maximizing revenue streams towards those groups.

I can say that despite this subsidy that is going to this association that looks like it's struggling financially, one wonders whether it's dying a slow death despite the propping up of it. I don't know whether it's diversifying the economy. I don't know whether gamblers are even choosing this as a method of entertainment anymore. You know, you can go to off-track betting throughout this province, and it's all over the place. Maybe they have been deciding with their feet where they wish to go to make their gambling choices, and that's just the simple fact of the matter. I guess there is some minor lipstick. I think the move to have more public members is a small step in the right direction.

For the simple fact that this government should not be involved in subsidizing this industry, our caucus will be voting against this, and we'd urge all members or urge the government at some point in time to really evaluate whether this is in our best interests for the long run, what this group actually does that is uniquely different from all others in this province to deserve this sweetheart deal. I pointed out in my first comments, you know, that bingos appear to be dying a slow death, yet we haven't reached out and done some magical VLT deal with them. So, you know, there doesn't seem to be precedent around whether these are actually good things, and I would put forward that they're not.

It's time for us to look at whether this is in fact reasonable, and for all the reasons that I said, we will not be supporting this bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

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

Are there other speakers?

Seeing none, hon. Deputy Government House Leader, do you wish to close?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a third time]

Bill 5 Securities Amendment Act, 2014

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance I'm pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 5, the Securities Amendment Act, 2014.

As the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood pointed out, securities regulation is a provincial jurisdiction, but this law has changed since the division of powers was set out in the Constitution Act, 1867, and the change keeps coming now and into the future. That's why Alberta along with other provinces and territories continue to amend their securities legislation to keep pace with changes in technology, new products, and market innovations and to support the ongoing reform of the system. The changes proposed in Bill 5 further modernize, harmonize, and streamline Alberta's securities laws and support the ongoing reform of Canada's securities regulatory system and help Canada in meeting its international commitments.

As I mentioned earlier, the amendments relate to several aspects of securities regulation. In addition to allowing for the continuing harmonization of general derivatives provisions, Bill 5 also supports recognition and oversight of the Canadian Public Accountability Board as an auditor oversight organization, incorporation of representatives of registered brokers and advisers, enhanced enforcement provisions, fee-setting provisions for the Alberta Securities Commission, and other housekeeping amendments to the Securities Act and consequential amendments to related legislation.

You're all aware of the federal government's efforts to establish a co-operative capital markets regulator. Some of you might be wondering why we don't wait to see what happens with that before updating our legislation. The reality is this. We do not definitely know if or when the federal government's proposed system will proceed. The federal government anticipates that it will be operational in fall 2015, but the timelines continue to change. There's no guarantee that this milestone will be met. Five provinces have joined, but five have not.

The trading of securities does not stop to wait for governments to sort out their differences. Taking a wait-and-see approach will compromise our efforts to maintain up-to-date and responsive securities regulation in an environment that is more complex, more sophisticated, more international in scope, and more driven by technology than ever before. Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government is committed to continuous improvement of our securities regulatory system and ensuring that it is operating as efficiently and effectively as possible while protecting Alberta's investors and maintaining Canada's reputation as a highly regarded leader in securities regulation. Bill 5 supports that commitment.

In this spirit I move third reading and ask that all members of the Legislature support this bill so this important work can continue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the main our caucus supports this bill. It goes some measure in trying to bring about some protection for investors in this province. Largely it's a result of the 2008 market collapse, which was largely attributed to derivatives trading.

I would be remiss if I didn't note that, you know, a large part of the reason why we in this country were spared some of the calamity of others, in the United States and around the world, was

that we resisted many of the changes to banking laws that were made in the United States and other places, that saw a merger of both the securities and the lending arms of banks and that were actually being proposed up here by, I guess, the federal Conservatives at one point in time, that thought this was a good move. At that time I'm glad it was resisted by then Prime Minister Chrétien and Finance minister Paul Martin. It saved us from a lot of the problems that we would have had, and it was recognized that Canada's banking system, as a result of resisting these changes, was able to hold up fairly well in comparison to the rest of the world when markets were crumbling and the like.

I think it's important to note that oftentimes the profit motive doesn't always lead to individuals or companies or the like going forward in the most open and honest ways, so we must ensure that we have structures in place that make the market system efficient and fair, that investors are protected from these unknowns in the marketplace, and that we put people in power to figure out and to ensure that there are no underhanded dealings going on. This is ongoing work, and we should always be diligent in ensuring that investors are getting an open, honest, and fair bill of goods when they are making purchases and the like.

I think, you know, that this move is working with the decentralized securities regulatory regime, and provincial governments must keep acting in co-ordination together to try and balance this protection given that under property and civil rights the securities industry is a provincial responsibility. It's a delicate balance of how we can keep it within Alberta's jurisdiction as well as work with our other Canadian counterparts to ensure that we have fair markets that reflect adequately investor protection, banking system protection, and the like.

So as I stated, in the main we're supportive of these changes, and we hope that the government continues to provide for fair markets with reasonable penalties for violators and to ensure that we are looking out for the best interests in the long run, not necessarily short market-making opportunities that may improve the bottom line temporarily but leave people hung out to dry when stuff hits the fan, if you know what I'm saying, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

11:20

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

The Deputy Speaker: No. That's after you.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will keep these comments fairly brief. I rise today to speak to Bill 5, Securities Amendment Act, 2014. I'll start off by saying that this act is a good step in many respects to harmonize our laws with the rest of the provinces and to provide some increased investor protection, but just like these security amendment bills get repetitive, it gets repetitive for us to point out to the government that we wouldn't need to waste valuable time and resources amending the Securities Act every few months if we would just join the other provinces in supporting a national regulator.

Moving on to auditor oversight, we're happy to see better oversight of auditors as well, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Public Accountability Board, or CPAB, needs the powers and protections necessary to improve financial reporting by public companies in Canada. All we need to do is look at Enron and WorldCom, in the early 2000s, to know that auditor oversight is very important to protect not just individual investors but also to protect the entire global market.

We also approve of bringing our laws closer to those in other provinces, though it's worth repeating that these repetitive security amendment bills wouldn't be necessary if Alberta would agree to discuss a national regulator, which is the case for most other jurisdictions, most other countries around the world. Of those which regulate securities, interestingly, Mr. Speaker, Bosnia and Herzegovina is the only other country in the world besides Canada without a national securities regulator, so that puts us in a very interesting category.

Calls for a national regulator date back to 1935 and include the 1964 Porter Commission, a 1979 study by the department of consumer and corporate affairs, the 1994 memorandum of understanding between the Atlantic provinces and the federal government, the 2003 Wise Persons' Committee report, and the 2006 Crawford panel. As it stands, Mr. Speaker, B.C. and Ontario and the federal government are going to be entering into a co-operative regulatory system, and Alberta will be left out.

The need for this legislation perfectly illustrates the absurdity of continuing on without a national regulator. We have to keep wasting government time and resources or those of the ASC in updating legislation and harmonizing it with other jurisdictions across the country as opposed to joining the national regulator. We wouldn't have to continue to do this every few months. Mr. Speaker. Another point is that all of the time and resources that are being expended on this and coming back to the Legislature to update the legislation could be better spent on enforcement and investigation to better protect Alberta's investors.

Capital markets are increasingly integrated, and so is our global market, so it's inefficient and in many cases impossible for a provincial regulator to handle these complexities. In other words, a provincial regulator would have to work with a national regulator regardless, so there is a duplication and a waste of services and dollars here. You know, a system of 13 different territorial and province regulators also leaves us vulnerable to fraud or simply just increased regulatory failure.

Another point, Mr. Speaker: Canada's financial services industry and indeed all industry is less competitive without a national securities regulator. There are significant costs to companies and investors when they need to research 13 different sets of laws and rules applied through the 13 different security commissions for each deal or investment. You know, we talk about wanting to attract investment in this province. Well, having separate securities regulators is going to detract investment and be very timely and inefficient costwise for investors. The lack of a national regulator also places a significant regulatory burden on small and emerging companies, who don't have the resources of major companies to deal with regulators' filing fees and requirements. So the frustration here for us is that money could be better spent, time better used if we had one national securities regulator.

Did you know, Mr. Speaker, that Canadians as a whole lose billions of dollars a year to securities fraud? You know, it is our contention that you would have less securities fraud if we had one national regulator and the money that we spend on updating this legislation went into enforcement and protection of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I will close by actually saying that, yes, it seems that I have very little choice but to support this bill because it is necessary, but I do urge this government to consider becoming part of a national securities regulator, which most other countries – I believe we're the only G-7 country that doesn't have one. It seems like we're not putting the best interests of Albertans and Canadians first by refusing to join a national regulator and insisting that we have individual ones for each province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.
Seeing none, are there other speakers?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 6 Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2)

The Chair: We are on amendment A2. Speakers to amendment A2?
Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We're back to the bill. Speakers on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks a lot, Mr. Chair. Certainly, I just want to maybe briefly remind people about the overall more global problem with Bill 6, which is that it creeps into this territory that I really don't want to see here in this Legislature, which is the omnibus bill – right? – that has many different sort of tentacles reaching out to cover things that need to be dealt with here in a housekeeping sort of way. But if we insert some elements of more substantive legislation into that sort of miscellaneous statutes bill, then it changes its character. It moves from something that's benign to something that can be a real problem.

You know, I've said it before, and I'll say it again: let's say no to omnibus bills. Right? Let's keep Alberta omnibus bill free, and let's debate these things on an individual basis or come to a consensus agreement through the House leaders if that's the route that we need to or choose to go.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hehr: I, too, would like to reiterate the point that we have a whole series of amendments that are incorporated into one bill. In the main we should try to avoid that practice.

There is a very contentious issue when it comes to WCB and the merits that that change made, that would have been better purported to be on its own. It just makes it easier, more clean, and gives the ability to discuss issues on their merits and allows opposition parties to look at the issues more closely and to in fact get a better briefing from the minister and things of that nature.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

11:30

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others? The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be brief. The WCB example is really why we need to pass this bill. The Privacy Commissioner has asked for changes, and the changes only really enable us to keep sharing information with the Appeals Commission so that they can hear appeals. There are thousands of

Albertans that need the service of WCB, thousands that have appeals crop up over the course of the year, and of course we need to be able to share the information with the appeals commissioner in order to have that happen.

Mr. Chair, this very much is housekeeping based on requests from the Privacy Commissioner, and I urge all members of the House to vote in favour of this important piece of legislation.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know what? I just want to clarify for the minister that this isn't just housekeeping. Under the proposed amendments there are fewer safeguards to ensure that employers don't see irrelevant details about an employee's claim like their medical history, medications, or claims made previously in other jurisdictions. You know, WCB claimants should be entitled to privacy from their employers just like any other Albertan. When the power and balance between employer and employee is heightened by the filing of a claim, the rights of the employee need to be given special consideration in these circumstances. This process needs to be transparent so that employees understand what's being done on their behalf and their rights are not being trivialized merely because they've decided to make a claim against their employer.

It's for these reasons predominantly, Mr. Chair, that I will not be supporting this bill. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there other speakers?

The question has been called.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 6 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chair, I would like to move at this point that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 6. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Does the House concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In consideration of the hour and the considerable progress made this evening, I'd now like to move that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:35 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E4
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The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, December 2, 2014

Issue 10a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Frank Oberle	Minister of Energy
Verlyn Olson	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Donald Scott	Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education
Teresa Woo-Paw	Associate Minister of Asia Pacific Relations

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Amery

Deputy Chair: Mr. Fox

Dallas	Quadri
Eggen	Rogers
Hehr	Rowe
Horne	Sarich
Kennedy-Glans	Stier
Luan	Towle
McDonald	

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Casey

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

Amery	Lukaszuk
Barnes	Mason
Ellis	Sherman
Horner	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Olesen

Deputy Chair: Mr. Pedersen

Cusanelli	McAllister
Eggen	Quest
Fenske	Rodney
Fox	Sandhu
Fritz	Swann
Jablonski	Weadick
Leskiw	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Jeneroux

Deputy Chair: Mr. Starke

Bikman	Leskiw
Blakeman	Quadri
Brown	Wilson
DeLong	Young
Eggen	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Forsyth	Lukaszuk
Fritz	Mason
Griffiths	McDonald
Hale	Sherman
Johnson, L.	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

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Bilous	Rowe
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Fritz	Xiao
Jablonski	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Rogers

Bilous	Pastoor
Calahasen	Pedersen
Cao	Rodney
Casey	Saskiw
Ellis	Starke
Kang	Wilson
Olesen	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Barnes	Luan
Bilous	McAllister
Donovan	Pastoor
Hehr	Sandhu
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Jansen	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Allen	Casey
Anglin	Fraser
Bikman	Johnson, L.
Blakeman	Mason
Brown	Xiao
Calahasen	Young
Cao	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 2, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As we strive to do our best for the generations that will follow, let us be mindful of and reflect upon the accomplishments of those who came before us. Amen.

Please be seated.

Hon. members, you may recall me mentioning yesterday in the House that I would pay tribute to a former member of this Assembly who passed away earlier, in fact on November 24, 2014.

Mr. Henry Woo

March 18, 1929, to November 24, 2014

The Speaker: Mr. Henry Woo, March 18, 1929, to November 24, 2014, served two terms as the Member for Edmonton-Sherwood Park, from 1979 to 1986. Born in Lethbridge Mr. Woo had a varied career, including serving in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve, the Royal Canadian Air Force, and the RCMP. His background and unique mix of skills led him to become an executive assistant to various ministers in the Alberta government before his own election to this Assembly. With his interest in breaking down barriers between different communities and cultures, he played a critical role in the expansion of Alberta's trade with the Pacific Rim. He was invested as a member of the Order of Canada in 1990 and received the Queen Elizabeth II diamond jubilee medal in 2012. During his terms of office Mr. Woo served on numerous committees, including the Select Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, on Private Bills, on Public Accounts, and on Public Affairs.

In a moment of silent prayer I would ask you to rise and please remember Mr. Woo as you may have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have today two members of Mr. Woo's family. Allow me to introduce them, and after I have, I would ask you to join me in welcoming them. I would ask them to each remain standing as we pay tribute to them. Ms Sheri Woo is the daughter of former member Henry Woo. She is accompanied here today by her husband, Mr. Blair Stuparek, son-in-law of Mr. Woo. I would also like to reach out with this statement to Mr. Richard Woo, son of former member Henry Woo, who, unfortunately, was not able to join us today. We all know what our families do to help support us, and in this case we are so grateful to have two members of Mr. Woo's family, whom we know both gave him great support during the time they had together. Please join me in saying thank you.

Thank you so much, Sheri and Blair, for being here with us today.
[applause]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups, starting with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure that our guests are actually in the gallery right now. They're from Maskwacis, in my constituency, 16 young people and their leaders. I would ask, in case they are within earshot, that my colleagues offer them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's give me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 27 bright young minds from Beacon Heights school. I just want to say that I had the pleasure of reading to this class during reading week in October, and the students loved – or at least it was my impression that they loved it – the story of Mouseland, that I read to them, and they asked very thought-provoking questions. Accompanying the students today are Ms Meryl Roberts, Mrs. Orianna Klotz, and three parents with the class: Shyla Masse, Catherine Roberts, and Kathy Owens. I'd now ask them and the students to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to all members 35 future leaders of Alberta and perhaps beyond who also happen to be exceptional students at Westbrook elementary school in Edmonton-Rutherford. These students are seated in both the members' gallery and the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise now and receive the very, very warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other school groups?

If not, let us move on to other important visitors, starting with the Minister of Transportation. I understand you have two introductions. Proceed.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two very special women. The first is a bright young lady who was recently elected president of the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta, Terri Beaupre. Terri got her start in politics volunteering for my constituency association in Grande Prairie-Wapiti, and I am so proud now to see her at the helm of the PC Party. I know she's going to do great things.

My second guest, Mr. Speaker, is my wife of 38 years, Sherry Drysdale. She is the reason I'm able to give so much of myself and my time serving Albertans. I'm always happy when I get an opportunity to publicly acknowledge her hard work and sacrifice, and I'm very proud to have her here today. Both of these amazing women are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: You have your second introduction, of course.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a member of my Alberta Transportation staff, Ryan Reichl, who is here today with colleagues from his work unit in the leadership development group. This group is involved in the work of the department and the government of Alberta's leadership program. Mr. Reichl organized this learning experience today so that he and his colleagues could better understand the business of the Legislature.

They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Asia Pacific Relations, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

1:40

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two very special guests from the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada. This foundation was created by an act of parliament in 1984 and has since been actively working to improve Canada's relations with Asia through research, awareness-building, and business and policy networks. The Asia Advisory Council was very pleased that we were chosen to partner with them to host the very first national conference, Canada's Asia Challenge: Building Skills and Knowledge for the Next Generation, this past October in Calgary. We are joined today by Mr. Stewart Beck, former Canadian High Commissioner to India and recently appointed president and CEO of the Asia Pacific Foundation, and also Mrs. Jill Price, VP of development and corporate affairs. They are both seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the very warm welcome of this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For my second introduction it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Mr. Munir Qazzaz, office manager in my constituency office. Previously Munir worked as a university professor and VP of community outreach at a university before immigrating to Canada. Munir has travelled up to Edmonton today to attend the winter 2014 constituency employee seminar and to be introduced in the House for the very first time. Joining him today is his wife, Hadeel, who's a community impact planner with the United Way of Calgary, who previously worked in international development for 15 years before coming to Canada. They are both seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Let us go to the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Jeneroux: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand here today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Miss Grace Gong. Miss Grace Gong is a fourth-year human ecology student at the University of Alberta. I had the privilege of going and talking to her class. She says that she's not sure what she wants to do after her degree, but we're here to convince her to become an MLA. Please rise.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Joseph Schow, whose birthday is today. Joe Schow played basketball with my son Spenser. He played at the Canadian collegiate level, at the Canadian basketball level, and in the international scene. Mr. Schow is fluent in writing and speaking Russian. He is a political science scholar. Joe, could you please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to the House two different introductions. The first is Dr. Donna Wilson, a renowned nurse-professor at the University of Alberta, a stellar candidate for us in the last by-election. She challenged the current Health minister and continues to challenge him in his place on health improvements.

The second introduction is Eric Musekamp and Darlene Dunlop, no strangers to this Legislature. They've been here every year, Mr. Speaker, for 10 years, calling on this government, at their own expense, to institute basic constitutional rights for farm workers in this province. They initiated the trust fund for the most recent fatality in the Raymond area, Charles Stauffer. I would ask all three of them now to stand and have the warm welcome of the Legislature.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly a valuable member of our Wildrose team, and I would ask her to stand as I do so. We have Cadence Bergman and her mother, Cathy, with us today. Cadence is a wonderful person to be around. She represents both myself and the Member for Calgary-Shaw. We often ask her which one is most high maintenance, and as a testament to her character, knowing full well it's the Member for Calgary-Shaw, she never says anything to hurt his feelings. I would like to welcome them today. It's good to have you.

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this House a good friend, a community volunteer from Lethbridge, Ms Shilpa Stocker. Ms Stocker has been instrumental in helping us put together the Team Lethbridge event, that's happening again this spring for the third time, where a number of organizations from Lethbridge come up here and meet with the government and talk about the good things happening and some of the wonderful opportunities that present themselves in southern Alberta. I'd ask Shilpa to please stand up and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, I understand your guests are not here yet, so let us move on.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: We have two minutes each. Let us start with Lesser Slave Lake, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Publication Ban on Deaths of Children in Care

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our history of Indian residential schools and the '60s scoop has traumatized aboriginal children and families for generations. This government has seen the impacts of this history in many forms. As an example, the number of aboriginal children in care is significantly higher than any other culture. A mantra I have and will continue to utter is that we need to do better to help families in need. I have heard from so many parents that their children were taken into care, and they don't understand why.

Thank you to the Ministry of Human Services for implementing several approaches that put communication and collaboration with families first. Thanks also for giving significantly more attention

to maintaining a child's connection to their own culture and their religious or spiritual beliefs.

Unfortunately, some children and youth, tragically, pass away while they're receiving child intervention services, and, Mr. Speaker, it's very sad. Parents have expressed to me that they have felt victimized by the past publication ban that was in place because it didn't allow them to talk about their children who died. I have personally witnessed the heartbreak families have had to endure as they felt they had to remain quiet when their children died in care. Some of these children were taken for reasons unexplained. I see how that really could place a horrible onus on families.

It makes my heart soar to see this government making efforts to respect families in their grieving. Mr. Speaker, I know the system is not perfect yet, but I am grateful for the changes made by the Ministry of Human Services to amend the publication ban so that the name and photograph of a deceased child may be published. I recognize that families who do not wish to have their child's name and photograph published may apply to the court for a ban.

I'm seeing a renewed focus on making sure families have the choice to speak publicly about their child or to seek privacy through a publication ban. The changes to the publication ban give control and choice back to the many aboriginal families who have been impacted and are still grappling with their losses. To me, this shows this government is committed to making sure that we bring dignity to families who are grieving the loss of a child.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Official Opposition Energy Policy

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about the Wildrose energy policy and our commitment to defend and promote our energy sector. We believe at our core, just as Albertans do, that with the bounty of natural resources we've been blessed with, we have a duty to develop our energy in the most responsible and most environmentally sustainable way we can.

While you may not hear it nightly in the news, our industry is doing some fantastic and truly amazing work on environmental progress. Through Canada's Oil Sands Innovation Alliance our oil sands are now sharing 777 technologies, that cost more than \$950 million to develop, to accelerate the pace of environmental improvement in Alberta's unconventional deposits.

The Wildrose believes in working with industry to implement bold, practical strategies to improve the quality of our air, water, and land, increase regulatory efficiencies, and grow markets for our products world-wide. Our moving Alberta forward policy this summer called to reduce tailings ponds. We believe government should act on this commitment by utilizing the tech fund and creating real incentives for those who do so. We believe government should tap into that wealth of knowledge along with other innovative, market-driven research companies and promote this research and development.

The Wildrose recognizes the importance of market access and the importance of getting our product to customers. Our leader this spring discussed our plan to create a natural resource right-of-way for future pipelines and other commercial activities. But while this is one of many ideas, we stand behind the current plans, including Keystone, Northern Gateway, and the Energy East pipelines. Our policy is positive, bold, and innovative. It will help Alberta secure a

dynamic and prosperous economy for generations to come, and I am proud to stand behind it.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's 1:50 p.m. We'll start. Please be reminded: 35 seconds maximum for the question and 35 seconds maximum for the answer.

Let us begin with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Resource Revenue Projections

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Finance minister about the fiscal update in light of Alberta's changing oil prices. He told this Assembly that he was sticking by the numbers in the fiscal update and that he fully expects to deliver the phony surplus that he promised. Setting aside the fact that the surplus isn't actually a surplus – they're taking out over \$2 billion more in debt – is the Finance minister really telling us that oil prices in the 60s are going to have no impact on the projections from last week's fiscal update?

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said yesterday, we don't budget oil on a daily basis. Prices are down right now, but we're quite confident that at the end of this fiscal year we'll be running a surplus. Stay tuned.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday the Finance minister's fiscal update pegged oil at a \$75 average between now and April. Two days later the Premier issued a revision, saying that oil will be between \$65 and \$75 a barrel for the rest of the fiscal year – note, Finance minister, that that does not mean a \$75 average – yet yesterday the Finance minister said that \$75 was a prudent number to budget on. To the Finance minister: why is he building his fiscal outlook on an oil price that the Premier has already said is wrong?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the Premier never said that the oil price was wrong. At the time I gave the second-quarter update, oil was at \$75. When the Premier gave his speech on Friday, it was down to \$65. As the Premier has said and I've said, predicting oil is a mug's game. I'll leave that to the opposition.

Ms Smith: Quite a change in 48 hours, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I know that this government is no stranger to wasting a few hundred million here and a billion dollars there, but a \$5 difference in the average oil price over a year has a \$1 billion discrepancy and impact on this government's revenues. The discrepancy between the Premier and the Finance minister could be as high as \$500 million for the remainder of this year. The Premier has said that the Finance minister's revenue projections are wrong. When will the Finance minister be doing a prudent fiscal update to correct his phony fiscal update from last Wednesday?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, we gave the second-quarter update. Those are the numbers that we had for the second quarter. I've been very clear that we're going to make sure that we reduce our spending. We're going to be very fiscally responsible

with every dollar we have from taxpayers, and we'll continue to make sure that this government runs in the black from an operating viewpoint.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions.

Health Facilities

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the stories of crumbling health facilities in Alberta continue to roll in: ant colonies in the walls in Sundre, frozen and ruptured water lines in Cardston, falling chunks of concrete in the surgical department in Brooks, and on and on it goes. This is Alberta. We are the wealthiest province in Canada, and this government can't even keep our hospitals from falling apart. This is the PC record of misplaced priorities and politicized health care spending. To the Health minister: what does he say for this sorry legacy?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, first of all, our hospitals have an outstanding record of maintaining the highest quality of health in this country. Accreditation: we are the top in this country. Mortality in Alberta hospitals is among the lowest of all 10 provinces. We deliver outstanding service. We'll continue to do that, whether it's in rural or urban.

Thank you.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I think the Health minister should be reading the newspapers lately.

This government has proven time and again that it's excellent at putting out press releases and cutting ribbons. When it comes to getting headlines, there's no one better, but when it comes to getting results, there's no one worse. Our wait times keep getting longer, and our hospitals, once the ribbons are cut, are understaffed, neglected, and fall into disrepair. To the Health minister: does he need to be reminded that it's not only his job to make sure that we have hospitals but to make sure that they actually function as well?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to making sure our hospitals are maintained properly and operate properly. Since 2009 we've spent \$283 million on operating maintenance. We've spent about \$220 million over the next three-year period on capital maintenance. We have a substantial budget. We work with all the hospitals to try to make sure we deliver the best quality health care in this country, and I think it's proven time and time again when you talk to the citizens of this wonderful province.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I think I know the problem. There are no commemorative plaques for fixing a broken pipe. You don't get a front-page local newspaper story for repairing a cracked floor, and new boilers don't come with ribbon cuttings. Maybe that's the real problem here. There is no incentive on that side to actually do any of these things because there's no political reward for them. So let's try to fix that. Would the Health minister please tell us how he would like to be recognized for doing routine hospital maintenance so that this work actually gets done?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question. You know, this government is committed to making sure people have access to the ongoing support of our health care system. We don't need to have plaques in order to get recognition. We get it daily from our citizens when we deliver the kind of health care

they expect day in and day out. We have the best in this country. We'll stand behind that.

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

Health Facility Infrastructure

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That leads me into this question. Today Public Accounts heard from Alberta Health professionals on the deteriorating state of core health infrastructure, and the warnings should not be ignored. The president of the AMA has said that deteriorating hospitals are really killing the system while the president-elect told the committee that "access is foundational to safety, and access is dependent on infrastructure, so therefore infrastructure drives safety." Minister, if infrastructure drives safety and you've ignored the infrastructure, it means you're ignoring the safety needs of patients and staff, and quite frankly that is unacceptable.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, our Alberta hospitals are outstanding in the care they give to Albertans. Patient safety is number one. Our record with infections is probably with some of the best in this country. We will continue to have the most accredited hospitals. Also, you know, on issues like mortality rate and infection rate we are some of the best in this country. We will continue to deliver services at an outstanding level.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, we're not talking about the incredible health care professionals; we're talking about the lack of infrastructure.

Minister, the head of the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta described rural Alberta hospitals as crumbling. There are reports of insect infestation, ceilings caving in, failing elevators, and leaks that have gone ignored for nine months. The doctors, the nurses, and patients are telling you this is a problem. We have been telling you that for years. So let's do this, Minister: ignore us as the opposition, but let's listen to the doctors and the nurses.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I have been out in rural Alberta and throughout many of the urban cities, talked to doctors. Yes, there's some frustration. I've not heard that story, but we'll let that story stay over there.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, once again, Mr. Speaker, I'll provide the story through a FOIP.

This government, your government, has done review after review after review. In fact, there are now three different lists of the repair work that needs to be done in hospitals. One is kept by Alberta Infrastructure, one is kept by Alberta Health Services, and the third party is inspectors contracted by the government. Now, we have three different lists and three different estimates ranging up to a billion dollars, and I can see why you're overwhelmed. So I'm going to make a suggestion to you, Minister: pick a list, prioritize the project, make it public, and get it done.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we have allowed Alberta Health Services to do the delivery of those repairs. We're spending \$225 million now. We've spent an additional \$283 million since 2008. The repairs in our hospitals are moving ahead, maybe not as quick as everybody would like, but it's a big province. We need to make

sure we prioritize things, and that's done through Alberta Health Services in co-operation with Alberta Infrastructure.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the nurses, doctors, and the health staff of this province are the best in the country, and they're operating under very difficult circumstances. Not too long ago our new Health minister was outraged as the mayor of Edmonton about the city's infrastructure challenges and potholes. He criticized the PC government for cutting funding and not keeping its commitments. Nonetheless, he forged ahead. As mayor he oversaw a budget of about \$2 billion. Now as Health minister he's got an \$18 billion budget, which is nine times greater. To the Health minister: why are you not outraged and using every means possible to fix Alberta's crumbling health infrastructure?

2:00

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed, as I've said before, to spending a tremendous amount of money to ensure this infrastructure works. We're going through a budgetary process. We'll discuss and look at what we can do. We'll make sure that we can do as much as possible. It is a problem that we understand, and we'll make sure that we move ahead finding solutions.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, it's not a problem; it's a crisis. According to an *Edmonton Journal* story Alberta's broken hospitals are as follows. Sturgeon hospital in St. Albert: the roof is leaking into the nursery of newborn children. Rockyview in Calgary: water leaks and moisture is causing noncompliance with infection control standards. Lamont hospital: lower air quality and ventilation. Lloydminster hospital: lead, X-ray, and radioactive contamination. Not to mention the millions of dollars needed to fix the litany of problems at the Foothills, Royal Alex, Misericordia, and other hospitals. To the Health minister. You were upset about potholes. How do you think Albertans feel about having to suffer to get care under these conditions?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member is confused between fixing a pothole and making sure people get proper health care. This province continues to give proper health care, outstanding care, the best in this country. Talk to people in this province. They're getting that care. They all say the same thing, that they really understand the importance of this system, how well we do in delivering the health care through our doctors and nurses.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I think this minister is confused. He's outraged over potholes, but he's not outraged over the state of our health facilities.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Health minister knows a thing or two about big development projects. It's important to buy bulk, set a budget, and get shovels into the ground as soon as possible to get the best value. I know he would not propose fixing a large complex by renovating one balcony or one unit at a time, but that's exactly what he's trying to sell to Albertans about our deferred maintenance crisis. Will the Health minister use the \$1 billion in federal health transfers to make a massive investment into fixing our broken health care infrastructure? If not, why not?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we will invest as is necessary in our health care system. If you look throughout this province, we've built unending numbers of hospitals, fixed unending numbers of hospitals, built unending numbers of long-term care and continuing care facilities. This government is committed to making sure Albertans are treated properly, with respect, and making sure they get the kind of care they expect.

Health Facility Infrastructure in Edmonton

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, yet an unending amount still needs to be done. Today the NDP released documents from AHS outlining the current state of health care infrastructure around Edmonton. They used three categories, the worst of which is the red zone, which means the problems are severe enough to negatively impact operations and/or elevate risk so that immediate action is required. In the Edmonton area five emergency rooms are in the red zone as are surgical facilities at the Mis, the Alex, and part of the U of A. To the Minister of Health: how could your government let this happen?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, in co-operation with Alberta Health Services we've been looking at how to do different things in our emergency care facilities. We're working with the Royal Alex, University of Alberta to put in transition beds and trying find more innovative ways to ensure that our citizens who go into emergency will be taken care of. This is an issue. We appreciate that, and we're working through it as we see the issues arise.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the section on surgical facilities describes significant capacity pressures at the Alex, which cause an "inability to meet the demand for service in a timely and efficient manner" in cancer surgery and the ophthalmology clinic. To be clear, this means that patient care is compromised by infrastructure neglect. To the minister. This happened on your government's watch. What do you have to say to those Albertans who aren't receiving the care they deserve because of your government's failure?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, this government is making every effort to ensure that people who are in need of surgery get that surgery. For those who are prioritized within the system quickly, we make every effort to ensure that they do it safely, effectively, and with great speed.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the report also says that the relatively new northeast Edmonton health clinic was designed to see 25,000 ER patients and instead is seeing over 50,000, causing many, many problems. To the Health minister. This problem didn't arise yesterday; it's the product of decades of neglect. Why won't your government come clean with Albertans and take responsibility for its long-standing and repeated failure to ensure that all Albertans have access to appropriate health care?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's question. You know, this province and this city are growing exponentially, and a lot of people are moving to the northeast end of the city of Edmonton, so it is a challenge. We realize that. We have great doctors, great support systems up there, and we'll continue to support them. The reality is that as our province is growing so much, we need to invest. We are investing, and we'll continue to do that, but it can't be done overnight.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Health Facility Infrastructure Capital Planning

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today's second release of the damning *Edmonton Journal* report is exposing how years of PC political manipulation in infrastructure has resulted in crumbling

hospital facilities across the province. Yesterday the Infrastructure minister said, "Guess who makes the decisions on those projects. It's Alberta Health Services." However, this report explicitly states that the government regularly ignores AHS funding recommendations. Last year only 1 out of 10 recommended projects was granted funding. Which story is true, Mr. Minister? Why aren't you being straightforward?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad members of this Assembly are finally paying attention to an issue that the Premier actually has outlined in the Speech from the Throne as being something that he deems to be a priority. It will be something that we have a measured and a precise plan for to address the infrastructure backlog in our province. I would ask the members to support our upcoming budget to make sure that happens.

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, we're facing over a billion dollars in deferred maintenance, and this government is failing to publish and stick to its priorities. Considering the *Journal* report shows that two-thirds of Alberta hospitals are at least 30 years old and needing major maintenance upgrades and given that this government's priorities change dramatically from one year to the next, can the minister enlighten us as to what specific priorities will be brought forward next year, or will he continue to shift projects with no predictable justification?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, this province has one of the most robust capital plans in the country, so the members opposite are more than welcome to take a look at the capital plan, to have a look at which projects are on there. With respect to maintenance funding, this is where they're getting a bit confused. Maintenance funding decisions are made by Alberta Health Services to address the most imminent needs they see for patients.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, well, the news just gets worse in today's second installment of the *Journal* investigation, which details issues such as insect infestations, burst pipes, and corroded sewer lines. To the minister again: since this report explicitly states that you've allowed maintenance issues to surpass your government's ability to keep up with them and given you've shown no sign of curbing the disturbing political trends that got us in this mess in the first place, what is your precise strategy in these tough economic times to address deferred infrastructure maintenance in Alberta's hospitals?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, we've got roughly 100 hospitals in the province of Alberta. That's a very significant number. At present we have about 265 different maintenance projects that are going on in every corner of this province: in Bassano, in Medicine Hat, in Pincher Creek, in Raymond, in the Crowsnest Pass. We have projects going on across this province, 265 maintenance projects, to ensure that Albertans are safe and looked after.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Calgary-Shaw. Edmonton-Riverview. [interjections]

Fraser Institute Report on Economic Freedom

Mr. Young: I'm glad I could build the anticipation. Wait for it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Fraser Institute released its report on economic freedom in North America today. Can the Minister of Finance detail for the House what this report concludes about

Alberta's economic freedom beyond an index number of 8.2? What does this mean to Albertans in terms of where we need to go?

2:10

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is pretty riveting stuff, and I hope the opposition listens. The report was very clear that Alberta ranks number one for economic freedom in Canada. Also, Alberta has the second-smallest government on a per capita basis in Canada, and overall we're the lowest taxed jurisdiction. Combine that with the highest wage earners: Alberta has a significant competitive advantage over other jurisdictions. [interjections]

Mr. Young: Also to the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance: given that this report shows other jurisdictions like Saskatchewan are making notable gains on economic freedom, what measures is this government taking to ensure that Alberta continues to pursue economic growth and not rest on the status quo? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, let's just give the floor to whoever has it, and we'll get through this together.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our economy continues to grow at a high rate. As a matter of fact, our GDP is still forecast to expand by 3.8 per cent for 2014, which is outpacing the national average. Our government has been clear that we will not introduce a sales tax and that we will maintain our low tax advantage. On Thursday I'm meeting with chief economists from across the country to get their insights into Alberta's economy as we work towards Budget 2015-16. But let me be very clear that we will be very prudent and very responsible with our fiscal decisions moving forward.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Young: Thank you. Can the Minister of Energy tell us how this economic freedom measure translates into something more tangible, like getting pipelines built and more to markets and keeping our economy competitive?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Market access is indeed important to us. Yesterday our Premier was in Vancouver talking to the Vancouver Board of Trade. Today he met with Premier Couillard in Quebec, tomorrow with Premier Wynne. On Thursday he meets with Governor Christie. We've got Rob Merrifield working in Washington, in Ottawa, Jay Hill working in west. We've got Ron Hoffman working overseas. [interjections] I can assure this House that we have the highest per capita number of people working on pipeline access in this country.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like some order, and I'm sure other members would here as well. So, please, enough is enough already, okay?

Let's move on.

School Modular Construction Prioritization

Mr. Wilson: Time for some real questions, Mr. Speaker. I am blessed to represent a constituency that is full of great people. They are selfless and understand the growth pressures that this province is under. They expect people to play by the rules, and

integrity is a guiding principle. This is why when a school in the Minister of Education's constituency was allotted modular classrooms before MidSun school in my constituency was, despite MidSun being higher on the CBE priority list, many legitimate questions were raised. The CBE uses publicly available, objective criteria to determine need. Minister, what criteria do you use?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the past two years we've approved more than 230 modulars province-wide. When we add in the emergent units that were announced in the past couple of months, the number is over 300, allowing us to accommodate more than 7,500 children. The Calgary board of education's requests for modulars have been received as have other school board jurisdictions' across the province. We respond to those, taking a close look at what criteria we believe to be in the best interests of moving education forward in each one of those schools.

Mr. Wilson: The front bench is making us proud today, Mr. Speaker.

Given this minister was asked the same question by the Leader of the Official Opposition on November 19 and she was told in response that he had received some letters and that he was responding to what parents are saying are priorities for their children, what does the minister have to say to the parents and families of MidSun and the five other schools who penned letter after letter asking for new modulars for their kids?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, we take very seriously every request which comes to us from school boards. When parents make their requests known to us, we respond to those, looking at them very carefully, seeing what criteria should be considered when we make decisions about where the modulars are going to go each year. We've done that this year. We'll continue to do that in the years to come.

Mr. Wilson: Minister, why won't you just stand in this House and admit that what you did was wrong? Let me put it in plain language so the minister understands, Mr. Speaker. MidSun and five other schools were higher on the CBE's priority list based on objective criteria, yet you chose funding for the modulars in your constituency first. To the Minister of Education: Will MidSun and these schools have their modulars before William Reid, and if not, why not?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, modulars are looked at in a variety of ways across the province. The schools which have been approved here in Calgary had the highest utilization rates of any of the schools that were being considered. We're going to continue to ensure that we are responding to modular requests in as timely a manner as we can, taking into consideration the most important criterion, which is: what can we do to improve education for children in all of our schools?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Seniors' Housing Placements

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Families often move relatives from one continuing care facility to another so that they may be closer to their relatives. This can be an emotional and trying time for the family involved. However, this process becomes even more difficult than is necessary because of a lack of clarity surrounding

the policy for transferring seniors from one facility to another. My first question is to the Minister of Health. My constituents in Sherwood Park want to know why this government will not consider a family's second, third, or even fourth choice for a continuing care facility if the first choice is not available?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for the question. Actually, we do that. I'm happy to clarify that. AHS does try to place each patient in a facility that the patient or family chooses, but I want to be clear that we need every bed in the hospitals. AHS needs to work with families to move patients in facilities as close as possible but not always their first choice. You know, 23,000 people a day are living in supportive housing or long-term care as well as another 25,000 per day in continuing care. We're really very busy, busy, and we will do all we can.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Olesen: Thank you. To the same minister: given that there is so much confusion surrounding this policy, what is being done to bring clarity to families with loved ones in continuing care who wish to bring their relatives closer to home?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said, AHS spends the time necessary to meet with and talk to the patients' families and explain to them the issues and what we can do for them. They also assign a case manager to continue to work with the patients and their families to move them closer to home if that's what they want. It's also important to qualify that there's no hundred-kilometre rule – that does not exist – or any distance. AHS just works to deliver the best health care possible and the best service anybody can have.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Olesen: Thank you. To the Minister of Seniors: given that nonsubsidized seniors' housing is much easier to get into but unaffordable for the majority of seniors, what commitments can you make to my constituents of Sherwood Park to assure them that their parents and grandparents will be able to find affordable housing in close proximity to their families?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for being such a strong advocate for seniors in her constituency. [interjections] I can see that the Official Opposition agrees with me on that point.

Our premier has this government committed to helping provide seniors with a variety of housing options, strategies, and programs close to home, Mr. Speaker, including affordable housing, because we know that there's no one size fits all. So to do this, we need to work with our municipal counterparts, our developers, our faith-based groups, and our housing management bodies and empower them with the tools that they need. Through the commitment of this Premier and the investments and announcements that you've seen recently, we are working on just that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

CNRL Environmental Performance

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the last five years Canadian Natural Resources Limited, CNRL, has had 978 releases in Alberta. These are releases which polluted our air, water, or land, from brackish water to fracking fluid, to ammonia, to crude oil. So far this week CNRL's Red Earth Creek operation has spilled 60,000 litres of crude oil, and in April they spilled 70,000 litres of oil and water northwest of Slave Lake. To the minister of the environment: why does this government continue to allow CNRL to operate in Alberta? They are the single worst polluter in all of Alberta by a long shot.

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, the premise of that question is unfathomable. CNRL provides a whole heck of a lot of economic activity and jobs for Albertans, pays a whole heck of a lot of royalties and income tax to the province so that we can deliver core services like education and health care, that the citizens of Alberta demand.

2:20

Ms Blakeman: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Minister.

Now, given that CNRL has had 978 releases but hundreds more violations for not reporting, failure to disclose, failure to test, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, how many financial penalties have been assessed to this company?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, it is very important that as we work with industry to make sure that we have the economic activity in this province that Albertans are very proud of, we also balance that with environmental protection. We have our integrated resource management system in place, which we are working on implementing. A big part of that is the Alberta Energy Regulator, who is the independent, arm's-length body that assesses and enforces the regulations that we have in place, which are some of the strongest around the world.

Ms Blakeman: No. No, that is just not true.

Back to the same minister: how long is this government willing to allow CNRL to write off the cost of any penalties or fines, the cost of pollution in other words, as tax deductible against their profits?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, we're always striving in this province to improve our environmental performance. You know, there are some businesses and some companies that need to do a better job, and we will challenge them to do so. We will work with our researchers, our innovators in this province, and our postsecondary institutions to make sure that we continue to push the envelope on environmental performance, and we do. We must do better. Albertans expect it. Our customers expect it.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's postsecondary institutions have suffered from drastic cuts because of this PC government for years. During his leadership campaign the current Premier promised to restore the funding cuts to Alberta's postsecondary institutions. Now the minister of advanced education seems to be backtracking on this promise. Will he tell us why he's telling Alberta students to expect cuts when the Premier promised to restore funding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell you is that no final budget decisions have been made. What I can further tell you is that Alberta invests in our postsecondary students. Our latest

numbers show that Alberta has the third-highest expenditures for full-time students in the country. Campus Alberta is a priority for our government. We invest \$2.1 billion in base operating grants across Campus Alberta. The Premier has made it clear that we are committed to sound, conservative fiscal principles, and that's exactly what we're going to deliver.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure if that was a yes or a no.

Given that the former Premier promised to increase funding to postsecondary but instead cut \$147 million and given that the current Premier promised to restore the remaining \$64.5 million, to the same minister, and I'll put this very simply for you: is your PC government going to keep this promise, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell you is that no final decisions have been made on the budget. I have been directed by our Premier to come up with a plan for long-term, stable, and predictable funding, and that is exactly what we're going to deliver. I can also tell you that we're going to be working with our institutions to deliver one of the best postsecondary educations in Canada, and that's what we're going to deliver.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta is the fastest growing province with the greatest need for doctors, teachers, and professionals and given that this PC government continuously undercuts the funding needed to train those doctors, nurses, and professionals, to the same minister: don't you understand that investing in Alberta's postsecondary education is key to maintaining Alberta's prosperity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell you, as I said earlier, is that we do invest in our system. We invested \$2.1 billion across our postsecondary system. We also provide access to postsecondary students. We provide \$234 million in grants, scholarships, and bursaries across our system. We also created a loan system that provides \$408 million in access to our postsecondary students. We believe in our postsecondary system, and we're investing in it.

Calgary Regional Partnership

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, the Calgary Regional Partnership claims to be a voluntary organization committed to facilitating regional co-operation. However, this organization is now pressuring the provincial government to legislatively force communities like Airdrie and Rocky View to submit to the CRP growth plan, essentially stripping communities like Airdrie of their local autonomy on issues, including housing density and economic development. To the minister: will the government agree to not legislatively force Airdrie or any other community to join or remain in the CRP against its wishes?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a good question. We really believe that we need to have regional planning throughout the province, in Calgary as well as in the greater Calgary area, but we also believe in municipal autonomy. We agree with regional planning but managed locally, and we support

municipalities to work together. We do that both financially and with other tools so that they can continue to grow together.

Mr. Anderson: Well, that brings up an interesting point. Minister, there have also been reports that CRP members are threatening communities like Airdrie that their water and waste-water agreements will not be respected or renewed if they don't agree to join and remain with the CRP. In my view, this is extortion. It's un-Albertan, and frankly I find it very disturbing. Will this government commit to protecting the citizens of Airdrie and those in other communities so that under no circumstances will a municipality's decision to leave the CRP have any effect on their access to water or waste-water treatment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we certainly respect Airdrie's mayor, Mayor Brown, and other mayors and municipalities in the area and their municipal autonomy. We support them as they do their regional partnerships and intermunicipal co-operation. We do that in lots of different ways, and we do it, certainly, with \$48.5 million in Alberta community partnerships. Many of the communities in the Calgary regional area have been part of the partnership and part of the Calgary metropolitan plan, and we work with them where they can provide services together.

Mr. Anderson: We need more clarity on that. It should be a voluntary organization, Minister.

Minister, there are also very credible reports that many CRP senior staff and executives are making outrageously high salaries and benefits and that they are attempting to stifle disclosure of these salaries by forcing elected members of the CRP to sign confidentiality agreements. Will the minister agree to ensure that the salaries and benefits of CRP management are publicly disclosed so that we can all make informed decisions in this House on whether this is an organization that's worth continued funding or whether it's a growing layer of unnecessary bureaucracy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We supply \$3.5 million to the Calgary Regional Partnership. They are doing good work. If you look at the Calgary metropolitan plan, they've come together in all of those regions, and they have done good work with that. We do, as I say for the third time, support municipal autonomy as well, but we want them to be able to work and plan together. They've come up with a great metropolitan plan. We will continue to work with them and communities in the greater Calgary region.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Feeder Association Loan Guarantee Program

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For 77 years the feeder association loan guarantee program has helped cattle feeders purchase calves. Through the program the Feeder Associations provides financing to the feeders, and the government provides the loan guarantees to the Feeder Associations. My question is to the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Back on November 19 I raised the issue of an increase in government loan guarantees so that cattle feeders could access more cattle. Can you tell me: has there been any progress on this file?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for the question. As you know, this question has been asked of me several times in the past weeks. This is a very important program, as I've indicated. I haven't changed my position in terms of extending or expanding the guarantee. I have also, in answering the question, though, said that there are other options, and we're continually looking at options. We have pointed out to the Feeder Associations that there is an existing program with AFSC, and it's called the specific loan guarantee program. We've invited them to talk to AFSC about that program.

Mr. Donovan: To the same minister: why can we not just increase the cap?

Mr. Olson: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of good reasons for not increasing the cap, and one is that it expands our liability. This is a guarantee, which gives the potential for some great losses. Now, it's been a very, very successful program. I will acknowledge that. However, I would suggest that we need to be more strategic in terms of expanding programs like this. We're doing a lot of policy work in this area right now, but in the meantime this is an existing program. It's also more commercial, and I would suggest that at a time of a very buoyant industry they should be involved in commercial deals.

2:30

Mr. Donovan: My final question is to the same minister. When can we expect something to be implemented here for a long-term solution for agricultural producers?

Mr. Olson: Well, Mr. Speaker, the immediate concern is what's going to happen today because we're in the middle of the fall calf run. This is something that needs to happen quite quickly, and the AFSC is available. They can take applications even today. It's an existing program, as I say. In terms of longer term, we continue to do work on that. I would just suggest that the member stay tuned.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Lyme Disease

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In our spring session I asked a question to the past Health minister on Lyme disease, where I addressed the chronic lack of support Alberta Health Services provides to Albertans with this serious disease. Now, with seemingly no progress on the file I am hoping that with a new Health minister there might be some real progress. Again, Lyme disease is a tick-borne disease and when left untreated has serious long-term health effects. Is this minister aware of this problem, and what is he going to do to ensure Albertans have access to testing and treatment?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, in 2014 six Albertans were diagnosed with Lyme disease, and there were 41 cases in the last four years. All cases required travelling out of the province to areas where the bacteria is known to circulate. There is an issue with the test. There are two tests, one that gives a positive/negative and one that can be more reliable. I think that we should look at the second one, which will give people far more comfort. As we move forward, I think it's important to do the proper testing.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll look forward to those results.

Given that many of my constituents and Albertans have had first-hand experience with this disease and dealing with AHS, two things have become evident. Doctors in Alberta are either not trained in detecting this condition or are outright refusing to test for Lyme disease, forcing Albertans to pay out of pocket and travel out of country for costly treatments with no possibility of reimbursement. Does the minister acknowledge that this is happening, and what progress has been made on this file since my last question?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, Lyme disease can be effectively and completely treated with antibiotics if the disease is caught in the early stages, and that's why the testing is so important. Alberta recommends that physicians consult with an infectious disease specialist if they're available – I hope they are, and I'm sure they are – to determine the best treatment options for an individual. We encourage consultation.

Mr. Rowe: This is not a laughing matter, minister. It's far, far from that.

Given that in Ontario and other governments, both federally and provincially, are already developing broad-based strategies to deal with this problem, to the new Health minister: when can we expect this government to follow suit and develop a provincial-wide strategy?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we will take every step we can in order to look at what we can do to ensure that those who have Lyme disease are taken care of. We can't promise a provincial-wide strategy, especially in light of that there's not that many cases. What we can do, though, is encourage that when people are tested, they are tested with the test that is the most effective.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Employment Services for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year about 100,000 people move to Alberta to find work because we are leading the country in job creation. However, certain groups of Albertans are not benefiting and are facing huge challenges in finding work. This includes a good number of my constituents in Edmonton-Mill Woods, who have disabilities and want to work, but they cannot find any jobs. They are among many Albertans who have a disability and are struggling to find employment. My question to the Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities: the government claims to support all Albertans to live fulfilling lives, but exactly what is your ministry doing to support those individuals who cannot otherwise participate in a level market?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to supporting all Albertans with disabilities to live fulfilling and meaningful lives. We firmly believe that if you're willing to work and you're able to work, you must have the opportunity to work. People with disabilities have a range of skills, and they are the best and the most loyal employees you will ever find. There are many, many employers right across our province who recognize that, and they're hiring people with

disabilities on their strengths because they're contributing to their bottom line.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again. My constituents of Edmonton-Mill Woods with disabilities who are looking for jobs are running into a barrier in finding employment. Why is your ministry not helping those Albertans to overcome those hurdles, Mr. Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are a lot of misconceptions out there when you're hiring people with disabilities. As I alluded to in my previous answer, they're the most loyal and the best employees you'll ever find. We're working on that through various different channels. We have an employer advisory council, both a private-sector and a public-sector advisory council to create awareness, to talk to various employers. Of course, there are many, many employers who are currently working on that to hire people, and of course we're leading by example by hiring 20 internship positions in Human Services.

The Speaker: Hon. member, second supplemental.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in Edmonton-Mill Woods have concerns about the lack of workplace support for people with disabilities. Will the associate minister admit that the current investments are simply not enough?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of different initiatives that we're taking as a government to reduce that gap or to bridge that gap. We launched back in May an employment-first innovation fund, which is to look at different ways to include people with disabilities. Of course, there are programs called DRES, disability-related employment supports, which are out there. But we can always do more to employ people. We can always do more to create awareness because, as I said earlier, they are the best people, the best employees, and the business cases are out there to prove that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Southern Alberta Highway Construction and Repair

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Winter driving conditions can be very hazardous, as we've recently seen, between Edmonton and Innisfail. Plowing and sanding crews for all the highways, county roads, and within our cities and towns have been working long hours as have tow truck operators and police personnel. Sadly, some have been injured.

Some situations are accidents waiting to happen, like highway 36 south of Taber – and I'll be tabling these pictures – where the road is actually breaking away and sliding off into the coulee and reservoir. Will the Minister of Transportation please tell us when this often-patched section will receive a safe, permanent repair instead of more Band-Aids?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. You know, we have areas of this province where there's slumping on riverbanks all over the place. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to stop Mother Nature before. This is one of those areas where there's going to be slumping.

Last year we added an additional lane on highway 36 at this location, but, you know, there still seem to be issues with the pavement. We'll be working to rectify that situation, and we'll continue to monitor it because I know it'll never go away. We'll always have to monitor it and make repairs as necessary.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you. I promise to keep reminding you.

Given that this provincial government continues trying to balance its budget through disrespect and disregard for local levels as a government by downloading responsibilities for bridges and secondary highways onto counties and MDs, will the Minister of Transportation please tell us when the funding required to do this job properly will be forthcoming?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the section that we're talking about – you know, we recently repaved that section and subsequently transferred it to the municipality in exchange for a gravel road, that the hon. member mentioned. Alberta Transportation does have plans to pave this road once the budget allows us to do that.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that last year the province rerouted secondary highway 845 south over a busy town of Raymond gravel road to connect directly with highway 52, will the minister please tell us when the promise to upgrade and pave will occur as well as the status of the work scheduled on highway 505?

2:40

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, that section that he mentioned, we do plan to pave it, but, as we know, the price of oil – we have budget restrictions.

You know, as far as 505, I know how important that is to agricultural producers to be able to move their crops to market in the fall and to get their work done in the spring. But I'm pleased to tell this House that this portion of 505 is being currently designed, and it's expected to be tendered this spring for construction in '15-16.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The time for Oral Question Period has expired.

We'll move back to Members' Statements, two minutes each, starting with Calgary-Hawkwood, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Members' Statements (continued)

Aging in Place Fair in Calgary

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rose several times in the House advocating for seniors' needs, in particular the aging-in-place initiative, which strives to meet the needs of seniors as they remain within or near their familiar community. On October 4, 2014, my constituency held an event called Aging in Place: A Family Affair. It showcased medical and social services such as in-home X-ray, snow shovelling, lawn cutting, assisted shopping,

and so forth. It also provided the opportunity for seniors to speak about their desire for special housing needs such as independent living, assisted living, and long-term care.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, a continuum of services, from soft services to infrastructure support, is what seniors need. The fair attracted over 800 people, including 40 agencies, who provided a resource fair. It was such a great success as a result of collaboration among community residents, community associations, senior-serving agencies, and different orders of government, provincial and municipal. It reminded us as an order of government that when we work together collaboratively, magic happens. By facilitating public engagement, we helped bring the community together and created a sense of ownership and pride, when local solutions were created meeting people's needs.

Mr. Speaker, the work has just begun, and we have a long way to go. With the new Ministry of Seniors being created under the Premier's new management, I look forward to working closely with hon. minister to make sure our next year's aging-in-place fair is another success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday Albertans witnessed a parliamentary low point demonstrated by the PCs, when they used procedural trickery to stifle the introduction of Bill 202 in this House, not, frankly, that there is much to debate because gay-straight alliances save lives. Full stop. Now, that fact doesn't seem to mean much to the members opposite, who have chosen to scuttle a bill that enshrines students' rights to form GSAs in favour of a bill that pits students against their schools and their school boards.

So for their benefit I'm going to share again the message we received from a student who tried to set up a GSA and couldn't. That student told us, "After a friend tried to start a GSA in my school and was shut down by our school board, I vowed to start one myself, but after having a conversation with the school board trustee, I learned that it just wasn't going to be possible. I was in my final year of high school, and exams were coming up, so it seemed like an impossible fight that I just wasn't able to raise."

Mr. Speaker, it seemed like an impossible fight. That's what this student says. This is exactly the situation that Bill 10 will make the rule, not the exception, and it's not only the students who are fighting this fight. Yesterday I heard from a teacher who told me about a student who had been engaging in self-harm as they were in the process of coming out. In support of that student the teacher offered to lead the formation of a GSA at the school. Within hours she was informed that parents wanted her fired. Her principal told her that her board's position was that GSAs were exclusionary and therefore prohibited at the school.

Mr. Speaker, the board was wrong. GSAs are a voluntary opportunity for youth to come together in a welcoming, inclusive space free from prejudice and discrimination. They are in many ways a lifeboat for some of our most at-risk children, a lifeboat that this PC government is denying to the students who need it most. Is this your government . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Let us move on to Calgary-Varsity, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

2014 Grey Cup Champions

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Sunday the Calgary Stampeders won the 102nd Grey Cup in Vancouver. I certainly don't want to compromise the decorum of our Legislature, but for many Albertans this is something to stand up and yahoo about.

Calgary deserved this Grey Cup. Coach Hufnagel's boys started strong against the Hamilton Ticats, and our quarterback Bo Levi Mitchell gave Calgary an early lead. But the game turned into a nail-biter, Mr. Speaker. A 45-yard Hamilton touchdown closed the gap to 17 to 7 at halftime. There were so many plays that could have taken the game to a different outcome, including a late touchdown by the Tiger-Cats that was called back because of a penalty. Fans had to try and remember to breathe.

Mr. Speaker, I'm the mother of three sons. Besides having a place in heaven, in this life I have a basement full of sports equipment: hockey pads, basketball shoes, and much-beloved football equipment. The experience of standing alongside my sons and husband and the other 52,056 fans at B.C. Place this past Sunday afternoon, cheering for our team in the Grey Cup, was an experience beyond my wildest dreams.

The home of the Stampeders, McMahon Stadium, is situated in the Calgary-Varsity constituency. Yes, Vancouver's B.C. Place, retractable roof and all, dwarfs our stadium, but out of that little stadium in Calgary has emerged a team triumphant, the 2014 Grey Cup winners.

Mr. Speaker, Canadians' willingness to endure winter storms and travel delays, trekking from football cities across our great country, to come together every year to watch the CFL Grey Cup is undisputed evidence of our hardiness as a people and of our oneness as a nation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Calgary-Varsity did seek special permission to wear the Calgary hat. I granted it, as I have done on a couple of other occasions. I will watch this carefully as we go forward. Each situation requires its own deliberation. That deliberation has been made. Thank you for allowing it to happen.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Aleena Sadownyk

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and give an update on a story on little Aleena Sadownyk from St. Albert. As many members in this House know, she suffers from MPS, a rare enzyme deficiency disease. After facing roadblocks from Alberta Health and the Alberta rare disease program to receive funding for a successful treatment program, Aleena's case was championed by the work of the Isaac Foundation and Andrew McFadyen. The public rallied behind Aleena and her family, and Alberta Health finally made the decision that should have been made earlier.

She's doing great these days. She has more energy than before, she and her dad can finally dance together, and she's now attending preschool. Mr. Speaker, she's bright, and she's happy. Her life stands as an example to everyone in the House about why it is critical that we stand up for the sick, the vulnerable, those who are living without a voice in our society. It's a reminder that we owe it to all Albertans to make sure that their health care

system is there for them when rare diseases strike and extremely expensive treatments are their only hope.

In July a new treatment for MPS IV, the same disease family Aleena suffers from, was approved by Health Canada. There are about six Albertans that need immediate access to this therapy to help prevent the devastating symptoms that come with the disease, symptoms that can't be reversed once they appear in individuals. Alberta could take up to a year reviewing treatment for this disease, a year of costly delays for those six vulnerable Albertans suffering from this terrible disease. Other provinces have approved the funding. Let's not forget about little Aleena. We can and must do better as a province in making sure that we are not denying life-saving services to those in need.

I'm going to finish this member's statement as I did a year ago. Dance, little one, dance.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Yes, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I am pleased to table five copies of the committee's report on its 2013 activities and would like to express my gratitude for the wonderful work of all members of this Assembly who are on that committee.

2:50

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice – and I present the appropriate number of copies – that at the appropriate time I will be rising on a point of privilege concerning the fact that I believe that by briefing Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect Our Children, to the members of the media without providing a similar briefing to members of the opposition beforehand, the government has breached the rights of the members of the House, obstructed the performance of our duties, and has thereby committed a contempt.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, did you have a notice as well?

Mr. Hehr: Well, I had a petition.

The Speaker: I'm sorry.

Could we have consent, then, to revert to Presenting Petitions?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Hehr: I have two sets of petitions, one with thousands of signatures on stating: we the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to consider a financial increase of monthly core benefits to the barriers to full employment and medical benefits with Alberta Works.

I also have a petition here, again with thousands of signatures on, primarily from many of the victims who were caught in the flood and were having serious problems with their DRP claims:

we the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to re-evaluate the disaster recovery program and how it has affected Alberta since its introduction following the flood of 2013 to ensure flood victims are compensated for their losses.

I have the requisite number of copies here.

The Speaker: If there are no other Notices of Motions, let's move on.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I have a number of tablings. I'll go through them quickly, Mr. Speaker. The first is a copy of a news article concerning the Education minister and his request for information from schools on how many different diversity, GSA, and antibullying clubs they have.

The second is a blog by David Climenhaga entitled *Balancing Rights? Just What Rights Are Being Balanced Here?* The Prentice Government's Bill 10 Is a Disgrace.

The third tabling is written by Graham Thomson from the *Edmonton Journal*, entitled *Muddling the Middle Ground*.

Next one is by daveberta.ca, which is Dave Cournoyer writing a political blog: *What If Politicians Could Stop School Kids from Starting Clubs?*

A second one again from Mr. Thomson: *Tories Weaken Stronger Effort from Liberals on Gay-straight Alliances*.

An editorial: *Liberals' Bill on Gay-straight Alliances Was Better*.

Then one from Breackenridge: *Prentice Has Made Debate Over Gay-straight Clubs Even More Divisive*.

Finally, quite a lengthy and powerful letter from Kimberley Bewick to the hon. Heather Klimchuk, who is her MLA, outlining why GSAs are so important and how much someone could be bullied and worse as a sexual minority student.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, and we have 30 more after this, so let's be brief, please.

Mr. Hehr: No. I'm good.

The Speaker: You're done. Thank you.

Let's move on. Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with two tablings. The first one is the requisite number of copies of a letter that I received from Tracy McKinnon, the chairperson of the Fort McMurray Catholic school division, with their position on Bill 202, where she outlines her concerns that the Education Act would be amended in a manner that takes away the parents' rights and makes the Education minister of the day the interpreter of decisions made under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Human Rights Act as they apply to school boards. It is the belief of the Fort McMurray Catholic school division that parents are the first and primary educators of their children.

My second tabling is the requisite number of copies of a document from Alberta Education entitled *Creating Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Learning Environments: Gay-straight Alliances in Schools*. It was published in November of 2013, and

it supports, encourages, and promotes the use of gay-straight alliances in Alberta schools.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Before we proceed forward, the hon. Government House Leader, presumably under 7(7).

Mr. Denis: Yes. I was going to ask for unanimous consent to waive rule 7(7). I hope I get it today.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: An objection has been raised, so we'll do as many as we can right now. Let's move on to Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: For what?

The Speaker: I have you down for three tablings.

Ms Notley: Okay. I don't believe I have three, but I do have one. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of the document from which I quoted in my question today. So there we go.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you. Is that all of them?

Ms Notley: No. I guess I do have one more. I'd also like to table the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail written by Faron Smordin in support of Bill 202. In this e-mail Faron writes, "If discrimination is not acceptable on grounds of sexual orientation, not allowing these types of clubs in certain schools would be discriminatory and would be violating the very change Premier Prentice is calling for."

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, real quickly. I've got three tablings here that I've been waiting for a while to do. The first is a tabling from Emma Clowes, who is a constituent of mine, asking the Education minister to take a look at adult school crossing guards for elementary schools. There is some very good information here. I was hoping that the minister could take a look at that.

The second one is from Deb Hutton, in my constituency again, talking about the need for concise legislation to protect homeowners from inadequate representation by boards and management companies in order to protect their investments and their homes. She's got some ideas there. I will forward it to the Service Alberta minister to take a look at it.

Finally, the third one is from Tanya Fix, who is worried about a monopoly that a company called Enform holds over safety and training for hydrogen sulfide. She feels that that should be open to many different safety companies to perform and not just Enform, which has been given that responsibility by the relevant agency.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, I understand you have five tablings.

Ms Fenske: Just one.

The Speaker: Just one today. Okay.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling of an electricity bill that I referred to yesterday in my speech on Bill 201.

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

Mr. Eggen: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings here today. The appropriate number of copies of a letter to the editor written by Sean Graham and published in *Fort McMurray Today*, putting out important statistics on GSAs, including that sexual minority students are seven times more likely to attempt suicide.

The second tabling I have is a letter written by Leah Ward of Edmonton. She reiterates what I think this government should already know, which is that the presence of successful GSAs in schools is known to contribute to positive outcomes for youth and to reduce negative outcomes such as violence and bullying.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I have a tabling for the Clerk on the statistics I referred to earlier on antibullying clubs, diversity clubs, and gay-straight alliances in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings with the requisite number of copies. The first are the photos that I referred to in my questions on highway 36.

The second and third are with reference to a situation in Taber, Alberta, with some of the concerned people there regarding the care that their senior citizens are receiving, including some e-mails and communications with Judith Jensen, whose father has been suffering in that facility.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, it's 3 o'clock almost or thereabouts. Before we stop this section, I'm pleased to table five copies of a letter received in my office today from the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, dated December 2, 2014, requesting early consideration for Bill 201 to proceed to Committee of the Whole. I'll table that with you now.

3:00

Let's move on to the point of privilege.

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, please proceed.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 15(2) yesterday afternoon I provided written notice to the Speaker of my intention to raise a point of privilege here today. Everyone should have a copy. In fact, the particular breach of privilege that I am raising today feels like a bit of déjà vu on this issue of media receiving technical briefings ahead of the opposition members and staff. We saw this happen on a number of occasions before. Yesterday, on December 1, at about 3:30 p.m. an exclusive technical briefing for the media on Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect Our Children, began. At 4:30 a public press conference was held. Then finally at 5:15 opposition staff and MLAs were briefed on this bill.

This is the first opportunity to raise this matter as per section 115 in *Beauchesne*, and we became aware of the media briefing shortly after it began yesterday at 3:30 p.m. Shortly thereafter we began to understand the nature of the information provided in the

briefing such as that media were provided with a vastly better understanding of the bill well before the opposition did. This is when we learned that our privileges as members of this Assembly and, indeed, the privileges of the Assembly as a whole, in my mind, were in fact breached.

As you know, "privilege is the sum of the peculiar rights . . . without which they could not discharge their functions and which exceed those possessed by other bodies or individuals." That's also from the *Beauchesne* text, page 11, and *Erskine May* as well on page 75. In this case the abilities of the members of the opposition to conduct their duties were obstructed, and therefore important democratic functions of the Assembly, I believe, were impaired. The government had given oral notice of the bill on Thursday, November 27, and it was on the Order Paper yesterday morning, yet the opposition parties had not yet had an opportunity to be briefed on or to even view the bill.

I believe that the government has committed a contempt of the Assembly by providing information about the government bill to members of the media prior to the bill's introduction in the House and without offering opposition members a similar opportunity.

Ms Notley: It was the same time.

Mr. Eggen: Same time. Okay. Yes, right. Thank you. The same time.

Erskine May on page 251 describes contempt.

Generally speaking, any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results, may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence.

Mr. Speaker, a similar case of privilege was raised a number of years ago in this Legislature on a ruling from March 5, 2003, page 304 of the *Hansard* of that year. The Speaker found that a government briefing provided to the media concerning a bill "when the bill was on the notice but before it was introduced constitutes a prima facie case of privilege as it offends the dignity and the authority of this Assembly." There is, of course, a slight distinction between these cases in that at this time Bill 10 had been introduced before the media briefing but only a very short time before.

Ms Notley: Three or four minutes.

Mr. Eggen: Three or four minutes, in fact. There you go.

However, the 2003 case is both persuasive and instructive nonetheless. In the debates and in the Speaker's ruling an important element in the Speaker's finding that members had been obstructed in the performance of their duties was that details of the bill, technical information, and the comprehensive understanding of the bill were provided to the media before we got it. The detailed nature of the information allowed the media to have a better understanding of the bill well before the members of the opposition. This in and of itself offends the dignity and the authority of the Assembly. However, it also frustrates the ability of opposition members to analyze a bill and comment on it in the media.

This mode of obstruction of the performance of members' duties is particularly relevant here because the media received a comprehensive technical briefing at 3:30 p.m., nearly two full hours before the opposition members were briefed. In this manner the media was provided with vastly more comprehensive information about the bill and were able to have a superior under-

standing of the bill well in advance of the opposition members. Accordingly, members of the opposition were unable to provide timely and accurate analysis at the subsequent press conference.

I would also note that on March 22, 2011, in a ruling from Speaker Milliken in the federal House of Commons, page 9113 of that *Hansard*, he said:

The member . . . is certainly not misguided in his expectation that members of the House, individually and collectively, must receive from the government particular types of information required for the fulfillment of their parliamentary duties before it is shared elsewhere.

Furthermore, on March 19, 2001, Peter Milliken, Speaker of the federal House of Commons, also said:

To deny to members information concerning business that is about to come before the House, while at the same time providing such information to media that will likely be questioning members about that business, is a situation that the Chair cannot condone.

These findings further clarify that a member's duties are obstructed when they are provided with necessary information after other parties or if they are provided with sustainably less information than other parties. The Assembly should be the place where public debate about legislation begins, not at a press conference mere minutes after the opposition has seen the bill.

So I am arguing out of fairness to all members of the House. Our privilege of being the first to see the details of legislation that is brought before this House must be maintained. That wasn't the case with Bill 10, Mr. Speaker, so I urge you to find that the events of yesterday constitute a *prima facie* case of privilege.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, please excuse my voice. I am still a bit under the weather today.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder has claimed that the government has breached the rights of members of the House by not providing opposition MLAs a briefing on Bill 10 similar to what was provided to members of the media. Despite the chirps from the leader of the fourth party there, Mr. Speaker, I agree with very little of what the Member for Edmonton-Calder has had to say. I can however assure the hon. member that we did in fact provide a briefing to all staff from opposition parties approximately an hour and a half after the briefing with the media.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I wish to remind this House that briefings provided by the government to the opposition are not in fact compelled by any standing order in this Assembly, nor does the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* or *Beauchesne* say anywhere that this is a requirement. We happily provide these briefings as a courtesy, as the leader of the opposition has pointed out to me – maybe it's polite – so that members from the opposition will have opportunities to ask questions of government officials.

Mr. Speaker, we on the government side even responded to feedback provided by the opposition House leaders, where they asked that briefings take place in the afternoon whenever possible and that they occur after the introduction of the bill. In fact, this is what happened yesterday. We made sure that the briefing with both the media and the opposition took place after Bill 10 was introduced in the House, therefore ensuring that members had the opportunity to attend the briefing with the copy of the bill in hand and the rights of the Assembly protected. [interjection] Now, I am going to continue on despite the leader of the fourth party chirping away.

The opposition was notified in the morning that a briefing would be provided that afternoon in the Carillon Room. It was originally scheduled for 5 p.m., but it was moved to 5:15 p.m. to accommodate the requests from the Member for Edmonton-Centre, which we were happy to do. We began at 5:20 p.m. when the member advised us to begin without her. Officials from Justice and Education went through the bill and took questions until there were no more. Far be it from me just to talk about something that happened when I wasn't there, but the following staff members from the opposition caucuses were present: Bill Bewick and Kim MacDougall from the Wildrose, Scott Fenwick and Kevin Tam from the Alberta Liberals, and Gwen Feeny from the Alberta New Democrats.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to provide clarification for the House and for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. However, given all the information provided, specifically the fact that there is no standing order or reference in any of the documents that we use to govern this Assembly that prohibits the actions of yesterday, I would ask you to find that there was no *prima facie* case of privilege and dismiss this matter summarily.

Thank you.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Anderson: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'll be very brief. I think that the point of the point of privilege is that, you know, the opposition should be able to see the bill and have a good look at it and have a briefing on it before the media gets a briefing on it. I think that's good practice. I would suggest that that be done going forward. This opposition party, I want to make it clear, has never said that we have any problem with morning briefings. Obviously, we'd prefer to see the finished product prior to getting a briefing, but I just want to make it clear that we're early risers here, got a lot of farmers in this caucus, so it's not a big problem to have those morning briefings.

Whether it's a point of privilege, well, I'll leave that to you to decide. I just think it is good practice in the future to make sure that the opposition parties are briefed before the media on these bills or at least get a chance to see it and have an understanding with the minister about what's in there so that we can respond in a coherent manner, which is tough at the best of times, as you well know. So maybe help us out with that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity. I just want to clarify a few things and speak to this point of privilege that has been raised. Indeed, the briefings are not part of our standing orders. They are part of a House leaders' agreement, an unofficial House leaders' agreement at that. The intent was to make sure that bills were not hitting the floor before opposition parties knew anything about them. We did start out some time ago with these briefings being offered. It has, some would say, degraded – others would say "have moved" – to quite a rigid point. My colleague from the Official Opposition has said that they don't care if there are morning briefings. Other opposition parties have said that they care very much and please don't hold them in the morning. But I just want to point out that at no point did I or anyone else that I'm aware of say that the briefing needs to be after the bill has been introduced.

We had a very strange period of time in the last session where there were panicked phone calls that we had to come to briefings, like, in the next hour because the bill was going to be introduced and they had to get it in before. I was in a meeting where it was said: "Well, this doesn't have to be. Let's accommodate each other. This is not hard-and-fast stuff." Clearly, the hon. House leader of the Official Opposition prefers to see the bill first, but none of this was meant to be hard and fast. Frankly, we don't really want it brought on the floor by the Government House Leader as: we said so. We didn't. We've tried to be accommodating.

I think the real point of this, Mr. Speaker, is that they're meant to be equal briefings. It is small and perhaps nasty of the government to give the media a much larger, more in-depth, more complex, more detailed briefing than they are offering to the opposition, and that indeed is what happened yesterday, I'm sure intentionally, so that the opposition would find themselves in a media scrum without the same information that the media had and, therefore, would be caught out and made to look foolish. I'm sure that was what was going on there, and it doesn't need to. None of this needs to be happening, and I wish it didn't, but unfortunately that is what happens.

You know, there are 60 people elected over there. They don't need to bully people over here. They don't need to stomp on them. They don't need to take extra measures and go out of their way to try and make us look bad. It's just not necessary. But, you know, that's what happened yesterday.

So that's what I think is underpinning my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Calder in bringing this point of privilege forward. It's that these briefings, official or unofficial, are meant to be equal briefings, not to give additional information to one group, which can then try to make the other group look foolish or less informed somehow. In that point I very much agree that what's been going on here is contemptuous of good working relationships in the House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we've heard from one speaker from each party. Customarily I would wait for a day or so to review all the comments, but they were, thankfully, quite brief, and I was able to track them as they went along. So I'm going to deal with this matter right now.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder did provide notice to me through a letter that was received in my office yesterday at 3:42 p.m., so we've had ample time from that perspective, and the prerequisites of notice under Standing Order 15(2) have been met.

Now, the hon. member claims in his notice and in his argument today, as we've just heard, that he feels his rights as a member have been interfered with because the government provided a briefing to the media on Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, but did not provide a similar briefing at the same time to members of the opposition, or words to that effect. Now, I'll just put aside for a moment the assertions and comments made by the Government House Leader that such a briefing was available to the opposition as part of the briefing that was given to the media and that that, in turn, was done after the bill had already been introduced. We'll leave that aside for the moment.

I would note that there is no specific right to have the government brief members on the content of a bill. Certainly, there have been instances in this Assembly where briefings were provided on a bill when the bill was on notice on the Order Paper but had not yet been introduced in the Assembly. In such circumstances a prima facie question of privilege was found by

former Speaker Kowalski on March 5, 2003, at page 304 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day.

In this case we have been advised today that the briefing to which the ND House leader objects occurred after the bill had been introduced in this Assembly. At that time the bill was public and had been provided to all members, obviously, in this Assembly.

Now, a similar purported question of privilege about access to a media briefing was raised by the former leader of the ND opposition on April 27, 2009. At page 824 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day former Speaker Kowalski said the following:

Allowing or not allowing a member to attend a media briefing does not constitute an impediment or obstruction to the member performing his or her parliamentary duties, which presumably is the category of privilege that the leader of the third party relies on.

I would also note that the current leader of the ND opposition raised a similar purported question of privilege on May 28, 2012, concerning a briefing on what was then Bill 1. In ruling that there was not a prima facie question of privilege, I stated on May 29, 2012, at page 59 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day the following:

"There has been no specific evidence to suggest that any member was actually impeded in the performance of his or her parliamentary duties."

In this case today the briefing about which the member complains occurred after Bill 10 was introduced in the Assembly. That's the key thing to remember, the word "after." In fact, there is no right for a member to receive a government briefing on a bill, but having said that, I do not want to discourage such a practice because we all know how much it contributes to the ebb and flow of the House and to the overall understanding of a bill coming onto the floor.

Now, even if the briefing was in any way, quote, proceeding in parliament, unquote, I cannot see how members were obstructed in performing their duties. Accordingly, I don't find there to be any contempt nor a prima facie question of privilege, and as stated in Standing Order 15(7), there will be no further proceedings on this matter.

However, I would encourage government members and others who have bills to be introduced to read *Hansard* for the comments that were made by Airdrie, Edmonton-Centre, and Edmonton-Calder, because I do find value in some of those comments, for your help and assistance. That being the case, this matter is now concluded, and we'll move on.

3:20

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 10

An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children

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

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the Assembly today to move Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children.

Before I discuss the details of this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak a little bit about why I decided to introduce and carry it on behalf of the government. Members of this Assembly know me. My constituents know me. They know me and my record as a passionate defender of the rights of LGBTQ citizens in this province. I have fought for the LGBTQ

community since well before I was elected to this Assembly, and I have been proud to carry on that fight as an MLA.

Mr. Speaker, if I may speak on his behalf briefly, I can also say that our Premier has carried that fight proudly and passionately for his entire career. He stood in favour of same-sex marriage as a federal Conservative, both in opposition and in government, in the House of Commons. That debate of nearly a decade ago was extremely heated, and our Premier's stand at that time was not necessarily as widely shared as it is today, but it was the right thing to do. I am very proud to have a Premier of Alberta with such a long and credible record defending LGBTQ rights.

I have seen the good and the bad in debates that affect LGBTQ citizens. I have seen prejudice and even outright hatred, and sometimes that made me wonder if progress on these issues could ever be made. But, Mr. Speaker, I've also seen tolerance and understanding, and that inspired me to keep fighting, knowing that it could make a difference. I've learned that if we want to make progress, sometimes we have to take yes for an answer.

Allow me to explain that. In the last session of this Legislature an opposition motion, Motion 503, went down in defeat. Had it passed, it would have mandated school boards to accept any and all attempts by students to establish gay-straight alliances in schools. Now, I voted for Motion 503. I spoke strongly in favour of it. I wish that it could have passed, but it didn't, Mr. Speaker. The result of that failed motion was that the status quo with respect to the rules on gay-straight alliances remained intact.

Now in a fresh legislative session this Assembly received a similar attempt from the opposition, this time in the form of a bill rather than a motion, Bill 202. There are differences, though. Bill 202 asked us not only to support gay-straight alliances in the same way as Motion 503 but also to repeal section 11.1 of the Alberta Human Rights Act, which speaks to specific rights of parents to withdraw children from their schools when certain subject matters are discussed. However well intentioned, Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 202 was unlikely to have passed in this Assembly either. The result: once again the status quo with respect to gay-straight alliances.

Mr. Speaker, I am not satisfied with the status quo. Members of the opposition might be. They might honestly believe that this is an all-or-nothing question. It is possible that they might also be quite happy to hold a no vote over the heads of their opponents in the next election and accuse them of intolerance or worse. I would have supported Bill 202 just as I supported Motion 503, but in the absence of their success, I choose to support progress instead of the status quo. I choose to support Bill 10.

This bill is the product of thoughtful, respectful, and thorough debate within the government caucus, the type of open and honest debate that makes me proud to be a member of the PC Party of Alberta. I heard views expressed on all sides of this issue, as did the Premier, and with those views taken into account, the government came back with a balanced and measured piece of legislation. This bill does several things. First and foremost for me, it makes important progress on the rights of the LGBTQ community. I believe this bill represents a significant step forward.

Let me discuss what the bill does on the subject of gay-straight alliances. As I said before – and I'll say it again – I support gay-straight alliances. They are proven as a means to protect kids, to deter and prevent bullying, and to promote inclusiveness. I share the goal of many Albertans to have zero roadblocks facing any students who wish to form a gay-straight alliance in their schools. Indeed, across the province schools and school boards have shown a remarkable commitment to ensuring that such requests are honoured. The Minister of Education informed this House

yesterday that the number of gay-straight alliances in Alberta has grown to 94, and, anecdotally, I hear from stakeholders in the LGBTQ community as well as those within the school system that establishing gay-straight alliances is generally seamless and is well supported by teachers, by administrators, by parents, and by others.

What Bill 10 does is to create a clear mechanism for those rare cases where students may run into roadblocks at their schools to have an appeal process with the school boards. They did not have that before. If a school said no, that was it. Our bill creates a process that is more accessible and democratic. School boards are elected bodies, and if they were to keep a roadblock like that in place, they would be answerable to the people who put them in place.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 10 also makes progress on LGBTQ issues more broadly. In Bill 10 we are enshrining and protecting sexual orientation in the Alberta Bill of Rights. That is an important step. It sends a signal to the public and to governments now and in the future that the rights of the LGBTQ community are fundamental in our policy-making.

Further, Bill 10 makes a change to the language that applies to parental rights in their children's education; specifically, Bill 10 repeals section 11.1 of the Alberta Human Rights Act and moves those provisions to the School Act and, eventually, to the Education Act. This makes our parental rights regime consistent with other jurisdictions. In doing so, Bill 10 also removes the words "sexual orientation" from the provision.

So what does that mean in a practical sense? Well, it means that parents will continue to receive notice when planned classroom discussions are to involve a number of sensitive areas and be given the option of withdrawing children, with no academic penalty. These include religion, patriotic exercises, and human sexuality. However, sexual orientation is no longer on that list. This has been a major irritant for the LGBTQ community, the idea that discussion in classrooms around gender identity or about rights for the LGBTQ community in Canada, for example, should be something that we need to warn parents about. We are removing that irritant.

There is a consensus that parents should still have notice with respect to religious instruction or patriotic exercises and indeed with respect to human sexuality, but if instructors wish to discuss broader concepts of sexual orientation separate and apart from discussions of human sexuality, we are signalling that those should not be a part of those provisions. It is because we value parental rights so highly that in addition to maintaining these provisions in the School Act and the Education Act, our government is also cementing parental rights in the Alberta Bill of Rights.

Mr. Speaker, I do not come to the Legislature today to tell you, my colleagues, or my constituents that this has been an easy position for me to arrive at. I have worked tirelessly on these issues, as have others in this Chamber. When it comes to gay-straight alliances in Alberta schools, I remain of the same view as when I cast a vote in favour of Motion 503. As legislators we are judged by our constituents on our records, on what we say, on how we vote, and on whether the former is consistent with the latter. I understand that when I supported Motion 503, it was not the same as what's presented here in Bill 10, but I also understand that an all-or-nothing approach to this issue has resulted not in all but in nothing. I wasn't going to be satisfied with "nothing" again.

There will surely be much spirited debate on this bill in the hours ahead. This is to be expected. The issues at stake are emotional. I haven't set my emotions aside either, Mr. Speaker,

but I hope that our debate can remain civilized and that it can remain at the standards that our constituents expect of us.

I urge all members to join me in supporting Bill 10. It reinforces the rights that parents have with respect to making choices about their children's education. It maintains the autonomy of school boards, which are elected and answerable to constituents at the ballot box should they take an approach that doesn't match their constituents' expectations. Most importantly, Bill 10 takes steps to protect our kids and advances the rights of the LGBTQ community.

I look forward to passing this bill, Mr. Speaker, and putting real progress in place. Thank you.

3:30

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I believe there's an understanding between the Official Opposition Wildrose and the Alberta Liberal Party for the House leader for the Liberals to speak next. I don't need any notes at this point. We'll just recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to go ahead.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to acknowledge the support of my colleagues in the Wildrose and thank them for allowing me to take their position as first responder to this bill. It is the kind of courtesy that I've come to expect from them, and I appreciate that.

Well, Mr. Speaker, gee, I finally get to get up and talk about a bill, not mine, unfortunately, but the government's. So here we are. My question is: will kids be safer tomorrow when this bill passes than they were yesterday? There's nothing in this bill that says that that's going to be the case, and I'm really, really disappointed that that is what this bill is.

We have the additional issue on top of us of the clock ticking. As I'm sure everyone in the House knows but they may not know outside of the House, the Government House Leader, before the bill was even introduced, called closure on every single section of this bill. So we have two hours to debate in second, two hours to debate in Committee of the Whole, and two hours to debate in third. That will be the sum total of the debate on this bill, which is really interesting when you consider that a number of times the colleagues opposite have made much in the media and other places in saying that there's been so much debate on this issue, they're sick of it. They're sick of all the debate on this. And then others have said that we should have continued debate on this. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we're about 15 minutes into the debate that we've actually managed to have in the Assembly, which is the debate that counts.

I find it really . . .

An Hon. Member: Troubling.

Ms Blakeman: . . . troubling, yes, but just bloody typical at this point of government to try and restrict the debate. That's just become their *modus operandi*. They can't bring us good bills, so they bring us bad ones, and then they make us debate them as fast as possible. Then I expect that everyone is going to get out of Dodge – I'm just doing a little bit of extrasensory perception here – I'm betting, Thursday. There's a hot foot. I can feel it. Hotfooting it out of town.

We have had very little debate on this issue, in fact, Mr. Speaker. There are a couple of questions that I want to go over or a couple of observations that I have. For starters, we keep hearing about the need for balance, and I find that really curious when you're talking about human rights. What is it about kids at high risk of committing suicide who want a peer support group? Who is

balancing this? What do they need to be balanced for? Why can't they just have a peer support group, help each other, and move on in their lives in the way that it's been studied and proven to actually work?

I always hear about this balance, and that's sort of become a little cue to me. When the government starts talking about balance – not the Official Opposition, mind you. They're talking about a different thing. But, certainly, when the government starts to talk about balance, I think: "Oh, yeah. They don't like this bill, and they don't know what to do with it. They can't quite admit that they're deeply divided, so they'll call it balance and move on."

You see, I don't think this balances at-risk kids with anything. Can they go and get a GSA today? No, not according to this bill. They're absolutely no further ahead today or tomorrow than they were yesterday. This bill does not help them with that. Can they force or mandate or insist or ask a policy to include – or wait. What I was trying to do in my bill was make sure that they could not be excluded. Can any of those things come to pass with this bill? No. They can ask a teacher or principal if they could have a peer support, and if the teacher or principal says no, that's it. Now, I don't expect you're going to have many eight-year-olds, but I don't know many 11-, 12-, 13-, 14-, 15-year-olds that have the wherewithal or even the knowledge to go: "Okay. Now, I'm going to go to the school board." Maybe they can get their parents to help.

The definitions that have been left in Bill 10 about the parameters that the school board makes these decisions on are pretty thorough, Mr. Speaker, and they can just say no for all the reasons. Especially those in the Catholic schools and in the private schools, they can just say no. No, that's not what they believe; that's not what this Catholic school is about. No. And that's the end of it. So are these kids any further ahead, these at-risk kids who, by the way, have no voice and have had no voice in this discussion? All these adults yammering on about their lives, but the kids themselves are not in here. They've had no voice, and it affects them so intimately.

So they go to the school board, and the school board says no. Then what? Well, this government, god bless them, is going to let these kids crack open the piggy bank or raid their university fund and go to court against their school board. Really, Mr. Speaker, how likely is that? Truly, not very likely. There are a few kids out there, a few really determined parents that might take it on, but these are long battles. The Delwin Vriend case took five or six years to get to the Supreme Court and stupendous amounts of money. Stupendous amounts of money.

I think the government telling these kids that that's okay, that they've got, air quotes here, legal recourse and they can take the school board to court – they're being sold a pig in a poke. It's pretty far-fetched, really far-fetched that they're going to be able to do that and be successful. Are they going to be able to get their GSA if they're at a school that doesn't want them to have it? No. Are we further ahead? No. I don't know what the government is talking about here, but they're not going to get any further ahead.

Further than that, there's even more confusion, if that is possible. I don't know of a government that can create more confusion out of pretty simple things than these guys, but they've managed to do it.

Dr. Swann: They're trying to placate certain people.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, they're trying to placate certain people.

They have removed section 11.1 from the Alberta Human Rights Act. I wonder if they would have done it if I hadn't brought Bill 202 forward. Somehow I think not. But they have removed it,

and then they put it into section 58. Now, what's interesting is that I stripped off "sexual orientation" and "sexuality" quite on purpose, quite deliberately, first of all, because what is sexuality if it isn't sexual health education?

Now, according to the media briefing – this information was not extended to us in the briefing that the opposition members got – the government will consider gender identity under sexuality, under that title, under section 50 of the School Act and section 58 of the Education Act. There's also a possibility – the question wasn't answered by the member, so maybe she can get up and answer it now – that it might also consider sexual orientation. Excuse me? So we've just cut it out of one place, moved the whole kit and caboodle over here, and now we allow that we're going to use that same term as a way of denying it to people again.

Can sexual orientation be discriminated against? Yes, of course. If they're going to put it under sexuality, absolutely. Can they deny gender identity to kids? You bet. Absolutely, if they're going to classify it under sexuality. That's the question that we have for the government. What exactly is under sexuality? Give us the definition, please, because the way it is now in the briefing that was given to the media, gender identity was definitely under it. When they asked, "Is sexual orientation under it?" that question wasn't answered. Let's have that question answered because if it is, we've got exactly the same thing in a different act with the same result. Kids with gender identity issues and kids with sexual orientation issues will not be allowed to do this.

One of the things that I was really concerned about in all of this, Mr. Speaker, was this whole debate/no debate idea, so I am going to circulate now a hoist amendment, which I will pass on. People say: why on earth would you be doing a hoist amendment, Laurie? Well, because I like parliamentary process. And parliamentary process says: well, why would you be hoisting a bill? Well, because it's not ready, because it hasn't had the kind of consultation and debate that it should have. So you essentially say: okay; let's bring this back at some point in the future, and then we'll be able to consider this with better resources in front of us, better consultation, a better written bill, perhaps. That's what I'm suggesting with this.

3:40

I am moving that second reading of Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence." That is duly approved and has been sent to the table.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, and I thank you for reading it into *Hansard*. I think everybody knows what the essence of a hoist amendment is. Let's get it circulated as quickly as we can, and with your unanimous consent, hon. members, we'll just let the hon. member carry on. Shall we do that? Yes? Okay.

Hon. member, why don't you just carry on, then, as the amendment is being distributed.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. So are kids safer now? No. Can kids get GSAs under this bill any better than they could yesterday or the day before? No, they can't. We're dealing here with a paramountcy of rights, which is – oh, I'm sorry; I didn't send the signed one. Sorry. There's the signed one.

It appears to be a paramountcy of rights, but in fact we don't have a paramountcy of rights in our Charter, in our Human Rights Act. The Alberta Bill of Rights is a piece of paper two pages long

with four sections in it, and most of the sections repeat themselves. It has absolutely no compliance mechanisms in it, it has absolutely no enforcement mechanisms in it, and it has no penalty mechanisms in it. So when they say that that is going to protect sexual orientation in Alberta, it's nothing. There is nothing in that bill that would protect them. Nothing. It's a piece of paper that says nice things except for one thing in there. It is not useful in protecting anyone with issues of sexual orientation. None of it. So I don't know why they puff up this Bill of Rights. Nobody ever heard of it before yesterday, and it's not going to help them at all. It's not protecting them at all. It has no compliance, no enforcement, no penalties. If it is violated, what would they do? They'd run after you with a piece of paper going: don't do that. Oh my, that will scare people, for sure. No, there's no help out of the Alberta Bill of Rights, none whatsoever.

We've also got a situation, and I was certainly the recipient of it. I am happy to share my telephone log and the many, many e-mails that I got from parents that were staggeringly ill informed and thought that GSAs were in schools to perform various sexual acts on children, to train them for pedophiles. It's just a staggering, shocking, appalling lack of information, and that was being perpetuated across this province. That's what they thought GSAs were, and that's why they campaigned so hard with my colleagues opposite to get them stopped. When I tried to read my bill to them, no, they didn't want to hear it. They didn't want to hear that sexual orientation and gender identity is genetic and there's nothing folks can do about it.

That's why kids need peer support groups, so they can figure out how to deal with this. But no. We had influence from a group of people that (a) didn't want to read the bill and (b) insisted on perpetuating – I don't even know how to describe it. I've never read anything like that. It was disturbing, frankly, that people could be that far wrong on what was trying to be done here.

I didn't start out with Bill 202 to do big things. I started out to do a couple of small things that were very meaningful to people: make sure that you could no longer discriminate against people based on sexual orientation, particularly not in the school system, that kids would be able to access GSAs as part of all the other antibullying measures that were being offered and, specifically, that they wouldn't be excluded from the antibullying measures that were being offered, which is what's happening now in the Catholic schools. They just won't offer it. They just include it in "all": oh, those kids under "all," they're all taken care of. Well, if that was true, we wouldn't have kids out there trying to get GSAs established in their school. They would feel they had been taken care of.

No kid sets himself out on that path and makes himself a public spectacle because it's already there for them. It's not already there. They are not looking after them in antibullying clubs and diversity clubs. They're not. And for a child that is questioning sexual orientation to go into a diversity club and say, "Well, I'm here because I heard this is where I could talk to people about sexual orientation," and then find out that is not what that club is for – it's for racial antidiscrimination or disabled antidiscrimination – that kid just outed themselves in the school. For that, they're going to at least get beat up in the parking lot if not much, much, much worse.

It was a small thing I was trying to do, but it had an immense effect on people's lives, and I'm really upset to see what's happened with it. I'm upset to see the amount of foul thinking that is out there about a group of people that moves among us in our society. Extending a human right to one person or group of people does not take rights away from someone else. It doesn't.

And I appreciate that parents want to supervise the teaching of their children or want to have input into it – I appreciate that – but in the end run if your children don't get sexual health education, who is paying for their sexually transmitted infection when they're an adult and wandering around with it? All of us are. We all take responsibility for that. That's why we all take responsibility for education. We understand that a well-educated youth improves us all, gives us all a better society, and it's all of our responsibility to pay for that.

I don't have kids, and I happily pay my school taxes. I believe in that public payment of school education. I think it's an important part of Canada and of Alberta. I never agree with people that phone and say: well, I'm a senior, and I shouldn't have to pay school property tax anymore. Yes, you do because you want people to be well educated so that when you're in a nursing home, the person looking after you has had a good education. That is the way I explain it back, and usually they'll admit that, yes, indeed, they do want someone that is well educated. So that is why we all join in education, but I think there also has to be a base point of what everyone is educated in.

I will not accept that it is okay in any way, shape, or form, under any euphemisms, under any clause, you know – and in this case it's hidden away in a parental opt-out section, section 58, which is what Bill 10 is presuming to do, to hide it away again under that subheading of sexuality, to hide away sexual orientation and make it okay to discriminate again. Not okay. Not okay. I never want to see that happen. I won't discriminate against seniors or the disabled or farmers. I don't care. I'm put on this Earth to make sure that I treat people with respect and dignity. I happily disagree with my colleagues beside me – and they will tell you that I do that – but I still respect them. I still honour the fact that they feel passionately about that.

So are we protecting people from being discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation under Bill 10? No. Are we protecting children who are at risk? No. Are we protecting children that are asking for GSAs to be available, to be accommodated for them? No. They can go to court to fight it. They can raid their university fund and take the school board to court in order to try to get a peer support group in their school. This is the length that this government wants to put children at? Seriously? Like, in no other cause would we do that. Even in equal rights they don't do that to kids. Even in the States, where they have the ERA, that requires that they fund girls' sports in exactly the same way as they fund boys' sports, they didn't make one little girl that wanted to play hockey go and take the school board to court in order to play on the hockey team. The whole team worked at it. But that is what our government is anticipating here, sending a kid off to try to battle the school board and then battle the courts in order to get a peer support group.

3:50

That is just not right, Mr. Speaker. It's just not Albertan. It's just not. We are good people. We believe in co-operation. We believe in honouring each other's opinions. We don't believe in subjecting children – or please tell me we don't – to some unbelievable hoops to jump through because we can't just come out and say: "Yes, you will get a peer support group. We will accommodate you. If we can't do it in our little tiny one-room schoolhouse in Somewhereville Alberta, we will accommodate you at the school next door, and we'll make sure that you're looked after there." It's about accommodation. That's what it was about. It wasn't about making anybody do things, but it was about making sure that kids had access to this in a real, meaningful, possible way. Have we got possible now? No, we don't.

I've talked a little bit about, you know, being bullied as a kid. We talk about that a lot in this House, and we've all talked about how important it is to assist kids not to be bullied. Boy, I'll tell you that I had a real taste of it yesterday in this House, and it was no fun, and I wouldn't recommend it to anyone, but I'm tougher than those kids, and you shouldn't be letting those kids be subject to that. You shouldn't be letting those kids be bullied.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll just make a couple of points of clarity here. We have before us a hoist amendment, and it will be referred to as amendment H1. The nature of this is to simply move that the bill be not now read a second time but be postponed for a certain period of time. I believe it's six months.

So all members who wish to may speak at this time, not all at once but one at a time, for up to 15 minutes, and 29(2)(a) will be available immediately after the next speaker, which in this case will be Airdrie. The order will be Wildrose, followed by the NDP, followed by the independent. Then we'll go back to government, a Liberal member, a Wildrose member, an NDP member and follow that sequence for as long as we have speakers. I believe that is in keeping with the spirit of how debate here should proceed.

That having been said, please remember that at the end of the speakers list the question will automatically be put on the vote at second. If it succeeds, you know what happens then; it gets effected. If it fails, then, of course, the question is immediately put for second reading.

That being said, let us move on with the hon. Member for Airdrie for his comments.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is tough. This is tough stuff. It's not always fun to debate these things, but some debates are tough, you know, and we need to have them, and we need to have them in a respectful manner.

This has been somewhat of a frustrating experience, I think, for a lot of members in this House, and I think maybe there's a little bit more empathy over on the other side now for having words thrown around and accusations thrown around about your tolerance and about your acceptance of other people because you take a position on an issue, whether that be free speech or whether that be protecting parental rights or religious freedoms, and trying to balance that with protecting kids and protecting students who are from the LGBTQ community.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

Sometimes it just happens in this political forum that you get your intentions or your motives questioned, and all of a sudden words like "intolerant" and "bigot" and so forth are bandied about. It is pretty painful to hear those things, especially when that has nothing to do with who you are as people and who we are as people in this Legislature.

That said, I would like to commend the Member for Edmonton-Centre for bringing her bill forward. She's obviously very passionate about it, clearly, and with good reason, but I believe in this debate she's managed to be passionate about these issues without stereotyping other people who disagree with her views on certain aspects of it as being bigoted or intolerant and so forth. Sometimes there's a line there, and sometimes we walk and straddle that line as we discuss these things, but I think she needs to be commended for straddling that very difficult line of being respectful.

Balance is tough. I know that the member just said that she doesn't like the word "balance," but for me it is a bit of a balancing act because it's genuine. We have all of these different

competing – they seem like they’re competing interests on the surface in that, you know, the rights of equality are obviously something we feel very passionate about. That includes that no one will be discriminated against based on any identifiable characteristic, very much including – we can go through the big list in section 15 of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms – race, religion, colour, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, and sexual orientation. So you have that equality right that you’re balancing.

You also have the right of religious freedom. It’s a difficult one because a lot of folks and a lots of parents and faith-based educators who start schools or have run our Catholic schools for many years, et cetera, want to have a fully immersive experience where their doctrine and their beliefs and their culture is felt throughout their entire educational experience. They feel very much that their freedom of religion is dependent upon that consistency of culture, of spiritual and religious background, and so forth. That means everything to them. I mean, you know if you’ve talked to them that it means so much to them as individuals about who they are, and it needs to be respected.

Of course, the protection of children. Who here doesn’t think we shouldn’t do everything we can to protect children who are being bullied? Of course, that includes very much our LGBTQ youth, who, frankly, over the last decade or so have become, I would say, one of the major targeted groups of bullying. I think that we have to recognize that. I think we do recognize that. Certainly, the introducer of Bill 10 talked about that. It’s a very serious issue.

Of course, there’s the autonomy of local school boards – that’s an important principle – and parental rights. You know, many of us in here have children and have been blessed with that. I’ll tell you that it’s an overwhelming experience, of course, being a parent in a lot of situations. You want to talk to your kids about these very difficult subjects that perhaps your parents maybe didn’t talk to you too much about growing up, and then all of sudden you’ve got to figure out how you’re going to communicate these things to a little 10-year-old, who’s wide eyed and completely innocent about a whole bunch of things. That’s a tough thing to do, but you try to as parents come together and figure out the best way, and you talk through it. It’s a tough thing to do, and it’s challenging. So we’re trying to balance all these rights.

The Wildrose proposed several amendments that we thought would take Bill 202 and, in our view, better balance those rights, that I just mentioned. We were looking very much forward to the debate. You know, I would have liked to have debated that bill. I think that it would have been worth debate. Certainly, we would have brought amendments, and we could have debated those amendments, and the government could have also brought amendments. But that’s not where we’re at right now. You know, we’re here now. We have a bill in front of us, and we’re going to have to vote on it.

One thing that I want to make very clear is that although the concepts and the principles I’m talking about right now are shared by the Wildrose, we’re very lucky in our caucus that we do have free votes. We’ve always had free votes, and we’re looking forward to voting freely on this bill. I know that there will be people in our caucus that vote against and people that vote for. I myself will be voting for Bill 10 for several reasons.

First of all, I want to commend the addition of “sexual orientation” to the Alberta Bill of Rights. I think that was read in by the Supreme Court of Canada a long time ago, but symbols matter. It’s not good enough that it’s just there in the ether having been read in; it’s good to actually put it down to paper. I think that that’s important.

I also think another piece that I feel that I support in the bill is the addition of parental rights to the Alberta Bill of Rights. I want to frankly commend this Premier and members from all parties that might agree with that for doing that.

4:00

Parents do have rights, and we have seen through a very sad portion of our Canadian history what happens when parental rights to decide with regard to their children’s education and cultural upbringing and so forth are interfered with by the state in the name of progress. Of course, one of the worst, darkest hours of our history was the residential school debacle – “debacle” is not even the right word – tragedy, awfulness, whatever adjective you want to use. That, to me, is an example of why we have to be very, very, very careful to always protect the rights of parents with regard to making informed decisions about their kids. That needs to be respected, and I want to commend the Premier for including those rights in the Alberta Bill of Rights. Hopefully, they will stay there for, certainly, the rest of my lifetime and, hopefully, beyond. So thank you to him for that.

The notification requirement. It was previously, obviously, in the Alberta Human Rights Act. It’s now being moved to the Education Act. The notification requirement for parents would be that when religion or human sexuality is explicitly taught, parents will be informed and will have the option to opt their child out. I really feel very strongly that this is an important piece of this piece of legislation if this part is respected. You know, people want to say: “Oh, because you want parents to be informed of this, therefore that just means you don’t want to talk about these issues. You don’t want to talk about equality. You don’t want to talk about sexual health. You don’t want to talk about these things.”

I have four boys. One just went through his first sex education class at school. I got the note and everything and was informed and left him in, obviously, to go through the sexual education class that was there. I knew what was going to be taught. I was able to sit down with him prior to and after, and I was able to have a sensitive and really healthy discussion with my child about all the questions that surround human sexuality that he was learning about on that day. I’ve got to tell you how absolutely critical it is for me as a parent to be able to have that conversation and to be part of the conversation. I know that little guy better than anybody else other than Anita, my wife. I mean, why shouldn’t I as a parent have the right, frankly, and why shouldn’t I have the responsibility, when we’re talking about something like religious belief and human sexuality, with regard to my child? Of course I should be involved in that conversation.

I think that to say that that is in any way a sign of intolerance is – I just can’t equate the two. I think that we have a responsibility. If parents, frankly, are more involved with their kids in discussing those topics and knowing what is being taught to their children and then making sure that the sensitivities of their individual child are addressed, I think that actually leads to better outcomes. It leads to better sexual health and better, more balanced children, frankly, than just having a stranger speak about those things, not necessarily a stranger but someone who, clearly, is less familiar with them.

So I really appreciate that that notification requirement is going to stay in there, and I don’t think we should say that human sexuality means one thing and doesn’t mean another thing. For me, it means that for anything that pertains to sexuality and the sexuality of my child, I just want to be a part of that discussion. If it’s going to happen in school, I want to know about it, and I want to make sure that I’m a part of the conversation with my child. I think that that’s a responsibility of parents.

Finally, I want to talk about GSAs. I don't know of anyone in here that doesn't support the formation of gay-straight alliances when they are requested by students. You know, I went to public school myself. I know that gay-straight alliances have had a very good effect in public schools and, actually, in a few faith-based schools where they've been introduced in some circumstances.

I would note two things. First of all, again, each different faith – we have a lot of different schools in my current riding and my old riding. The Khalsa school is a great Sikh school just on the northeast side of Calgary. We have different Christian schools and so forth. The schools take very seriously that they want to keep a certain culture, a certain framework, and they want to have everything, you know, their entire experience, immersed in their religious culture. That's what they want. It's not that they don't support antibullying clubs or diversity clubs or GSAs or anything like that. They just want to make sure that language and perspectives that they have are a part of that discussion. I don't in any way think that these faith-based schools are doing this because they're in some way bigoted against these students or want them to be hurt. I just don't believe that. I just believe they want to do it in a culturally sensitive manner that makes sense for their individual school. In some cases that might mean doing it a little differently than I would do it or most of the members in this Assembly would do it with regard to allowing a GSA. I think that does need to be respected.

I would note, too, that the Wildrose would like to bring an amendment to Bill 10. It's specifically regarding when a student requests a GSA, that if the answer does end up being no – and we would hope in most cases it wouldn't be – in cases where for some reason the answer is no, we believe as the Wildrose caucus there should be a requirement for the school to work with the individual student on a very specific antibullying and support strategy that meets the individual needs of that individual student or students who requested the GSA in the school.

I think that the current government's resolution to that is good. I don't think it's a poor resolution, but I don't think it gives enough protection and enough resources to those students who feel bullied in those schools in those circumstances. I credit them for working on that balance, and I think they're really striving for it in an honest and sincere way, but I think that we could increase support for those students by making it a requirement that the school work with them on their specific needs, whatever that may mean. Each individual circumstance would be different.

I will be supporting Bill 10, and thank you for the debate, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I would remind you that we are speaking on the hoist amendment.

The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise to formally engage in this debate today in the Legislature. Let me begin by saying that I will be voting in favour of this hoist because we cannot support this piece of legislation as it is currently constructed.

I want to begin by acknowledging the fact that this legislation does remove 11.1 from the human rights code, and that is a good thing because I've always characterized 11.1 as a scar on an otherwise beautiful document. It's a scar that existed only in the province of Alberta. It was a scar that was inflicted upon an otherwise beautiful document by this PC government in 2009. I am pleased that that particular scar is being corrected through this bill. Nonetheless, unfortunately, the other components of this bill are premised on assumptions that are so deeply troubling to me

that I'm still not able to support it, and those are the things that I want to talk about.

First of all, of course, there's this issue of parental right to be notified on education with respect to human sexuality. Let me just put it very clearly on the record. I have no difficulty with that. I think parents should be part of a conversation about human sexuality, and they should know when their kids are being taught those issues at school. I agree with the kind of scenario that the Member for Airdrie outlined in that regard.

4:10

That's not the issue here, though. We're not talking about issues of human sexuality. We are talking about the ability to openly and with pride protect the rights of students who are members of the LGBTQ community or who are themselves part of a family where, say, both parents are same-sex or transgendered or another member of a sexual minority group. That's who we are talking about protecting. So that's a different issue.

This bill, if you look at the history, was very clearly devised, delivered, distributed, promoted in an effort to negate discussion and to protect this government and the Official Opposition from having to vote on Bill 202. It is a very intentional attempt to muddy the waters as much as possible and avoid a clear understanding of what people's positions were with respect to Bill 202.

I've been very pleased to see the commentary that has occurred within the public since because most people see that for what it is. They understand that at its heart this bill does nothing to protect the rights of sexual minority students to promote and begin a GSA in their schools. In fact, what this does is that it simply protects the status quo with respect to the rights of students to seek out a GSA as a means of protecting themselves and their rights in their school setting.

To be clear, GSAs do exist in other jurisdictions which have faith-based schools as part of their tradition. They exist both in Ontario and Manitoba, and it happened, frankly, without the sky falling. Frankly, were there enough courage in this Assembly, it could happen here.

This government continuously talks about balancing – balancing – the rights between parents and LGBTQ students. I am going to talk about how offensive that notion is in just a moment, but I just want to speak for a moment as a parent because everyone keeps talking about parental rights. Well, I too am a parent, Madam Speaker, and I have to tell you that I am deeply offended that another parent believes that they have a right to tell me what after-school, extracurricular activities my kids can be part of. And be very clear: that's what's happening here. No one is telling any single solitary parent in this province that their children have to go to a GSA after school. No one is telling a parent that, and that is not what Bill 202 would have done. What's happening here is that this government, probably with the support of the Official Opposition, is telling me that my kids cannot go to a GSA if they choose to if their school board will not allow them to do it.

So just to be very clear, parental rights are at issue here, but it's my parental rights that are at issue because it's the ability to go that is being limited. It is not the ability to not go which is being limited. Let us be very clear that that so-called balance is disingenuous at best when it is being discussed here.

Now, let's talk as well about the notion of balancing human rights and balancing one of those protected grounds under section 15 of our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Well, I've said this before, and I'm going to say it again. If a parent came to me and said that their rights were being prohibited or somehow limited because my kid wanted to start an antiracism class or an

antiracism club after school and if this government stood up for that parent's rights to say that my kid cannot start an antiracism club after school, people in this province, probably even the majority of folks over on that side, would lose their heads, and they should, because we all get that racism is bad.

I hate to break it to you, folks, but racism is not the only prohibited ground of discrimination under section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Sexual orientation is also a prohibited ground under section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Let us be very clear. That Canadian Charter does not – it does not – say: “Racism is something that should not ever happen. We also kind of really hope that if it's not inconvenient for you, you should also try not to be homophobic either.” That's not the way the Charter reads. The Charter reads that both rights deserve equal protection, yet implicit in this government's bill is a prioritization, a hierarchy of which rights they believe are more important than others. I'm talking just in terms of those enumerated grounds upon which all Canadians deserve protection, which are listed in section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. So inherent in that, then, is that issue.

I find it incredibly troubling that probably the majority of people in this Legislature don't understand that people and children and families and communities in this province deserve as much protection from homophobia as they do from racism. It is very clear to me that that understanding is not commonly understood, embraced, or accepted across the aisle. It's that fundamental presumption which drives the decision of this government to talk about balancing the rights of parents, to tell me that my kids cannot participate in a GSA in a publicly funded school should the school board decide that they're opposed to it. That is what is fundamentally wrong with this bill, and that is why under no circumstances can I support it.

Let's just talk a little bit about some of the other disingenuous arguments that we've seen float across the aisle from people defending this piece of legislation. Well, the sponsor of the bill has talked publicly several times today about how she will do everything she can to promote GSAs in as many parts of the province as she possibly can. So my specific question to her is – I don't know what her financial situation is like, if she has been talking perhaps with the Minister of Justice – has she planned for that roughly \$25,000 that each judicial review application will cost?

Mr. Eggen: Or more.

Ms Notley: Is the plan to pay that \$25,000 or more on behalf of each marginalized kid who is told that he or she and their friends cannot start a club, a voluntary club, after school that would help kids that are systemically bullied as a result of outdated and undeveloped understandings of what true equality consists of? When those kids are bullied by that, they need to be able to reach into their back pocket and bust out with a \$25,000 bill to pay for a lawyer to do a judicial review application, and people over there call that a solution.

I mean, it's interesting. You know, we often talk about the Premier and his relationship with the banking industry. But if he, honest to God, thinks a \$25,000 bill is a solution for the majority of kids who are going to come up against the inability to develop clubs that will provide them support and protection from bullying, then it is clearly an indication that he's desperately out of touch with the economic circumstances of the vast majority of people who live in the province over which he has a governance relationship or governance authority. I don't know. Maybe CIBC,

maybe Enbridge can pull 25,000 bucks out of their back pocket to run a judicial review application, but I'm pretty sure most Albertans cannot. So to suggest that that is a solution is disingenuous, Madam Speaker, incredibly disingenuous.

We've talked about how this might perhaps be an issue with respect to, you know, some issues around faith. But I would suggest to you, Madam Speaker, that that's not the case. It's absolutely not the case. Again, these GSAs would be voluntary. No one is imposing them on anybody. The EPSB allows for every child within the Edmonton public school board who wants to start a GSA to start a GSA, and that's why the vast majority of GSAs in Alberta resides in the Edmonton public school board.

Interestingly, the Edmonton public school board uses its public dollars to also fund several destination faith-based schools. That exists within the EPSB, yet we've not heard a peep about how that somehow has undermined the rights of those who participate and attend those schools because, in my view, it doesn't. A voluntary support group adjacent to a faith-based education: they're not mutually exclusive, Madam Speaker. Frankly, I think that it's the people who suggest that they are who are the ones that are sowing divisiveness. Those are the ones that are sowing unnecessary debate. Those are the ones who are sowing a fight where none exists. I think that if it can happen in EPSB, frankly, it should be able to happen anywhere else.

4:20

There's a lot of talk about school board rights. School board rights. Now, I find that very entertaining, Madam Speaker, because school boards, just to be clear, are institutions, and when we're talking about the fundamental, Charter-protected rights of human beings, you know, it's a little bit ironic that a minister who was prepared to overlook school board rights when it came to funding priorities is prepared to now hold them up as a means of undermining the Charter-protected rights of kids and their families.

You know, I just want to mention that there was a vote at one point by the School Boards Association, back in 2012, around a policy that would have supported, among other things, GSAs. At that point one of the people amongst those school boards who voted against that policy was quoted as saying that, quote, if children with a gay tendency appear a certain way, we know that we have to be vigilant to make sure they are not discriminated against. End quote. But when asked if those students should try to be less identifiable, the same school board representative said, quote, I think that for their own benefit it would be helpful. End quote. That's a good example of the concerns that are expressed by some representatives of the school boards against adopting a policy that would have been adopted had we voted in favour of Bill 202.

Those are the rights and the opinions that these folks over there are committed to supporting and protecting. I would say to you, Madam Speaker, that that caucus over there is profoundly, deeply, and probably irreparably out of touch with the values of the vast majority of Albertans in choosing to represent those notions. These are fundamental rights. They can be accommodated. They can be accommodated with an inclusive, welcoming, voluntary approach. That is something that Bill 10 prohibits. It is something that facilitates an ongoing ban on GSAs where people who have the attitudes I just described choose to do it, and that's why we can't support it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Once again, we are speaking to the hoist amendment. We have 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: No, thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. Anyone on 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre on the hoist amendment.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm going to support the hoist amendment as I would support the bill itself, as I would support Bill 202, that the member would have brought forward.

For me, as I hear everyone's arguments, what's disturbing particularly – the emotions that some people have displayed and demonstrated are reminiscent of what I grew up with. If I take out LGBTQ and just substitute black or African-American or African-Canadian, I'm reliving the 1960s. I've seen this in the civil rights movement. I didn't understand it till I got much older, but the arguments have never changed. They're the same arguments; they're just repeating themselves. It's just another class of people that we're dealing with.

I understand what is happening here. I listened to the Premier when he brought his bill forward. Has anyone in this Assembly used the LGBTQ community for political purposes? I believe that there's a lot of guilt in this room. But the fact is that what we're trying to do is legislate ethical behaviour, moral grounds. We're trying to legislate against discrimination, and we've not figured it out yet as a society. We're still working on this.

I understand the whole issue of parental rights. I know the imperative of – I'm hearing what particularly these young children are going through, particularly the suicide rate and what these GSAs do to help prevent the suicide rate. I do not believe there is any common ground between parental rights and discrimination. It is already in the Charter, as has been mentioned.

I've been watching the media as I've been listening to the debate, and I think something that is extremely hurtful – I watched the Member for Calgary-North West get attacked in the Twittersphere and all the social media, and I've seen other people get attacked for what side of the debate they take on this, the kind of emotions that are rising up, the hatred, the vitriolic anger. Yet everybody in here is trying to in one degree or another express their concern or their opinion on how they stand against discrimination.

But nobody has really brought up the elephant in the room, which is the Catholic church and the Catholic school boards. The issue that we're dealing with here, when you actually break it out, is that we're dealing with a religious belief system – it's not just the Catholics, but they are the dominant force here with the school boards – that believes that somehow you choose to be gay. I don't know why anyone would choose to be gay. I'm sorry, but the fact is: would I choose a lifestyle given the opportunity to be totally discriminated against all the time? God forbid that I choose to be gay and First Nations. Why would you make that choice? You wouldn't make that choice.

If I had to make a choice, I'd choose a life of leisure. I get a better choice at that sometimes. Maybe I'd choose to be a young person in this Legislature's nice life of leisure. But the fact is that I don't get to make certain choices, and people who are gay and in the community of LGBTQ – that's not a choice. I can't believe that's a choice, for the life of me. I've talked it over with some of my colleagues in the room. Back when I was a child, we didn't even have any of these support systems, but we knew that some kids in schools were different, learned later in life that, okay, they were gay. Didn't know it then, but they were bullied, they were

harassed, and that's fundamentally wrong. It's illegal in our country today.

Here we are trying to bring legislation forward to improve or to at least change what is happening, to protect. How do we deal with this when you have religious belief systems that contradict that? But what's interesting is that they don't contradict the discrimination part, because if you talk to the people in charge of these school boards and if you talk to, you know, the bishops and the cardinals, they will tell you that they do not discriminate. So what are we faced with? We're faced with trying to bring legislation which is nothing more than trying to educate. The battle with discrimination is the battle against ignorance. It will never leave us as a society. It is a constant battle, and it's only winnable through education, constant education.

If you watch TV today and watch what's happened down in the United States in the community of Ferguson and the issue of dealing with African-Americans, I can show you a litany of legislation, and I can show you a litany of racism. We're dealing with that today with the gay community. We're going to try to legislate. There are claims here: the bill does nothing; I don't agree with it. It does something. It's debatable, and we're educating the public. I mean, that's one step. But it does just take a small step.

4:30

Had we mandated gay-straight alliances, I understand why that mandate would have come, but I also understand the fear and the ignorance around the arguments that it's going to promote sex or that it's going to promote a gay lifestyle. I don't know how you'd promote a gay lifestyle, to be perfectly honest. Someone's got to teach that to me someday. It's nonsensical. But it is the ignorance that we deal with in society.

How we get beyond that: the first thing that we have to do is take the emotions out of the debate, and we have to stop attacking each other in the debate and start dealing with this logically and pragmatically and understand that what we're trying to do here is not infringe on any parental rights, but what we're trying to do here is lower the suicide rate and to stop bullying. I will support any legislation that makes an attempt to lower the suicide rate among young adults, that would help stop bullying among young adults. That is a good thing, and if it just gives an inch in that travel of a journey of a mile or two miles, I'll take the inch, and then I'll want the next inch. But we've got a long way to go.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I will tell you that in this society today it's interesting that a lot of adults my age and older are all upset about this issue, but when I ask young people under 30 years old, under 25 years old they don't even know why we're discussing it. It is an issue that they have accepted for most of them.

But the issue of bullying has never left our society. If it's not the LGBTQ or First Nations or any other minority group or even dealing with women, we still see the bigotry, the racism, the ignorance, and no law can beat that. You can make it illegal, but you are talking about a behavioural change. To pass legislation, to pass rules and regulations to help get that societal, behavioural change forward, I'm all for it. To put this off six months so we can debate it further: I would support that.

If this bill goes forward, I will vote on the bill. When it goes forward, I will support it. If the other bill comes forward, I will support that. I will challenge any organization to end discrimination, and I will continue to challenge organizations to end discrimination for any reason.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing no one wishing to take that opportunity, let me move on and see if there is a member wishing to speak here. Why don't we proceed with Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Not surprisingly, I will be supporting the hoist amendment, and I will be urging all members of this Assembly to, in fact, vote against the bill. If you look at what we have here, we've introduced a bill that, in my view, does not protect children in the way they should be protected today. In my view, this Legislature has a paramount responsibility to ensure that our youth have opportunities to succeed, have opportunities in our education system, and have the opportunities to live a life where they're able to express themselves, where they're able to get the supports they need, where they're able to live those lives free from bullying.

What we have here today is that in the main we had a bill, Bill 202, that would allow for all kids in this province, regardless of whether they went to public school, Catholic school, or private school, to establish a GSA should they want one and to not have administrators or school boards get in the way of that peer support forming. These are known as gay-straight alliances, and the research has shown in numerous studies – one from the University of British Columbia, one from Egale Canada, and others – that these clubs are proven to work. They reduce suicides, suicidal thoughts, and bullying in these schools.

Let's be clear. This is a real problem. Our LGBTQ youth are suffering from suicidal thoughts at far greater rates than people who are not or not perceived to be of that community. They are committing suicide at far greater rates, sometimes at rates four times as high as other youth members compared to them, and gay-straight alliances make that reduction in those tendencies and those suicides happen. The evidence is clear. When we see that evidence out there and we see impediments to how we can better support children in our school system, we should do that, and we have not done so here today. In my view, frankly, we should be ashamed that we have not taken that opportunity to go forward on that.

I remember when I put forward Motion 503 in the spring, that would have mandated gay-straight alliances in all schools where kids want them, there was much passionate debate, and in my view the person who put it most succinctly was the Member for Calgary-Northwest, when she said:

We know that all schools in the province may not want a gay-straight alliance, but that need isn't a board's to determine; it's a student's to determine. This is not a question of religious rights, and it's not a question of sexuality as much as it is a question of the right to free speech and free assembly.

I believe that was true then, and I believe it is now, that we should have done everything possible to allow gay-straight alliances to occur.

What we have now in this government's bill, that is trying to, I guess, avoid this contentious issue in this province of trying to be supportive of our LGBTQ community, is that it keeps the status quo. We know that. Nothing will change for kids at various schools in this province in their efforts to start a gay-straight alliance. That is what we should have been doing. That should have been the paramount point of what we are trying here. We know that right now in this province school administrators will first say no; school boards will then say no. Where is the child left?

That's the interesting part of this bill. The government is actually parading around, celebrating this supposed solution to this

conundrum here today and here in this bill, and was doing so yesterday in the press. Their solution to this problem that they know is out there, that kids in many school systems, mostly Catholic and private schools, do not have the ability to form a gay-straight alliance, is: well, if your administrator says no, you can appeal it to the school board. Well, the student then goes off and appeals it to the school board, and if they say no, well, my goodness, you can appeal it to judicial review.

Well, say that a child does happen to get the funds together or gets parental support or maybe some pro bono legal help. Well, they trot off to a legal review, which we all know will look at this in the narrow confines of what school boards are set up to do and will see whether they're in the scope of their authority in the way they're acting. It may send them back, saying: "Nope. The school boards are acting as they should. They are given the authority under the School Act to act in this way, so you can't find fault with a judicial review."

Then the process for this child who wants a gay-straight alliance in his school is to trot off to Queen's Bench and to try and get this heard before a justice at that level and fight his or her or their battle at this stage. Does this seem like a solution to you, Mr. Speaker? It seems to me like an exercise in the ridiculous.

4:40

It's absurd to actually present this as an option for kids and families to try to pursue in the name of some sort of process set-up that they can follow. This is redundant, it's ridiculous, and really to offer it as a solution to Alberta's kids is, frankly, beyond the pale. This really stinks, in my view, Mr. Speaker. We keep on going down this path, this exercise in absurdity, when all these kids really want to do is set up a gay-straight alliance, and that has not been changed here today.

There are some other aspects that we have to consider here. Under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Human Rights Act no one is allowed to be discriminated against on the basis of many things – race, religion, country of origin – and one of those is sexual orientation. That has been enshrined in our Constitution. It has been enshrined in our Alberta Human Rights Act and the like. So, these principles are laid out there. Once we accept that those principles are the law, which I think we all agree we would unless someone here can tell me otherwise, then we have to understand that, frankly, school systems' or their boards' or their administrators' opinion on sexuality or sexual orientation – it doesn't matter. They cannot hold an opinion on that fact. They can merely recognize that: look, this is not a grounds we can discriminate against kids on, so we can't do that. Okay? That's fair. That's clear. That should be a given amongst all members of this House and, frankly, all school trustees and administrators throughout the system.

So when you accept that, they can only have one option, I think, that they should look at. It's the option of what helps build healthy lives for kids. The evidence is clear that that, again, is gay-straight alliances. Once we accept that, knowing that there are school boards and school systems out there that, despite the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Human Rights Act being the law of the land, despite that their opinion on human sexuality is nugatory at best, still won't allow this gay-straight alliance to be formed, which we've established saves lives and reduces bullying not only for LGBTQ kids but for the entire school, and they still won't implement a GSA – well, my goodness; this government had an obligation to act and to right an injustice that is out there facing our children, and this government failed miserably today in that effect.

Really, to throw out the bogeyman of parental rights, which is now going to be enshrined in the Bill of Rights, and sexual orientation is now going to be in the Bill of Rights: well, big whoop. We all know here that that doesn't mean a tinker's darn. We have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms and we have an Alberta Human Rights Act that proceed this Bill of Rights. It's window dressing at best, and it does not change the fact that we failed to make kids' lives better today. We are forcing them to jump through endless hoops and not be able to get what they want, a peer support group.

Whose rights are you really trampling on? Parental rights – you're basically choosing some version of parental rights, those who do not want GSAs, against those parents who may want a GSA. I think there are many out there who do. It was just brought up by the leader of the fourth party that she would like a GSA at her school, and her kids don't have access. So you're picking and choosing whose parental rights you're going to support, and you're really trampling on kids' rights. No one is forcing anyone to go to a gay-straight alliance. No one is saying: you will go there Monday, Wednesday, and Friday after school, and you will discuss these issues with your peers. No one is forcing anyone to do so, okay? So whose rights are you really infringing on? What complete and utter crap, Mr. Speaker. It's just simply garbage. It's a nonsensical argument that this government has trotted out, okay?

Let's talk about this. You know, much was made here about diversity clubs and things of that nature that may or may not be going on in various systems throughout the schools in Alberta. Let's think about that for a second, Mr. Speaker. You have a student who is LGBTQ. They are going through a difficult time. Discussing human sexuality is difficult for adults, much less children, and they're looking for a safe place to go discuss this issue. They get to this diversity club that's out there. What does the diversity club talk about? Well, we talk about all things diversity. We talk about racial diversity, we talk about country of origin diversity, we talk about inequality, and I'm not certain what. They probably have a multitude of issues at their diversity club.

But how safe do you think that young student who is going through this difficult time feels showing up at this club where he is not sure what, in fact, is on the agenda or who is going to be there or whether it's safe to discuss these issues. In my view, they're not. To think that this is a safe place and to trot it out like it's some sort of option for our LGBTQ students, in my view, is disingenuous. They need a gay-straight alliance with supportive peers that are mature enough, thoughtful enough, and understanding enough to give them the support they need. This government failed in that respect today, and frankly that is a disappointment.

I thought Bill 202, that was brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre, would have actually finally allowed this government to turn the corner on all of it.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

With no one wishing to take that up, let us, then, move on to the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. You have up to 90 minutes should you wish to use it.

Ms Smith: I won't use 90 minutes, Mr. Speaker. [some applause] I know: a sigh of relief from the room.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Member for Edmonton-Centre for bringing forward Bill 202, which I was prepared to support. I think it's very unfortunate that we didn't get an opportunity to be able to debate that bill because of a procedural

manoeuvre, which I think doesn't respect the rights of all of the members in this Chamber to be able to bring forward private members' business.

I think that you can well imagine the discussions that took place in our caucus over the last week or two as we were debating this bill. I think that the Member for Airdrie helped to come to a reasonable compromise that balanced all of the rights that are under consideration here: the rights of LGBTQ students to feel safe and accepted, equality rights, the rights of parents as well as the rights of school boards, in particular religious school boards and faith-based schools, to be able to ensure that everybody's rights are protected.

I was looking forward to that debate. I was looking forward to those amendments. I've talked to the Member for Edmonton-Centre. I know that she didn't support all of them, but I think that we gave an honest effort to try to preserve the essential elements of what it is she was trying to do while still respecting that we needed to come to a conclusion on how we could better protect parental rights and religious freedom.

The three main ways in which we would have approached that would be to have removed "sexual orientation" from clause 11.1 supporting that, affirming as well that home-school families and faith-based educators would not be forced to teach something that was contrary to their beliefs. Again, I think it would have been a reasonable amendment. Importantly, if a faith-based school or a Catholic board said no to a GSA, they would have to provide some kind of counselling or support to the student in question. To me, that's absolutely essential to any bill that I can support, and it's the reason why I'll be voting against Bill 10. I don't think it preserves what the original intention of the Member for Edmonton-Centre was attempting to do.

4:50

There have been some comments made about Catholic schools and Catholic school boards. I had the great privilege of going back and forth between Catholic schools and public schools when I was in the education system. It was of great value to me, and I think I characterize the Catholic concerns a little bit differently than the Member for Calgary-Buffer. I think that the Pope himself – and I like this Pope – is having the same debate and discussion within his own hierarchy about how to be able to welcome members from the LGBTQ community and still be able to live within the tenets of the Catholic faith. I'm watching that with great interest, having been very close to the Catholic teachings over the course of my life. But I think we do have to respect that it is up to the Catholic school board and the Catholic schools to be able to find that balance of how to be able to reconcile those, and we can't dictate to them.

As for Bill 10, there are some things that I do support about Bill 10. Putting sexual orientation into the Bill of Rights: again, this has already been determined by the courts. It's already in our Alberta Human Rights Act. Having it in the Bill of Rights makes sense. Parental rights also being enshrined in the Bill of Rights: an excellent move for the reasons that the Member for Airdrie had said. We have a great stain on our history as a province and a country with the residential school system and the violation of parents' rights, where the state felt that they knew better than parents. I think that we make a grave error in not recognizing how important parental rights are in determining the education for a child.

Moving this section to the School Act I'm supportive of as well, but where I don't support the bill is in the treatment of the issue of a student asking for a GSA club. I agree with the members for Calgary-Buffer and Edmonton-Centre that it doesn't do anything

to advance where children find themselves today, and I'll give a few stories to illustrate why I prefer the approach taken in Bill 202 as opposed to the approach taken in Bill 10.

First of all, going to Stony Plain a few nights ago, I met Rachel, a transgendered woman who actually supported the approach that we were taking by modifying Bill 202 with the amendments that we had proposed. She felt that that actually did get the right balance and would have satisfied her concerns. So I thought that that was important to know, that not every member of the LGBTQ community thinks everything has to be dealt with in exactly the same way. I think that there are members of every community who believe that this balance is important.

Secondly, of course, the Foothills school division, which overlaps the area that I represent, already have two gay-straight alliances in their schools, one in Okotoks and one in Turner Valley, so we've seen already in the community that I represent that this is something that our school boards have taken a proactive approach on, and I'm grateful for that.

The third story is that I had a constituent who called me because her transgendered son had wanted to start up a gay-straight alliance in the school that he was in, in Claresholm, and was told no. And that was just it. It was no. It was not: no, but here is what we can do instead. It was not: no, but here is another school that you can go to. The answer was just no, and that has stayed with me for a year. I've been wondering what happened to that child in being shut down by the adults in that school when he was clearly trying to reach out to find a support group. The fact that there was no answer for him – and his mother was calling me to see what I could do. I contacted Kris Wells, who teaches at the University of Alberta in the sexual minorities area, to get some advice from him. It was the first time that I came into contact with him and the group and the work that he's trying to do.

I've since been able to visit GSA clubs and talk to the kids who benefit from them, and it's moved me greatly, which is part of the reason why I support the approach that was being taken by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. One of the issues that I think is important for us to understand – and I mean this as no offence. I'm trying to speak in a way that's accepting of everybody's diverse viewpoints in here, and I know that everybody does have strong passions about it. In speaking with a Catholic school trustee at the ASBA breakfast a little while ago as they were trying to grapple with how to deal with this issue of how to accommodate gay students within a Catholic environment, they did a series of round-tables with students at high schools. I think that the adults were looking at this as just an issue of bullying, so they wanted to understand the bullying aspect of it. What the kids told them was: "We're accepted by our peers. It's the adults who don't accept us."

That, I think, is why we have to really understand: at what point does a mature youth have the ability to make their own decisions about their sexuality that don't involve their parents? At the age of 12 a child, if they've got a split home, can choose to live with mom or dad. We recognize that a child as young as 12 can choose which parent they want to live with. At age 14 they can choose to have sex as long as it's with somebody who's within a close age to them and not somebody who's in a position of authority over them. At age 16 they can become emancipated from their parents and make entire education decisions on their own. There is with these children somewhere in the age of sexual maturity, somewhere above the age of 14, when they're in high school, where they really have the ability and right to be able to make their own decisions about the kind of support that they feel they need to feel accepted.

That, to me, is what GSA clubs are about. The children that I met with who were at these GSA clubs: most of their parents didn't know that they were out yet. Most of them knew that if their parents knew, there would be some consequences to that. One individual I spoke with said that two lesbian girls had come out at her school and had been kicked out of the school. Another young boy told me that he came out to his parents, and his dad rejected him.

[Disturbance outside the gallery]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm just going to pause for a moment while we get a door closed up there. Sergeants, if you could close that door, please. We can hear some interruptions coming from there.

Sorry to interrupt you, hon. member. Please proceed.

Ms Smith: Another young woman was beaten by her father.

While I respect that we need to find a balance with parental rights and with religious freedom, I think we need to also respect that in the case of these mature youths this really is a case of life or death for some of them. We really do have a number of youths who have nowhere else to go if they're not accepted by their community, not accepted in their home environment.

It's a very confusing time to go through puberty at the best of times. These kinds of clubs are providing an opportunity for these students not just to feel safe from bullying, which is important, not just to be able to provide an avenue to be able to educate their peers but also to make sure that they can deal with the confusing thoughts that come along with what it is that they're dealing with, which is compounded by everything that kids this age are going through.

Now, these students who are going through this, who are already facing these extreme emotions: in some cases these kids are cutting themselves, they're attempting suicide, and in some cases they are actually succeeding in committing suicide. To take these kids and say that the solution when their teacher says no is to go before a school board and try to argue their case or go before a lawyer and a court and try to get a judicial decision for them to be able to set up one of these clubs: that's not reasonable, Mr. Speaker. That's not the balance that we were looking for in this bill. I think that Bill 202 found that correct balance.

5:00

I'm very hopeful that when the members are considering this bill and considering potential amendments to it – unfortunately, we don't have a lot of time to bring amendments to it – they will bring forward and support an amendment that doesn't give a school board the right to just say no when a child comes before them, will support an amendment that will create an opportunity for these kids to have some other avenue to be able to feel supported, to feel accepted, and to deal with the issues that they're dealing with.

I'm afraid that Bill 10 falls well short – well short – of what the Member for Edmonton-Centre was trying to accomplish, and I would hope that if it cannot be properly amended to be able to accommodate that, that it would be voted down so that we could go back to debating the bill that I think creates that better balance and ensures that LGBTQ students do feel accepted and don't end up on the path that so many have gone down so far.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

I don't see anyone rising for 29(2)(a), so let us move on to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to this bill. I'm going to cover a variety of topics, and I'm probably going to run out of time because there's much more that I have to say than in the short time that I'm allotted.

I want to just back up before I talk about Bill 10 and talk about the reason that Bill 10 came into existence. You know, I think many Albertans see it for what it really is, an attempt to torpedo Bill 202, which was a bill put forward that actually would ensure that children in schools who wanted to form GSAs could not be blocked. I've yet to hear a reasonable argument on how an extracurricular club infringes on parental rights or infringes on another student's rights. I think the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona put it quite well when she said that when a parent can stop a group of students from forming one of these clubs, then it's infringing on her right as a parent for her child to have access to this type of club.

I'm going to go through a lot of the reasons why the Alberta NDP are such strong advocates of this bill and why it was so disheartening, the actions that were displayed here yesterday, from what seemed to be an unending stream of points of privilege to eat the clock to the fact that when a vote was passed – it was unanimously passed in this House, Mr. Speaker, yet members from the other side decided to force a standing vote, therefore eating another 10 minutes into the time and, essentially, shutting down any discussion that was going to happen on Bill 202. Honestly, I can say that that was the most undemocratic action I've ever seen in this House, not only in my time as a member but as a person who has lived for 39 years in this province.

I want to bring up a variety of points here. Again, I'm not quite sure how a gay-straight alliance, because it's voluntary and it's student driven, is somehow infringing on the rights of others, whether it's parental rights or student rights. My mind has gone through numerous clubs that students start up in a school. If a school board tried to block an antiracist club or a club supporting students in any other way, there would be outrage, and that board's decision would be overturned very quickly. Yet for some reason when we talk about the rights of students regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, those rights are not equal to other rights. I don't understand it. I think it's wrong, Mr. Speaker.

The other part – and I am going to be all over the map, and I apologize for that. The fact that Bill 10 supposedly brings forward rights in incremental steps is quite absurd, Mr. Speaker. When you look at any rights that have been won in the history of this world, they have never been done incrementally. You know, I think of the examples of Rosa Parks or Dr. Martin Luther King. They didn't win rights incrementally or partially or that some people could or that a half a person could or an inch of the way. When women earned the right to vote in this country, it wasn't only a handful of women; it was women. It was all or nothing.

If we are wanting to get to the root of this bill, which is what I want to talk about – I mean, this isn't about parental rights. This isn't about religious views. We're talking about introducing a piece of legislation which will protect our students, which will protect our youth. We're talking about antibullying. Despite the fact that we can talk about different clubs that exist, there are none that are as effective at dealing with bullying and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity than GSAs. There is proof from around the world that GSAs work.

What frustrates me is the fact that you're now setting up a system where if a GSA is blocked by a school, the student can take this to the school board, which I find kind of ironic. Would

they come back and say: "Did you change your mind?" "No." "Okay. Now I've got to take you to court or a judicial review." We're telling our young people that if you want this, you've got to jump through these hoops, you've got to expend money and time in order to try to take a board to court to prove that they're wrong and it's your inalienable right. It just seems so ridiculous, Mr. Speaker. It's unbelievable, and I think Albertans are flabbergasted at that part of Bill 10, which is ridiculous, quite honestly.

I want to talk a little bit because I feel like I need to educate some of the members in this House as far as the reasons for GSAs and their value. So let me just tell you, starting off in 2011, that a report by a Canadian advocacy group called Egale found 21 per cent of LGBTQ students reported being physically harassed or assaulted because of their sexual orientation, and more than half reported having been verbally harassed. Almost half of gay, lesbian, bisexual students and 75 per cent of transgendered students have experienced verbal harassment about their sexual orientation or gender expression at school. Studies show that LGBTQ teens experience greater levels of violence and more negative health outcomes than their heterosexual peers. Twenty-four per cent of harassed students report lower grades; 27 per cent report higher absentee rates; 55 per cent report greater depression; 35 per cent are more likely to make plans to commit suicide.

Those numbers, to me, are staggering. When you have a tool or a club that decreases those numbers and provides for a safe and inclusive space, it seems like a no-brainer to me, Mr. Speaker, that we as provincial representatives and Legislatures would do everything in our power to ensure students are safe in our schools. I mean, this is what it comes down to. It's not these other arguments that have been set up. I would argue that the Premier himself has pitted and created this dichotomy, this imaginary argument of one side versus another, when what we're talking about is an extracurricular school club that gives students the tools to feel safe in their schools, to feel supported. They work toward combating bullying and discrimination.

I don't understand it, Mr. Speaker. I've had students write letters and send e-mails asking me to try to explain the rationale of Bill 10 and why this government torpedoed Bill 202, and I can't. I don't think members on the other side either can provide a rational explanation of how an extracurricular club that's voluntary infringes on the rights of other students, when they're nowhere near that club if they don't want to participate in it.

5:10

I do want to point out a couple of things which may come as a surprise, Mr. Speaker. I was thrilled to learn that there are other jurisdictions in this great country of ours that have GSAs which exist in both public and Catholic schools. That may come as a shock to some. But, hey, believe me, it's true. Ontario and Manitoba both have legislation that mandates that all students in all public and separate Catholic school boards are allowed to form GSAs if they want to. For some reason for the folks in Ontario this doesn't contravene or contradict their religious beliefs.

You know, there's a part of me that feels as a – I want to mention in this Assembly that I myself am a Catholic, Mr. Speaker. I see no conflict between students starting GSAs in Catholic schools or rural schools or any school. This isn't even about singling out one or another. This is about all schools. If students have the desire to form a GSA, they should be allowed.

I do want to commend some of the work that many folks have done moving this forward. You know, I will give kudos, first and foremost, to the Member for Edmonton-Centre for bringing this up and even her predecessor. Last year we had a great debate on

Motion 503 from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I do want to congratulate and thank the members of this House who were in favour of Bill 202 and opposed to this toothless bill that's just really meant to sidetrack the conversation and, well, quite clearly, just to take out any strength or ability or protection that would have been given to students.

Also and especially I want to thank the students of this province who have the courage and have had the courage to step forward in spite of adversity and challenges and the potential of public shaming to voice their beliefs and to fight for something that is, I believe, so important when we talk about protecting the rights of our children, the rights of our students, and the fundamental human rights that all Canadians deserve to enjoy.

I will mention – and I am going to try to keep this fairly short. I know there are other speakers that want to get up. Due to the fact that the government in their move to make this Assembly more democratic invoked closure . . . [interjection] Well, there is a two-hour limit on this current bill, is there not, Mr. Speaker?

An Hon. Member: Not yet.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. It has not been invoked yet. All right. Then I withdraw that last comment. Fair enough. I got my back up there a little pre-emptively. I'm sorry, government members. However, I won't be surprised if it crops up at some point between now and third reading.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I think the point of this is that the whole thrust behind the bill – and I know that there are some gestures in this bill as far as removing section 11.1 that the government has made, which we were opposed to when it was first introduced. I appreciate that gesture. But, really, this comes down to: what tools are we giving to students to ensure that they are protected in our schools? Bill 10 I cannot support because it does not protect the very students that it claims to protect. Therefore, I support the hoist motion put forward, that this bill needs to not get read for six months hence. Let's bring forward legislation that truly respects and protects the identities of all students in this province.

I'll tell you one last thing, Mr. Speaker. I've never liked the word "tolerant" or "tolerance". To me that's putting up with something that you don't like, like tolerating a dirty car or tolerating, you know, something that you don't appreciate. The point is that we don't tolerate one another. We don't hold our nose and put up with them. If we want to truly respect diversity and inclusiveness, then we need to celebrate our differences in who we are and not white wash them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I don't see anyone rising under 29(2)(a).

Are there any other speakers? I see Calgary-Mountain View, and then after that, I have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark on the list. That's all I have for the moment.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. An honour and a privilege I do take seriously to stand and speak to Bill 10 and the specific amendment to hoist the bill as a result of some of the, I guess, lack of confidence that one has developed over the last 24 hours in not only the legislative process, as it's been diverted and subverted by this government, but also on the basis that I think the Member for Calgary-Northwest, who proposed Bill 10, herself believes that there needs to be a lot more discussion, a lot more understanding, not only in the public but in this Legislature, about what we mean by human rights, what we mean by gender and sexual orientation and sexual education. She herself indicated that

there is a lot of confusion and a lot ambiguity about what it is we're about here.

I will revert briefly to the Premier's throne speech, in which he repeatedly said and has said in the press: this government is under new management. That was a profound comment to me, that he believes that all we need is new management rather than leadership. What this province needs is new leadership – a vision, values, a commitment to a longer term, sustainable province – which includes real honouring of human rights, a government that not only talks about human rights but demonstrates it in their actions and in their process here in the Legislature and in their actions outside this Legislature, a government that actually lives their commitment to putting children first. There's an interesting phrase we hear repeatedly, and here again it comes into question because we're not putting children first. We're not even putting human rights first. We're putting some authority first.

There's some confusion here about what human rights are and what we need to do to protect those human rights. It's not unlike what we've seen over the last hundred years across the planet, where voting rights and legitimacy of ethnic communities and women's rights and First Nations' rights gradually, step-by-step, got included in our legislation.

Here we are at another impasse because there is a resistance among certain groups to honour sexual orientation as a human right: oh, yes, we'll put it in somewhere, and potentially we'll honour it, but there has to be balance. What is this balance that we're looking for? Is there protection or isn't there? We're looking for leadership, and we're not seeing it. In fact, we saw the subversion yesterday of a legitimate bill, 202, that tried to ensure that all of us would not have to deal with decisions around this because the decision was made in our Charter of Rights.

Sitting in the gallery today is the Farmworkers Union, who has for 10 years asked for the same basic human right, and this government continues to deny it because it's optional. All other working groups get occupational health and safety, guaranteed compensation if they get injured, labour code standards, even child labour standards, but not the farm workers because this government is really confused about human rights. How is it that this government can look at itself in the mirror every day, can speak to its constituents as standing up for human rights, being pillars of democracy, and continue to do this, to say that human rights are optional? "Some human rights we will honour and defend; other human rights we will decide on balance. How will this affect our bottom line if we honour this commitment to human rights? How will this affect our voters if we impose a gay-straight alliance on schools?"

Why are we considering political impact when we're talking about human rights? This is the 21st century. It's unbelievable that we are dealing with this in such a contentious way and honouring some opinions over the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Bill 202 enabled all schools to have some kind of a group, whether they call it gay-straight or some other name, to honour our commitment to children first: their safety, their health, their well-being, their empowerment, their freedom to speak, their freedom to assemble. Does this government even realize that they're limiting their freedom to assemble?

5:20

They are limiting farm workers' ability to assemble. Is that an option? It appears to be an option. This government has legislated against farm workers' freedom to assemble. They cannot by law form a union. This is 19th-century stuff. I'm glad the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour is here because this is his bailiwick. I know he stands for human rights. I've seen him on the

streets of Calgary. We've stood together on some important issues of human rights, and I look forward to his leadership, not management but leadership, on the issue of farm worker rights in this province and to setting a new tone, setting a new, I would say, image for Alberta that we're not foot-draggers, that we're not being dragged into the 21st century, that we are actually trying to lead in a responsible and inspiring way and that our children will be inspired by what we do.

We know that there is a pinnacle here called the Charter, and it has to do with human rights and dignity, the democratic process, the right to assemble, the right to free speech, and our commitment to try to create safe, caring communities, especially for our young people with gender identity issues and with sexual orientation confusion, who desperately need to feel respected, feel some openness, especially among this adult community. If we don't set the tone for this, who's going to do it? We lead with these decisions, and we're dragging our feet in this instance. Teachers and school boards are looking for leadership.

Yes, there will be some resistance. There always is resistance to change, especially around human rights and human dignity, even free speech and, obviously, even freedom of assembly. Young people are basically saying: "What's the problem here, folks? Why are we giving the jurisdiction, the decision-making power, to an elected body of people when this is a fundamental of Canadian society, a Charter right?"

Who is threatened by honouring our commitment to human rights? Who is threatened? If they're threatened, maybe there's a good reason for that, and we need to challenge the fact that some people are threatened by the freedom of young people to gather and talk about sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender ambiguity. This government is inventing a conflict because they're pandering to a political base. Very disappointing.

You know what is the right thing to do. This province is looking for the kind of bold, courageous leadership that the Member for Edmonton-Centre was trying to bring about here. Would you say the same about a group that wanted to start a Christian organization in the school? "Oh, we would leave that up to the discretion of the school board." Or if we want to start a multicultural group? "Oh, we'll leave that up to the discretion of a school board." No. There's something very sensitive and very special about sexuality, and we're still struggling with 1930s, 1940s attitudes in some areas of the province.

They're actually looking for the kind of leadership that this government could give to allow there to be no ambiguity, that it's going to be challenged if you try and block people from associating, if you try and block people, especially young people, from talking about their confusion and their sensitivities and the dangers around gender ambiguity or gender identification and sexuality. We're looking for leadership. I know this government wants to be effective leaders. I know they do. That's why they got elected. Here's an opportunity in this amendment to lift this for six months, to compromise on their desire to always win the vote, to win the bill.

Consider putting children first. Consider making human rights the pre-eminent decision in this. Consider hoisting this bill to allow for the dust to settle, the emotion to settle, and for debates and discussions to go on all across the province, and allow that to come to the fore in six months' time. Let's then have the fulsome debate and, potentially, the changes that we all want. Not new management but new leadership.

This is an example of something that looks like a 1940s decision, and you have an opportunity to show 2014 leadership. Where other provinces are today, we could jump right into that leadership role. We want an inclusive society. We say that we are

committed to open accountability, inclusiveness, tolerance. I say that we want empowered youth who feel confident in themselves regardless of their sexual orientation, regardless of certain voices in the back of their head and certain voices in their community that say: "You're not good enough. You're weird. You're a faggot. You're whatever, and we're not going to accept you." This is a time for real leadership to say: "Hey, everybody, this is something we stand for. Children first. Human rights, top of the agenda. We're not going to compromise on this – sorry – even though some of you and some particular religions will be uncomfortable with it. We are not going to set the bar there. We're going to set the bar up here. You're going to come there, and we're going to have debates and discussions, but we're going to get there and not in the 22nd century but in the 21st century."

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing no one, let us move on to the next speaker. I would go to the Official Opposition in the rotation.

If not, let us move on to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Caldor.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to certainly support this hoist motion. I think that it's probably the best idea. We saw a lot of very heightened emotions yesterday, and I think we've seen quite a lot of poor decision-making on a leadership level in regard to how this PC government has handled this situation.

I think it's very important, when you do have a very large, changing, pluralistic society and you have a considerable majority, that you exercise that majority with caution because if you do in fact revert to old sort of muscle memory of how you always had governed and behaved as a ruling party, then sometimes that is inappropriate. We have a very sensitive situation here, a very symbolic situation, where we're not just talking about gay-straight alliances. We're talking about the capacity for a majority government to govern for everybody.

On that very large level I thought we saw a categorical failure here yesterday, Mr. Speaker. I'm speaking as constructively as possible on this, too, because I know what the reality is here in this province. You know, I wasn't born yesterday. I know that we have a situation where there is a very strong Conservative, virtually a one-party state that has existed and has exerted its control over this province for many, many decades. We're not going to change that wholesale overnight, but we certainly do need to and can change the way by which that very large power is exerted over all of the citizens here in this province. We're not just fighting for gay-straight alliances here. We're fighting for the capacity of people to make reasonable assertions that are in the best interests of both mental health and societal health and reflect the values that are changing rapidly in our province without having to be heavy handed and mean spirited.

You know, Mr. Speaker, as you were as well, I was a teacher for more than 20 years, and I look at this as a very succinct teaching moment. [interjection] Oh, yeah. I taught for 20 years. Absolutely. I always look for teaching moments. I still consider myself to be a teacher.

It's not just about having a legal space for someone to form a gay-straight alliance in a school or about a school board or a place where maybe they are opposing that at some administrative level, but this is also a way to teach every single person who pays attention to this issue about equality and social justice and the capacity to accommodate differences in our society.

5:30

So you say, “Well, you know, we changed 11.1 in this act, and we made adjustments here,” and that’s all good. I mean, I’m not opposed to the evolutionary process of reform as well. But just as strongly the undercurrent message here, the subtext of a message that was presented here, was: we will use and employ legal power and just raw political power to compromise the clarity of our commitment to gay-straight alliances so that some school boards can continue, either tacitly or explicitly, to exclude gay-straight alliances from the schools in the jurisdictions which they are responsible for. Business as usual, basically, right? I just really find that a little bit – not just offensive, but I think, as I said before, it’s missing that opportunity to have that teaching moment.

Other people will look at that as well and say: “Well, you know, the government pushed and shoved them. The PC government will always come down on the conservative, right-wing side of things, so we can always pull strings to make sure that we get what we want if you are of that persuasion.” Again, that’s not really good democracy. It’s just people thinking that they have a government in their back pocket, that the right-wing side of the equation can be tilted at any time: “We can make the deal. We can make it happen like we want it to be.” That’s not fair.

I would say that Bill 10 reflects the values and the desires of quite a small minority, actually, here in the province of Alberta, not even explicitly in terms of gay-straight alliances but explicitly in terms of a live-and-let-live attitude and a sort of a libertarian idea that people can mind their own business and that the government has no business in regard to being discriminatory towards one’s sexuality and other things like that. In 2014 that is a predominant majority sentiment in societies such as ours. Again, Bill 10, sort of hastily cobbled together more for political reasons than actual practical reasons, is out of step with how the vast majority of Albertans feel and the attitudes that they share with themselves and with their families.

Yeah, of course people can have their own religious views on things, and they can have their own societal and cultural views on things, but you don’t have discriminatory views on things and think that we can actually enshrine those in law. I think that’s a message we should be sending out of this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, and that’s not really explicitly what we’re doing here.

We know that on a sociological level, on a school-wide level in terms of a teaching level these sort of peer support groups are very, very important, and we’ve learned over a long period of time that peer support and student-initiated ways of teaching things and helping each other are the most effective teaching tools of all. When I heard the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on the radio yesterday – time flies when you’re having fun, so to speak – and she used the words “peer support” over and over again, I thought that was so incredibly appropriate in looking at this from a pedagogical standpoint and from a teaching moment, right? I know for a fact that student-initiated direction in these things is just so much more powerful than anything that a teacher could come up with.

I mean, I could come up with a social justice club or something like that, and I’ve done it before in teaching in the past. But, you know, was it student initiated? Well, it became that after a while, but it started out with me, right? I was treading against the water and paddling upstream, and it wasn’t effective. But if the kids come up with something like a social justice club or democratic elections for student council and stuff like that, it takes off like wildfire, and it becomes a much wider teaching opportunity, right?

So with student-led GSAs, I mean, it’s not like we’re mandating. I know that this has been another subtext, which is so

wrong on this whole debate, you know, that we’re going to make a law forcing people to have gay-straight alliances in schools. Well, I don’t think so. If the students want to organize one, then, yeah, they can do so, right? They can do so, and we will protect them to allow them to do so, and there’s nothing wrong with that.

I mean, a choice that somebody makes – I heard it earlier this afternoon – to have a gay-straight alliance in a school doesn’t affect other people, nor should they stick their noses into that, quite frankly. Right? I mean, if there are some teachers that don’t like it or if there are some administrators that don’t like it or a school board or whatever, well, too bad. I mean, it’s not as though you have a GSA that is otherwise imposing their will on the school. You have a peer support network in a club that people can choose to join or not join. There’s nothing sort of subversive about that. In fact, it’s very progressive. You know, it’s reflecting a cultural phenomenon that we’re seeing in schools over the last number of years.

Like I said, really, I haven’t been teaching full-time now for a decade, since I’ve been a legislator and so forth, but it’s happened during that time frame. When I left teaching full-time, GSAs weren’t around, and now they are, I think, as the minister tabled today, in at least 94 schools around the province and growing fast. Most of those are in places where the school board has given that space to encourage GSAs. If they don’t, then people are scared. I mean, it’s authority, and people exert their authority through the school board tacitly or explicitly, and you won’t see GSAs in a place where a school board says no. I mean, it’s just not going to happen.

It’s not like kids are equipped with legal advice and lawyers in their back pocket. That’s a phenomenon that is very rare and very expensive, too. For someone to actually challenge a school board to allow a GSA would be at least \$25,000 to \$35,000, I would say, to mount a legal challenge. I mean, that’s a pretty rarified world. Whoever came up with that idea, the Premier perhaps, lives in – I don’t know. To think you can have legal counsel at your beck and call and \$30,000 to go for a legal challenge. I mean, that’s what we do here in the Legislature, make those laws so that you don’t have to have this mixed-up, convoluted sort of legal conflict on a basic human right.

Mr. Speaker, that’s my feeling on this. Certainly, you know, we talked a lot already about the sociological benefits of these GSAs. It’s very interesting how it’s been tracked. I’ve been really quite amazed at how successful it’s been in schools and how much more widespread it could be if we allowed that space to continue here through the Legislature.

Based on that, I certainly support this hoist for now. You know, I don’t judge people on a single issue. I judge them on an accumulation of their actions at the time. Certainly, I know that there are some good people over on this side that would like to see us do the right thing. I’m surprised, very happily surprised, to see the public’s reaction to this. It’s not just a reaction on gay-straight alliances. It’s a reaction, like I said at the outset of my comments, on the capacity of a large-majority Conservative government to exert fair and equitable legislation that doesn’t discriminate and appear heavy handed towards minorities. That’s part of why I was so upset yesterday, and I still kind of am today.

I also know that there are lots of good people over on the other side that will concur with that idea and will vote appropriately, I’m sure. I mean, this is not a threat, right? I know that I can smell some threatening language over there. That’s not the way we should conduct ourselves, I don’t think. You know, I often think of that Shakespearean line about thou “doth protest too much,” when I hear someone over there speaking very, very loudly, louder than you need to considering we’re miked here, about how

much they really love this political thing that's going on here when, in fact, I know that they must be feeling very, very conflicted considering how this has all come out in the wash.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I certainly encourage everyone to support the hoist. Thank you very much.

5:40

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I see no one rising. Anyone from this side or that side?

Then the next speaker on the list I have is the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support the hoist motion on Bill 10. I can't believe that we're actually having to have these discussions in 2014 in what is the best place, the best province in the best country in the world. You know, I just want to talk to you about the history of our country. In 1906 my grandfather came to this country at the age of 17. In 1908 the government, or the law, said that people of Indian origin couldn't come to this country anymore. They brought in the Continuous Passage Act. You had to come from your country of origin directly to this country, and only one ship made that journey, a government ship, and they changed the journey.

In 1914, Mr. Speaker, my great-grandmother's brother was on a ship called *Komagata Maru*. They challenged Canadian exclusionary laws, discriminatory laws directly aimed at one class of individuals. The ship was turned back, and it was not a warm reception when they got back home.

Mr. Speaker, in 1917 women were finally allowed the right to vote, and I believe that it was about 1929 when they were considered real persons. People from other countries didn't get a chance to vote until after the world wars, and First Nations, the people on whose land we reside, didn't get the chance to vote until the '60s.

Mr. Speaker, I remember coming to this country in 1972. Many of us who are from other countries, who are visibly different or talk differently, know what discrimination is like. The first week was one black eye, and the next week was another black eye, and you learned how to defend yourself. Frankly, I asked my parents as a child: why did you bring me to this country just to get beaten up every week? It was very scary having to go to school, finding a different way, and trying to sneak back home so you wouldn't get beaten up. Well, I sort of got toughened.

You know, I grew up in a war-torn country postpartition. I was already a tough kid, and after about 10 fights I learned how to defend myself and get back up. Then the rest of the time, Mr. Speaker, I spent my time at the playgrounds, standing in front of the kid that was queer, the kid that was gay, the kid that was fat, the girl whom people teased, because bullies would pick on these poor children in the playground, and I happened to be one of the tough kids. I didn't like fighting, but I had no trouble standing in front of somebody who needed some protection and defence in the playground from elementary to my high school days.

I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that as an inner-city emergency room doctor I've seen countless children – the health care staff will tell you – countless young people. Mental health rates right now are going through the roof: the suicide attempts, the despair, the overdoses. More than 60,000 children are suffering from mental health issues, and there's a big stigma attached to it. I'll tell you that we've seen countless people from the LGBTQ community, young children who've slashed their wrists, who've overdosed because they were outcast from their families and their communities because they considered this a shameful thing.

Mr. Speaker, for these children their only recourse if their family doesn't accept the way they're born is their peer group, which is usually at school. It's usually your teachers, your parents, or your peer group, which is your social circle. So at school you form peer groups. You know, it could be the chess group, it could be the sports group, it could be the geek group or a certain religion or – hey – it could be a certain culture. These children want the ability to talk about their issues, that are unique to them, and these are very unique issues.

When you're a teenager, sexual identity – it's a very confusing time. Well, I remember that it was a tough time with, you know, my own sexuality. I think we all struggle with those kinds of things and hormones when you're a teenager to begin with. But imagine if you're from the LGBTQ community and with every other stress that you have in life, stresses of your family struggling to pay the bills, of poverty and single parents, imagine that you add this on top of that.

The hon. member from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, her Bill 502 was really about protecting our children, giving them the freedom . . .

Ms Blakeman: Bill 202.

Dr. Sherman: Bill 202. Sorry. I stand corrected.

Giving these children the freedom of the right to create their own little social support group in the school where and when they felt that they needed it, that's all it was about.

Now, the reason we have to hoist this bill is because the Premier, with all due respect, is wrong. I don't think he's suffered the type of discrimination these children and many others have suffered, and that's why he's wrong. He doesn't get what these kids go through.

Mr. Speaker, imagine this. Young people want to assemble. Bill 10 is asking these same young people to go to the very people – the parents, the community, and the school boards – that they're actually fearful of, that they feel ostracized by, to ask them: will you allow us to assemble? Bill 10 not only asks them to do that to the very people they don't want to tell they're a lesbian or gay or bisexual, to adults who are going to drag them off to get a medical fix because there's something wrong with them, allegedly, according to some people – these children are born this way.

They are actually telling these children: "No. If the school board doesn't work for you and you've outed yourself in your community and now you're really alone, go to the court system. Go get a lawyer." The Premier may be a very wealthy lawyer who made a few million dollars a year working for a bank, but you tell me which young student is going to have the money, the family support, the community support to raise that kind of money to go to the court system to get the ability to just hang out with their friends and have their own group. This is a grassroots, student-led issue.

Mr. Speaker, my son just made a film for the city of Edmonton. It's called *Through My Eyes*. The City of Edmonton Youth Council under the mayor's guidance wants the issues of First Nations and homelessness, especially youth homelessness, to end. I'm so proud of my son and the young people that he made this film with. You know, there were packed houses at the university theatre just a week or two ago. I didn't even know this, but of the hundreds of youth that are homeless, 50 per cent are actually from the LGBTQ community – 50 per cent – and the majority of the youths that are homeless are also from the First Nations community and low-income families.

Fifty per cent of all homeless youth – they've got no houses to stay in – these children said that they don't want to live on the

north end of the river because they're fearful they're going to lose their lives on the north end of the river. They already have been kicked out of their community and their families, and they're living on the streets south of the river. They're not living near Whyte Ave to have a good time. They want a home, they want a family, they want to be accepted, and they want dignity, human dignity.

Mr. Speaker, what we're really talking about is human rights, human rights of our children, young people. What makes us a great country is what happened in 1993, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guarantees us inalienable rights to walk freely in this country, to have freedom of speech, freedom to assemble – and these freedoms also come with responsibility – without being discriminated against and treated horribly. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms lays out the protections all Canadians have from discrimination based on religion and sex, which the Supreme Court has extended to sexual orientation.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta Liberals want to protect the rights of all minorities, but the Premier is intent on playing one minority group against another by shifting focus off the Charter and onto the Alberta Bill of Rights. The guiding principles of this country are under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. So I wonder what it is about the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that the Premier and his PC government will not support.

5:50

Mr. Speaker, I know that the Premier likes to talk about his record on human rights. The Premier's record is no different than all other conservatives, dragging your feet until you're forced by the Supreme Court of this country to recognize what every other province has accepted years ago.

Recently references to the Charter and Education Act were removed, between drafting Bill 2 and Bill 3, in favour of the common beliefs and values of Albertans. The Premier has been out of the province and in Ontario for quite a while. So perhaps he may have a unique perspective and can tell us, but I also wonder: how, exactly, are the beliefs and values of other Canadians different from those of Albertans?

Mr. Speaker, school boards that don't want to allow gay-straight alliances essentially want students to conform to their systems rather than having to accommodate them. Bill 202 would have provided safe and inclusive schools that respect diversity, all diversity, and the Premier's plan only maintains the status quo, which gives the boards a veto and forces our children to go to the court system. The fact is that LGBTQ students have a constitutional right to be free from this sort of discrimination. That's the fact. So, again, I wonder why the Premier wants vulnerable teenagers to have to go get expensive lawyers and out themselves to the very community they feel that they are not welcome to and accepted by.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has come a long way. We have, and I ask that members in the government – please. You have the majority of the votes. We don't on this side, in the progressive parties. You have the majority of the votes. We've come so far.

You know, I remember coming to this province in 1984. I became a Christian, and I was at a Baptist camp in Caroline, Alberta. Those were the days the KKK were burning crosses in Alberta, and there were hate rallies in this province. I was there, just a few miles away from Eckville and, oh, gosh, some other town out near Eckville, where some folks were denying the Holocaust, very discriminatory stuff.

Also, Mr. Speaker, in 1994 a teacher who was homosexual was doing his job, and he was fired. He was fired for being a human being, for being himself. It went to the Supreme Court of the land,

and the Supreme Court of the land said that sexual orientation is under the protections of this country. The last I checked, Alberta is in the country of Canada. We operate under the supreme law of the land of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has had some bad times and dark times in our history when it comes to human rights and protecting the rights of minorities. The whole point of democracy, my dear friends on the government side, is that it's the duty of the majority to protect the minority, and that's the greatness of democracy. In other parts of the world the majority stamp on the minority, and that's what makes Canada the greatest country in which to live.

Mr. Speaker, we have one, just one, little hurdle to go. We're so close. This is the best province in the best country in the world, but I think we are capable of so much more. I believe if we actually allow our young people from the LGBTQ community to have their gay-straight alliances and if we move section 11.1 into the Education Act, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre had originally suggested, we can get on to the business of what we really need to do, which is provide Albertans the services they need, protect our economy, balance the books, and put money in the bank.

Really, we have to improve Alberta's reputation on human rights. This is about the safety of our children. If we as a civilized society are not going to protect the human rights of young, vulnerable children, many who end up homeless on the streets, whose suicide attempt rates and suicide rates and depression rates are higher than the norm, then what are the values that we stand upon as a people and as a province?

Mr. Speaker, it seems as though new management is doing the same old thing. Their concern is more for political expediency versus doing the right thing. I urge the members on the government side. You have the majority of the numbers until the next election. I ask you to please, please do the right thing. There are many of you. I don't believe there's one homophobic member in this Legislature. I believe we are all united in protecting human rights. We just have to enshrine them in legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I would like to make a motion that any bells that we have at this point but also for the rest of the evening after the break be shortened to one minute.

The Speaker: Hon. members, my interpretation of what the Government House Leader has just said is that the time between the original summoning of the bells and the second summoning be curtailed or brought down to one minute. Is that the intention, hon. Government House Leader?

Mr. Denis: Actually, I'll correct myself: just until adjournment at 6 p.m., Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. Government House Leader. I was talking while you were talking, so could you just tell me what it is that you have in mind for this motion?

Mr. Denis: Please accept my apologies, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry. I'd like to rise and ask for unanimous consent of the Chamber that if there are any standing bells prior to the break, they be at a one-minute interval and not 10.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: So there will be a one-minute interval between the ringing of the two bells.

Now, under 29(2)(a) is there anyone else here?

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the hoist amendment, known as H1?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment H1 lost]

The Speaker: We will immediately put the question on second reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:57 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allen	Dirks	Lemke
Amery	Donovan	Leskiw

Anderson	Drysdale	Luan
Anglin	Ellis	McDonald
Bhullar	Fawcett	McIver
Brown	Fritz	McQueen
Calahasen	Goudreau	Olson
Campbell	Griffiths	Pedersen
Cao	Hale	Sandhu
Casey	Jansen	Scott
Cusanelli	Johnson, J.	Starke
Dallas	Johnson, L.	Weadick
DeLong	Kennedy-Glans	Woo-Paw
Denis	Kubinec	Xiao

Against the motion:

Bilous	Lukaszuk	Sherman
Blakeman	Mason	Smith
Eggen	Notley	Wilson
Kang		

Totals:	For – 42	Against – 10
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[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a second time]

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:03 p.m.]

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EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E4
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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, December 2, 2014

Issue 11e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Calahasen	Young
Cao	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 2, 2014

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Good evening. Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 7 Chartered Professional Accountants Act

[Adjourned debate December 1: Mr. McIver]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll be brief now because I introduced and adjourned it at the last sitting. Ever so briefly, this is the bringing together of the CGAs, the CMAs, and the CAs, three separate organizations, into one. It's part of making sure that Alberta's accountants have job mobility, that we can attract the best and the brightest. This change has been contemplated and brought here in consultation and co-operation with the three accounting bodies and with their, I would say, unvarnished support in letters tabled in this House yesterday.

I hope that everybody, all my worthy and honourable colleagues, will choose to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's with pleasure that I stand to support this bill. After consulting with CAs in my riding and throughout the province as well as members of the association, it seems to me that it's a good example of what happens when we listen to the stakeholders and engage them and act on their recommendations and suggestions. So it's with full support that I give this my blessing.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm sorry. I think we're geographically the furthest away from each other, and I blend into the wall a little bit here. But I just wanted to very quickly express my support and the New Democrats' support for this bill as well. It certainly seems to be a logical and, probably, reasonable evolution of not just this legislation but the profession of accountants as well. I've heard unanimity of support for this from the outreach that we did. Fair play. That's the way we should do it. Certainly, the New Democrats will support this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Standing Order 29(2)(a). Are there any comments or questions?
Seeing none, are there any other members who wish to speak to Bill 7, the Chartered Professional Accountants Act? The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

An Hon. Member: It's got a pretty good chance to pass. Don't mess this up.

Mr. Dorward: I know.

I stand in support of Bill 7, the Chartered Professional Accountants Act, brought forward by the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour and MLA for Calgary-Hays. I'd like to thank the two previous ministers who worked on this file, the MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs and the MLA for Calgary-Klein. As well, Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank the hard-working public servants in the departments of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour and Justice and other departments.

Madam Speaker, the professional accountants of Alberta are presently governed by the Regulated Accounting Profession Act, likely the most advanced legislation in any province in Canada. The participants – the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta, of which I'm proud to be a member; the Certified Management Accountants of Alberta, of which I'm proud to be a member; and the Certified General Accountants' Association of Alberta – are on the same page with this legislation. Imagine getting three boards and three groups of professionals, staff, committees, et cetera, on the same page.

This task was performed by the unification agency, led by Mr. John Carpenter, FCGA, CEO of the agency. I'd like to thank Mr. Carpenter, his staff, and the board of the agency, led by Greg Draper, CGA; Ruth McHugh, FCMA; and, recently, Curtis Palichuk, FCA. Madam Speaker, Mr. Carpenter will be retiring December 31. I'd like to thank him for his work. It's anticipated that Rachel Miller, FCA, presently the CEO of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta, will take over as CEO of CPA Alberta.

Madam Speaker, accountants are a regulated profession in the province of Alberta. As such, they're responsible for protection of the public interest, protection of the profession, ethical and professional conduct, licensing, levels of competency, education, standard setting, continuing professional development, discipline, regulation, advocacy, practice review, and scope of practice, to name a few.

Madam Speaker, this bill sets forth the framework for a pathway for the professions to come together. There are aspects of the responsibilities of the accounting profession that must still be met and will continue, in fact, for some time. I'm confident that that will happen, that accountants in Alberta will continue to move forward to be leaders in the accounting profession in Canada.

I'll be supporting this bill, Madam Speaker, and highly encourage all of my colleagues to do the same. Thanks very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour to close the debate.

Mr. McIver: I'd just like to say thank you to my hon. colleagues, the members of the three accounting bodies that have asked to become one, and, of course, the tremendous staff at Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, that tried to work collaboratively with all the different accountants across Alberta.

I invite all of my hon. colleagues to support what I think is a collaborative effort that is intended to make things better.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

Bill 8 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate December 1: Ms Kennedy-Glans]

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

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise again in support of the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014. As we discussed last night, this piece of legislation is very heavy because it amends so many pieces of legislation: the Court of Queen's Bench Act, the Estate Administration Act, the Family Law Act, the Limitations Act, the Notaries and Commissioners Act, the Oaths of Office Act, the Perpetuities Act, the Provincial Court Act, the Wills and Succession Act, and housekeeping matters with a few other acts.

I very much appreciate the support of all the colleagues in this room who have become pseudo-lawyers in an attempt to understand all the amendments to this legislation. I appreciate the support of lawyers and judges across Alberta. Making lawyers and judges happy across Alberta is our goal, and I am so grateful for your support in that work. So back to you, colleagues.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members who wish to speak on Bill 8, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'll keep my comments fairly short here. We understand that the purpose of this bill is general housekeeping in regard to language used in legislation, to make necessary clarifications or coming-into-force dates. We're in support of that because of the modernization of our legislation. We also support changes which address unintended problems or confusion caused by past legislation, and we want to ensure that we have the best quality legislation in this House.

The concern is that some of the changes introduced in the legislation are more substantial than housekeeping, which, again, tends to be the pattern that this government has followed. We'd like to focus on the Court of Queen's Bench Act and the Provincial Court Act as the proposed amendments do nothing to address the serious issue of access to justice in Alberta. We're concerned about access to justice and legal aid in two different regards, one, because this PC government has constantly underfunded legal aid; and, secondly, because many of the most vulnerable Albertans don't qualify for legal aid.

As an example, Madam Speaker, an Albertan working a full-time job, making minimum wage is not eligible for legal aid because they make too much money. An Albertan receiving assured income for the severely handicapped, or AISH, is not eligible for legal aid. When it comes to access to justice, legal aid is extremely important, and unfortunately, there are too many people that simply don't qualify for legal aid and to therefore get representation in our justice system.

This legislation and the fact that many Albertans can't access legal aid is not only having an impact on those who can't afford representation, but it's having an impact as well on the court system, Madam Speaker. Again, I can go through – I'll save the specifics, but there are many examples where this PC government has chosen not to adequately fund legal aid.

7:40

We've been advocates for better access to justice. You know, the announcement by the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General in the fall of a one-time transfer to legal aid is not sufficient. There has been a major shortfall in funding, and we're predicting a need for about \$8 million a year because legal aid will have a deficit of \$15 million by 2016-2017, and they're going to have to either cut their services, reduce their services, or cut jobs. As a result, we're

going to have more Albertans unable to access legal aid, Madam Speaker.

I'm just trying to move through some of my notes here, Madam Speaker. You know, in the Speech from the Throne this government made commitments to use taxpayers' dollars wisely and to achieve the best possible outcomes for money spent. Now, the government could have done this had they improved access to justice in Bill 8 and increased funding to legal aid.

Countless studies in countless jurisdictions consistently show the benefits and the savings that result in investment in legal aid. I'll give you a couple of examples, Madam Speaker. In the United States a 2007 study on Nebraska estimated the total benefit of legal aid at \$13.5 million whereas the cost was only \$3.4 million. Benefits included benefits awarded to litigants, benefits in cost saving to improve the quality of life, tax savings, and increased economic opportunity. In Texas for every dollar spent on legal aid there was \$7.42 in annual gains to the economy; a \$3.56 gain in output, or gross product; and a \$2.20 increase in personal income. And there are examples from Australia, from the U.K., and from New York as well that outline the benefits to investing in legal aid.

So it's very clear. Studies show time and time again that when we increase investment in legal aid, there is a net benefit not just for the recipients but for all Albertans. Madam Speaker, we support the modernization of legislation and understand the need for housekeeping legislation done through bills such as this one, but we want the best quality of legislation for Albertans. Again, we have concerns with the fact that the issue of legal aid is not being addressed.

Therefore, we will support Bill 8 reluctantly and, again, would very much like to see improvements to legal aid. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I've been asked to request unanimous consent to revert to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We have amongst us the 152nd Royal Canadian Sea Cadets, who parade at Headway School in my area. I was proud just now to meet them and have a selfie taken as well as a formal picture. I wonder if they could all stand with their leaders, please, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 8

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (continued)

The Acting Speaker: Reverting back to second reading of Bill 8, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014, are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 8 in second reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: I'll be quick. Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 8. It's a great honour. Most of Bill 8 is housekeeping amendments. The main changes are in regard to

the Family Law Act although much of Bill 8 is to make Alberta legislation consistent with the most recent versions of the *Alberta Rules of Court*, which were updated in the last five years.

At first glance, Madam Speaker, Bill 8 looks to be procedural in nature, with the proposed amendments to the Court of Queen's Bench Act, the Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, the Estate Administration Act, the Limitations Act, the Notaries and Commissioners Act, the Oaths of Office Act, the Perpetuities Act, the Provincial Court Act, and the Wills and Succession Act. Over half of the bill is supposed to relate to the *Alberta Rules of Court* and making the laws consistent with it. For example, Bill 8 proposes changing the use of the words from "with leave" to "with the permission."

As referenced earlier, the main changes in Bill 8 are within the Family Law Act, Madam Speaker. The government bills this as an access to justice initiative, and this involves four changes related to the child support recalculation program, keeping in mind, however, that this is different but related to the maintenance enforcement program, which is akin to a collection agency. The child support recalculation program assists parents with child support orders to comply with their legal obligation to regularly adjust their child support to reflect changes in income without going to court.

The government states that these amendments to the Family Law Act will increase program efficiency. This is akin to a diversion program so that fewer cases are heard by Alberta judges. In the case of adjusting child support orders to reflect income changes, this does help further the idea of reducing the burden on our courts, Madam Speaker.

Most of Bill 8 is housekeeping amendments. The main changes are in regard to the Family Law Act although much of the bill is to make legislation consistent with the *Alberta Rules of Court*. These are some of the housekeeping amendments this bill is trying to do, Madam Speaker. It's just a housekeeping bill. I think it will help to take the load off the courts and maybe will help speed things up.

With those comments, I'll be supporting the bill, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments?

Seeing none, are there any members who wish to speak in second reading on Bill 8?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker: The question has been called.

I would ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close debate.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues for your support on this bill. I'd also like to thank all the lawyers and judges in Alberta who contributed to improving these pieces of legislation: the Canadian Bar Association, the Law Society of Alberta, the Law Reform Institute here in Alberta, and the Chief Justice of the Provincial Court.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 6

Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move third reading of Bill 6, the Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No.2).

As stated earlier, this bill includes amendments to a number of acts that are the responsibility of three different government ministries. Those ministries are Agriculture and Rural Development; Municipal Affairs; Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. The affected legislation includes the Safety Codes Act, the Workers' Compensation Act, the Farm Implement Act, the Farm Implement Dealerships Act, and the Dairy Industry Omnibus Act, 2002. These amendments will bring greater clarity, streamline processes, and ensure that the acts are aligned with other legislation to enable greater consistency and effectiveness in providing services to Albertans.

In closing, Bill 6 incorporates a number of changes that will ensure legislation is working as efficiently and effectively as possible. I'd like to thank all members who have contributed, and I encourage them to join me in supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other members who wish to speak in third reading on Bill 6? Oh, yes. There you go, blending in again, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. Sorry.

Mr. Eggen: It's okay. It's fine. Certainly, we don't ignore each other on the street, so we certainly don't ignore each other here either.

I just once again wanted to express that we spoke on this at great length at a different stage of this debate. Certainly, most of the sections of this bill are entirely innocuous and quite useful, right? It's just that, put together with that WCB provision, you know, that makes it impossible for us to vote for this.

Once again, if I could just put it on the record that any version of an omnibus bill really is not welcome here in this Legislature. We should refrain from doing so. If we want to make miscellaneous statutes legislation, then we can get together and agree on that and make things move a lot faster and more expeditiously.

That's all I have to say. Thanks.

7:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on third reading of Bill 6?

Seeing none, would the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development please close debate.

Mr. Olson: I'd like to call the question, please, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The question has been called.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that we've made excellent progress, I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 7:52 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, December 3, 2014

Issue 11a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 3, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. May we give thanks for the bounty of our province, including our land, our resources, our friends and neighbours, and all those whom we serve. Let us also pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much. Edmonton-Mill Creek is an interesting place. Many great people come from your constituency, Mr. Speaker, but one that shines out to me is my wife, Breanna, who is sitting in your gallery today. She is a graduate of J.H. Picard high school in Edmonton as well as NAIT. In addition to her career pursuits, she is currently pursuing a master's degree at Royal Roads University. I had the privilege of meeting her about four years ago in Calgary. She's obviously here to see the proceedings today. I want to say thank you very much to her for putting up with the long hours of this job and thank her for being such an amazing person.

The Speaker: Thank you, and welcome.

Let us move on to school groups, starting with Edmonton-Manning, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you 53 students from Edmonton Christian school northeast, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Manning. They are accompanied by their teachers, Miss Elaine Junk and Mr. Greg Gurnett, teaching associate Geri Kingma, and five parent helpers. These young and bright students are the future leaders of our province and country. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask all my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Young: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you 37 visitors from Crestwood elementary-junior high school. I had a chance to meet with these students earlier today, and they asked some really tough questions. They are joined today by teacher Trina Ludwig and parents Erin Nelson and Alexia Tsigozis. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members 38 visitors from Westbrook elementary school, an exceptional school in Edmonton. They are seated in both the public and private galleries. I know that this particular group of students is going to be listening very carefully today to what they hear in question period, and I know my colleagues in the House will not disappoint

them. I'd ask them all to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any other school groups?

If not, let's move on to other important guests, starting with Edmonton-South West, followed by Medicine Hat.

Mr. Jeneroux: Great. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I continue to be impressed with the number of students who have decided to visit me – I mean us – here. Today I have in attendance two ladies from the University of Alberta. I'm very pleased to introduce Tristen Runzer and Melissa Nilsson. I ask them to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure, as always, to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Navneet Khinda and Beverly Eastham. Navneet and Beverly are no strangers to my fellow members, and they are here today to represent over 100,000 postsecondary students and ensure that there is stable, predictable, and sustainable funding for all Alberta's postsecondary institutions. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Sukhdev Aujla and Patricia MacGarvie. Mr. Aujla was a practising High Court lawyer turned corrections officer in Canada, and he served the Alberta Solicitor General's branch for 31 years. He's a successful businessman and a community leader. He's here to get a taste of what it's like to work in the Legislature as he prepares his run to serve in the Parliament of Canada as a federal Liberal candidate for Edmonton-Manning. Patricia is Mr. Aujla's campaign manager as well as a current riding president for Edmonton-Manning. I'd like to thank Sukhdev and Patricia for their service to our province and ask them to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly my fabulous constituency assistant, Maria Somers. She is sitting in the members' gallery. I'd ask her to stand as I introduce her. She's been with me since day one, when I became an MLA. One phrase we go back and forth with all the time is that when I say to her, "Maria, when we have a slower time, we'll do this," she says: "Jason, I don't believe you anymore. Since I joined you, there's never been a slow time." So that goes to show how hard she works with us. I ask my colleagues in this House to help me give her a round of applause and the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my wonderful constituency assistant, Laura McDonald, who serves the people in and around the town of Hanna. Without her I

would be lost. Could she please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour again to introduce Mr. Eric Musekamp and Darlene Dunlop, who have come here at their own expense as the Farmworkers Union, demonstrating and challenging the lack of political will to extend constitutional rights to the people who feed us and consistent with law professor Jennifer Koshan, who cites several Charter violations in Alberta: freedom to associate, security of person, and equality before the law. I'll ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Calgary-East.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Legislature a good friend of mine who's visiting the Legislature for the first time, Ms Diane Edison. While Diane originally hails from Newfoundland, she decided to make the trek out and make the second-largest city of Newfoundland, Fort McMurray, her home. She is the community affairs and public relations manager right now for the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin. She is seated in the visitors' gallery, and I'd ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three visitors, three good friends, all the way from Lebanon. We have Dr. Abdallah Al Tassi, Dr. Khaled Smaili, Dr. Jihad Hamdan, and a dear friend of mine from the great city of Calgary, Mr. Akram Idriss. The three fine doctors have visited five Canadian cities: London, Ontario; Windsor, Winnipeg, Calgary, and Edmonton. They are here promoting their charitable work. They are in the gallery, and I see they have risen. I would like to ask all members to give them the traditional warm welcome.

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: We have two minutes each for these. Let us begin with the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Care System

Ms Smith: Since this session started, we've talked a lot about the problems in our health care system. We've talked at length about hospital maintenance and infrastructure spending, about long-term nursing care beds and chronic disease management. Albertans are deeply dissatisfied with how this government has handled health care. It is Albertans' top issue, and it is an issue that this government gets its worst ratings on. Health care is the largest part of our provincial budget, and given that "belt-tightening" is the Premier's new favourite word, getting health care right is essential.

Everything we've talked about for the last three weeks can be traced to the fact that this government is centred on a hospital-based model of health care. Hospitals are critically important – no one denies that – but the more health care we can provide out of our hospitals, the better the system will run, and by better I mean

better health outcomes for patients and better efficiencies for taxpayers. Mr. Speaker, this government needs to understand that getting seniors into real long-term care nursing beds and out of acute-care beds will make our hospitals better. This government needs to understand that moving chronic disease management out of hospitals and into primary care networks, with family doctors, pharmacists, and other professionals working together, will make our hospitals better.

I was dismayed to read that the Health minister thinks that Alberta Health Services should own improving the chronic disease management system. The Auditor General rightly notes that improving chronic disease management should be in the Health ministry because the key players – family doctors and the teams of professionals who can help those afflicted with chronic diseases – are not paid for by AHS.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes when I listen to this government, it sounds like they want to make AHS a parallel Health ministry, one they can repudiate when they need to for political reasons or pressure into decisions when it's politically expedient. This government will never make improvements in the health system unless and until it figures out where the Health ministry begins and where AHS begins and ends. This model we currently have doesn't work, and the government does not have any willingness to admit it.

Government Effectiveness

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the following phrases have been in far too many media reports this week: lack of transparency, subject to manipulation, crumbling, leaky, mouldy, unreliable. Most of these were references to the critical condition of Alberta's hospitals, but they could just as easily be referencing the current state of this PC government.

According to a recent poll Albertans continue to rank health care as their top priority. At the same time they acknowledge that this PC government is not that good at providing, administering, or supporting health care services. But why would they be? The critical condition of Alberta's hospital infrastructure bears a striking resemblance to this PC government. The government, whether the new management, the old new management, or the old old management, continues to play politics with the needs and well-being of the people it was elected to represent, just as it plays politics with school modulars and hospital infrastructure funding. This four-decade-old PC government dynasty has reached the same critical milestone as two-thirds of Alberta's hospitals, clearly past their best-before date.

In the construction business professionals operate on the assumption that even with regular maintenance buildings will need a major overhaul or sometimes outright replacement right around the 40-year mark. It's at 40 years that the risk of breakdown gets higher and higher and maintenance costs rise out of control. Mr. Speaker, does this sound familiar?

For more than 40 years this province has been ruled by one PC government or another. Today's PC government is one of the most secretive in the country. Its broken promises and outright neglect of the things that matter most to Albertans are so extensive that this government's foundation is crumbling. This province has seen five Premiers in nine years, with each one's term shorter than the last. Albertans can no longer rely on this government, just as they are increasingly skeptical that their hospitals are safe and sound.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Child Care and Schools

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Coming from the new and growing constituency of Edmonton-South West, I speak every day with young families, parents with small children, and people new to the workforce. As a parent of two young girls myself, their concerns and aspirations resonate with me.

With young children you constantly worry about the schools they go to, the communities they play and socialize in, the care they receive from professionals, and, most importantly, their well-being. It can be difficult when schools and child care services are in high demand and short supply, as is the case now in Edmonton-South West. To an extent it's also the case across the province, Mr. Speaker.

Edmonton-South West is a perfect microcosm of the situation in Alberta with its growing population and increasing demand for schools and supports for families raising children. Innovation counts the most at times like these, and I'm happy to say that my daughters' school serves as a great model for how we might tackle this issue. Their school also houses a daycare program, run by the YMCA, meaning they do not have to change locations at the end of the school day. They also have a health clinic on-site, which does wonders to ease the strain on a parent. Besides this, it is also a great, innovative way of applying multiple-use facilities. It'd be great if we could apply this model more broadly. We could help parents like myself as well as our budgets.

Like I said, Mr. Speaker, my constituency of Edmonton-South West is a perfect test case for this type of system, and it works remarkably well. As our communities grow and continue to attract new families, we're going to have to find new ways of fulfilling their needs and the needs of their children. This means more schools and more child care supports. Preferably, we can do this in innovative and efficient ways, which will also strengthen our communities as a result. Our children should be front and centre in every decision we make here. Let us never forget that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Charity at Christmas

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Christmas season has started, and for many of us it is a time for our families to come together, exchange presents, and eat lots of great food. However, for some Albertans Christmastime is a time of depression, loss of family, and crisis. There are many Albertans who rely on the help of others, including shelters and food banks, to make it through the winter. I would like to say thank you to each and every one of them for all of the individuals and the organizations who help those in need in our province, and they do it with a smile.

Inn from the Cold is a great example of this kind of charitable work. They provide emergency shelter, support, and programs to homeless children, their families, and others in need. They have a goal of building healthy, stable families and ending homelessness. Inn from the Cold is the only shelter program in Alberta that houses families. At over 60 locations their kindness provides a hot dinner, fellowship, breakfast, a bag lunch, and a safe place to stay. Let's not forget the great work of our Alberta food banks. They are kind and compassionate and help those who are hungry by either providing a meal or a care package with a week's worth or more of food.

We can all take a look at our communities and see how we can make a personal difference to someone. This past weekend 21 of us got together and made 36 baskets of hope for the central

Alberta women's shelter. These baskets will bring a moment of joy to women fleeing domestic violence and will show them that we support their courage. We all have a special role to play in sharing our kindness and ensuring that those less fortunate than us have a positive experience during what can be a very depressing time of year.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage everyone this holiday season to spend some time with their families but to go and serve dinner at the drop-in, donate a toy, or just give someone a hug. Let's all stop and reflect at this time of year. It's not all about politics; sometimes it's mostly just about people.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to join the millions of people around the world who are recognizing the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. This annual event is a great opportunity to highlight and learn how Albertans with disabilities contribute to our province. It's also an important time for increasing awareness and understanding of people with disabilities. Communities all over Alberta are holding events to celebrate the valuable contributions of Albertans with disabilities.

I'm also pleased that several Albertans are being recognized with awards today for their outstanding leadership in helping to increase opportunities for people with disabilities and to promote inclusive schools, workplaces, and communities.

Mr. Speaker, our province is one that not only promotes but embraces inclusion, so this is a day that we must also embrace. I wholeheartedly encourage all of the members of the Assembly to take a moment today to show your support for the thousands of people with disabilities living in our communities. Let's remember to make inclusion a part of everyday Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, you're reminded: 35 seconds maximum for the question and 35 seconds maximum for the answer.

Let us begin with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Hospital Infrastructure Evaluations

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, political manipulation between Alberta Health Services and the Health ministry officials is rampant. Recent reports make it clear that objective evaluations of hospital maintenance priorities are ignored and facility condition scores are routinely lowered for hospitals in government ridings in order to move them up the priority list. Does the Health minister understand that playing politics with hospitals threatens the lives and safety of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What the member has said I categorically disagree with. But to make sure, what we will do is ensure that in any report where a consultant's view is disagreed with by Alberta Health or Alberta Infrastructure, the revised document with reasons for why the decision is

disagreed with must be posted online. We'll start doing that tomorrow.

Ms Smith: Well, I look forward to that, Mr. Speaker, but freedom of information requests are pretty clear about the problems.

Everything about the process of evaluating hospitals is a mess. AHS brings in outside engineers and architects to evaluate hospitals but frequently rejects the reports. Even when reports are accepted, Alberta Infrastructure edits them before they're made public. The reports are used to create a facility condition index score that determines their priority, but then these are inexplicably changed up and down without new studies being done. Will the minister please explain how a hospital's priority can shift when no work has been done?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, once again a lot of what the member has said I completely disagree with. There are reasons for changes to reports. Some of them could be, for example, that a consultant could perhaps not get into some areas of a hospital during their review such as an operating room that is in use virtually all the time. In those cases Alberta Health Services provides additional information that then changes the report.

Now, what I am committing to is to ensure that that work is done collaboratively beforehand so that the document that goes out is something that everybody has seen . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Smith: Well, there is another explanation, Mr. Speaker, and that's the obvious one, political manipulation.

The government avoids publishing individual hospital condition scores. Instead, they aggregate scores and publish those numbers in their annual report. The latest report says that 75 per cent of Alberta's health infrastructure is in good shape. That percentage appears to be among the best the ministry has had for a while, but as the *Edmonton Journal* noted: "That isn't because the government has done a lot of repair work. It just changed the way it adds things up." Will the minister admit that manipulating the data on hospital maintenance does not fix the problems?

Mr. Bhullar: Well, Mr. Speaker, if we're on the subject of manipulation, I think there's a lot going on over there.

Regardless, the fact remains that when you're taking in the condition of a building, Mr. Speaker, you must take into account things like the size of the building. Why? Because you need to be able to determine the replacement cost of the building. It just makes sense. The replacement cost of a building is something you must take into consideration when looking at the amount of maintenance that is required for that specific facility.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions. The hon. leader.

Health System Concerns

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to managing health care, the new management is the same as the old management, and that's no surprise because they are, after all, the same managers. The Infrastructure minister keeps telling us that AHS decides which projects get funded. We're pretty sure that's not true. Reports show that last year only one of 10 AHS-recommended projects was actually funded by this government. Either the reports are wrong, or the Infrastructure minister misspoke. Which is it?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, when it comes to the maintenance projects of health facilities, those are decisions that Alberta Health Services makes. They must account to us, they must report to us, and we must work collaboratively on them, but the prioritization of the maintenance and repair projects is something that Alberta Health Services does.

Ms Smith: It still doesn't explain why they only approved one of the 10 recommended priorities from AHS.

This government, though, also can't manage chronic diseases. The Auditor General recently pointed out that six-year-old recommendations on how to improve chronic care management have not been acted upon. Public Accounts heard about this issue yesterday. All the experts agree that there can be savings and quality-of-life improvements if we just had some leadership. To the Health minister: what will this government do to improve chronic disease management?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of the environment.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm wearing a slightly different hat today. The Auditor General rightly pointed out that chronic disease management is best managed through primary care and family physicians, with referral to these specialists as needed. That's the responsibility of AHS, and it's an essential part of the picture but not the whole thing. You know, our government supports PCNs as a medical home for each patient to focus on managing these chronic diseases.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the experts all agree that the key to chronic disease management is a robust, easy-to-access, integrated electronic medical records system. We don't have that. The Member for Edmonton-Riverview summed up the situation the best. He said that the government

spent \$300 million . . . and really got nothing more than electronic isolated file systems . . . We went down this road without any kind of data exchange standards . . . it [just] blows my mind.

Well, it blows my mind, too. How does the Health minister justify wasting \$300 million dollars?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, as the Auditor General indicated, strong medical health records and information records are critical for chronic disease management. I know that in conversations with the Health minister this is a focus for him, and he's going to move on those recommendations by the Auditor General.

The Speaker: Third, and final, main set of questions.

PDD Supports Intensity Scale

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, today is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. We celebrate individuals with physical and mental disabilities and the many organizations that make their lives better. To the Minister of Human Services. The supports intensity scale is used to assess what supports people need who have disabilities. The problem is that it's humiliating. The questions they must answer during the interview are intrusive, insensitive, and degrading. Why is the supports intensity scale still in use?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is focused on ensuring that all Albertans have the best

quality of life. The supports intensity scale is one of the tools which is used to assess what supports an individual needs to be successful. In terms of some uncomfortable questions this summer we toured the province. We had conversations with Albertans, we had conversations with people who are receiving these services, we had conversations with service providers, and we are doing everything we can to accommodate them without losing the integrity of the tool.

Ms Smith: Actually, Mr. Speaker, it's the only tool they use.

Just to remind the minister, here are some of the questions individuals are asked in their SIS interview. What assistance would you need to have a romantic relationship up to and including an intimate one like other regular people? If you were a regular 28-year-old woman who wanted to take a course, would you need help? Did you ever expose yourself inappropriately? Do you steal? Mr. Speaker, these questions are demeaning and discriminatory. Can't this government assess the needs of Albertans with disabilities without comparing them to regular people?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is wrong. That is not the only tool which is used. That's one of the tools which is used to assess. The natural supports for the individuals play a role. The needs, the goals, and aspirations of the individual play a role. Of course, this is an internationally renowned tool, which is used in 13 different countries. For the first time, probably, in the history of the province people are getting consistent services right across the province.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, in last year's budget this government slashed \$42 million from PDD. The cuts threatened programs that bring developmentally disabled Albertans out of their homes and into their communities to socialize and volunteer. That is equal to about one-tenth of what they've wasted to build the sky palace and new MLA offices in the federal building. This government's record on supporting individuals with disabilities is dismal. On this International Day of Persons with Disabilities as a goodwill gesture will the minister finally abandon the demeaning supports intensity scale?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is absolutely committed to making sure that every single Albertan enjoys the best quality of life. Using an internationally renowned tool to assess the needs of the individuals – their needs, their goals, their aspirations – and support them to lead successful and meaningful lives: that's what this government is committed to.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:00 Child Death Investigation Process

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The resignation in frustration of Dr. Lionel Dibden as chair of the council for quality assurance is disturbing. The council reviews problems in the child intervention services, especially since the death review last year. He cites a lack of commitment to thorough and transparent internal investigations of all serious injuries and deaths

in care to enable real improvements in Human Services. This highlights the ongoing dysfunction in Human Services one year after the minister committed to a full review and fixing the secrecy and shame around children suffering and dying in government custody. To the minister: why is this expert council not free to address child health and safety concerns, and why don't you follow its advice?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the safety and well-being of children remains a priority for this government. I would like to thank Dr. Dibden for his service and all of his work over these last couple of years. I expect the council to work collaboratively with each other, with ministry staff to solve these problems. I know that Dr. Dibden has expressed concerns. I have as well. When I did meet with the council, I asked exactly what some of the priorities were. We had a great discussion. Today I'm going to be tabling letters I sent to the council outlining the clear expectations of priorities moving forward.

Dr. Swann: Decades of cover-up, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Sauvageau, the former Chief Medical Examiner, recently criticized the Justice department for interfering in death investigations, a shocking allegation that the Justice minister never denied. Dr. Sauvageau has since been let go; also disturbing. Interfering in death investigations in any other jurisdiction would cause outrage and demands for a full investigation, but not in Alberta. To the Human Services minister: what have you done to address the concerns of Dr. Sauvageau about Justice ministry interference in child death investigations?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With respect to this member I reject the premise of this question. It is correct that Dr. Sauvageau's contract was not renewed. I looked in our department, I've had many meetings, and I've yet to find any information that would even warrant an investigation about any interference by my department.

Dr. Swann: Well, that leads me to the next question, then, Mr. Speaker. Can you table the results of your investigations around the allegations of Dr. Sauvageau, and if not, why not?

Mr. Denis: I again reject the premise of that hon. member's question, Mr. Speaker. As I've indicated before, we have not seen anything that would actually lead towards an investigation, that would need an investigation. There has been no investigation, and no investigation is warranted.

Hospital Infrastructure Evaluations

(continued)

Ms Notley: Yesterday we learned about the dire straits of Edmonton's health infrastructure through reluctantly released FOIP documents. Today we learned that information the government does voluntarily release is misleading and disconnected from real infrastructure priorities. Albertans deserve the truth about their health infrastructure, so today I asked the Auditor General to review and report on how these decisions are being made and how they can be made better. To the Premier: will he join me in this request, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, I have made a commitment that every single report on our health facilities that is completed needs to be made publicly available. If there are any changes to that report on account of Alberta Health Services or Alberta Infrastructure, the reasoning for those changes, the reasoning for any changes in the rating of a facility must be provided and made publicly available, and we're going to start doing that as soon as tomorrow.

Ms Notley: It's a little late, 40 years overdue.

This government has clearly been playing politics with the health of Albertans by manipulating objective records of need. When it comes to the Ministry of Infrastructure's overall rating system, the information published appears to have a very distant relationship with the truth. To the Premier: after decades of neglect and now in the face of this misinformation why should Albertans trust you to build a snow fort let alone something as important as our hospitals?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, I think I need to remind the member that I am only 34 years of age.

You know what? The fact remains, Mr. Speaker, that of all capital spending in this country it's the Alberta government that is investing the most amount of capital to build the infrastructure we need in this province: the schools, the hospitals, the roads. We're investing to make sure Albertans have the best quality of life today and for years to come.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, of 18 rural hospitals that had their status arbitrarily changed in order to increase their priority, 14 are in ridings held by PC MLAs, and four are in ridings that PCs lost by less than a thousand votes. It seems that when it comes to infrastructure needs, the government is willing to either dial it up or dial it down to suit the political purpose of the day. To the Premier: don't you think Albertans deserve to have their health care needs put ahead of the government's own political objectives, and if so, why not just start doing that?

Mr. Bhullar: Once again, Mr. Speaker, I absolutely disagree with the premise of that question. You know, it's very simple and very easy for members of the opposition to read articles in the newspaper and then quote them in question period, but I would ask them to bring forward facts. I, on the other hand, am willing to make every one of those reports public so the public can know why anything was changed, so the public will understand why ratings were changed. On a go-forward basis we will ensure that any report that has disagreement in it is made public.

The Speaker: Thank you.

From this point onward please curtail or preferably eliminate any preambles so that more members can be recognized for their questions. Let's see how this works.

Alberta Land Stewardship Act

Mr. Barnes: Earlier this session I questioned the minister of environment on Bill 36 and how it diminishes the rights and property values of Albertans. He said that Bill 36 is a fair piece of legislation and will not be repealed. This despite the fact that Bill 36 blocks a landowner's rights to access the court when the government runs roughshod. To the minister. Let's take this one important step at a time. Will you repeal section 13(1) of Bill 36, that prevents landowners from having access to the courts, and if not, why not?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, the regional plans that are developed under the Alberta Land Stewardship Act do not change or alter property rights or freehold mineral rights in Alberta. The Alberta Land Stewardship Act contains a clear statement that government must respect the property rights of individuals, and it continues to have in place the existing rights to compensation under the Water Act, the Public Lands Act, and the Mines and Minerals Act.

Mr. Barnes: It clearly says: no access to the courts.

Given that the environment minister clearly stated, "We will not repeal Bill 36," and considering that he believes that Bill 1 is a saving grace for this government on property rights, will the minister now be brave enough to steal more policies from the Wildrose by admitting the faults of Bill 36 and repeal section 15(3)(b), which prevents a claim being exercised by an Albertan, and if not, why not?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is committed to responsible development of energy, and part of that is the land-use framework that was put in place by legislation that was passed by this Legislature a few years ago. We're committed to that legislation. I would suggest, if the member has any examples of individuals that have lost their property rights through this piece of legislation, bringing them forward to my office.

Mr. Barnes: Seventeen Wildrose MLAs are why we don't have any examples of that.

Given that the most controversial and devious section of Bill 36 is 17(4), which outlines, "If there is a conflict or inconsistency between [the Land Stewardship] Act and any other enactment, this Act prevails," essentially giving Bill 36 the ability to trump all other acts and extinguish property rights, will the minister do the right thing by property owners and repeal section 17(4), and if not, why not?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, I thought that was a puffball for a second. We won't go into the math there.

Again, this government is committed to being responsible developers of our energy and natural resource stewards. This province is growing. There are competing demands on our landscape for residential, growing communities, oil and gas development, forestry, agriculture, and we needed this piece of legislation to go in and provide some thoughtful planning about how we manage that because the landscape in this province isn't growing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

2:10

Elk Population

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Elk herds are increasingly becoming a nuisance, as my colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat articulated earlier. However, I believe it's all over Alberta and affects all Alberta farmers, east, west, south, and north. Environment and Sustainable Resource Development has determined that no elk are to be killed even though the population has reached levels that are impacting farmers' livelihoods. To the Minister of ESRD: what methods and studies are being used to determine what a manageable and sustainable population would be for the elk herds?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, what we do in our department is determine how many elk there are and start to look at the growth rates and mortality rates of the population. We do aerial surveys

that help us do that as well, and models are created to look at the growth of that. Then the department makes decisions around what is a sustainable number and what is needed to be put in place to ensure that that number stays at that level. We understand that there are some problems. I've asked my department to go away and look and come back to me with a plan to deal with this issue.

Ms Calahasen: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that we have imported elk to the north and we can't obviously seem to put a plan in place to address this issue, what initiatives are under way to revise how hunting licences can be issued to farmers to cull the herds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My department has decided at this point in time, as we continue to do work on what a sustainable population of elk looks like in this particular area, to increase the number of licences for hunting. I've asked my department to go and look at what a longer term plan is and if there are any additional strategies that might be needed, but the point is to try to get to what that number is and get a plan out there and monitor that plan over a number of years. In 2013 there were 41,331 elk licences sold in Alberta, and if you want a licence, you can go to mywildalberta.com to get one.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Final supplemental.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that. I love the fact we have a strategy, and I would like to ask of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: if ESRD can't seem to cull the herd, as we would like to see happen, what can your department do to help the farmers in addressing this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister responsible for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. There is actually a program in place, and it is funded jointly by the federal government and our government. It's called the wildlife damage compensation program, and it's administered by Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, and it's one that has no cost other than a \$25 fee per section. That's just an appraisal fee. There is no administrative cost or premium to pay. So that program is in operation. Some might argue that it should cover more things, but that's something that we continually monitor.

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Calgary-Lougheed.

Hospital Safety Issues

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday AHS finally released details of the major infrastructure concerns at hospitals in and around Edmonton: at the Mis, frequent sewage leaks in the OR and failing electrical centres, putting patients at risk; at the Stollery, significant safety, infection prevention, and privacy issues in the ICU; at the Glenrose, significant safety risks for children with mental health issues. To the Minister of Infrastructure: how can you say that the safety of patients and staff is not at risk when AHS says that it's clearly happening?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government and AHS obviously put the safety and well-being of patients first and foremost. Alberta has a very large number of hospitals, nearly a hundred, and, yes, some of those hospitals are aging. At the same time Alberta has a very rapidly growing population, and the need for new infrastructure has been very, very robust. As a result, we have to make very strong investments in capital, and that's what we're doing on this side of the Assembly, and I hope the members opposite will support our capital budget.

Mrs. Forsyth: Minister, these aren't new problems. Come on.

Given that the Alberta Hospital, a mental health facility, says that a lack of alarms creates higher levels of risk for staff and visitors and that patient crowding and buildings without sprinklers create significant safety issues, again, Minister, can you please tell me how you don't think patient and staff safety is not at risk when your own AHS says that it is?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, once again, we have made a very strong commitment to ensuring that the province of Alberta catches up on deferred maintenance. Our Premier has been very clear about that. He's been saying that long before media articles. He's been saying that long before members opposite decided to pick up the paper and talk about this issue. So it's something he's committed to. It's something we've committed to, and we will ensure that we're investing in capital, that we're investing in infrastructure to make sure Albertans have the best services at their disposal.

Mrs. Forsyth: Minister, we've been asking these questions since 2010. Ask the Minister of Mice about that.

Given that these AHS documents show this government and this minister were not forthcoming with Albertans about the significant risk to patient safety at Edmonton area hospitals, will the minister now admit that the same patient safety concerns are prevalent in hospitals in Wainwright, St. Paul, Bonnyville, Brooks, Sundre, and Calgary? And we can go on and on.

Mr. Bhullar: It's interesting to hear, Mr. Speaker, that the 17 – oh, I'm sorry – 14 people have been discussing these issues for some time because they are also the individuals that often object to our raising money for capital spending. When we, in fact, believe that we need to invest very heavily in capital, they are the same individuals that say no in many, many cases. They think that we're building too much infrastructure when it comes to schools and that some of our schools, in fact, are not needed. We're very clear when it comes to our infrastructure spending. We're growing – Alberta is robust – and we're going to continue to invest in infrastructure.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by Calgary-McCall.

Southwest Calgary Ring Road

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has taken some time, but great progress has been made on the Calgary ring road. The project is and will continue to be vital to the livelihood and quality of life of an untold number of Calgarians and Albertans. It will lessen congestion on many of the arterial roads of the interior city and make transportation safer for everyone. To the Minister of Transportation. It's fantastic that we finally have an agreement on the Calgary southwest ring road, but the current stumbling block is the approval of the federal government. What can you tell my

constituents and all Albertans about when the official federal approval will occur and we can finally get this road built?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, we're committed to completing the Calgary ring road. It's part of the infrastructure needed to move goods and people safely across this province, and our growing economy and population depend on it. We expect the federal government will transfer the lands from the Tsuu T'ina Nation to the government of Alberta in 2015. At that time we'll proceed with the project pending Treasury Board approval.

Mr. Rodney: To the same minister. This project has great potential for every community connected to it, but many of my constituents are concerned about whether or not they will actually have easy access onto the southwest ring road. Can you assure them that they will have access to the east and west from the south end of 24th Street S.W. as well as access to the north from 130th Avenue S.W.?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, we want to ensure the safety of drivers and passengers on all Alberta roads, and the interchange at 130th Avenue would be too close to another interchange to provide safe access. The Anderson Road interchange will provide all directional access to this ring road. For safety reasons access to the ring road from 24th Street cannot be provided. Instead, we'll include a full interchange at 167th Avenue that does not impact the safety and operation of the ring road. At this time local residents can use both 167th Avenue and James McKevitt Road to access the ring road.

Mr. Rodney: Finally, to the same minister. At the recent open houses on this subject in Calgary constituents raised questions regarding noise in their neighbourhoods and construction of a second bridge right over Fish Creek park. What can you tell constituents that will address these serious concerns of theirs?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, we know that operating a highway in an urban setting may impact residents who live nearby, and we're committed to addressing these concerns. That's why we held nine information sessions this fall, and these sessions were well attended with between 100 and 300 attendants at each session. When it comes to noise concerns, Mr. Speaker, we're currently modelling the predicted noise that the ring road will generate as part of our planning project. The project will conform to provincial noise policy guidelines. To ensure the safety of users of the ring road, a second bridge will be built over Fish Creek that will carry four lanes.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's move on to Calgary-McCall, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

2:20 Infrastructure Project Prioritization

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know this PC government often makes decisions based on politics and not what is best for Albertans. We saw a clear example of this in the last couple of days. Now a news report shows that the PCs cannot evaluate Alberta's health care infrastructure needs without political interference. To the Minister of Infrastructure: will you prove today that your government is not making political decisions by publishing a detailed and prioritized list of Alberta's infrastructure projects?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that infrastructure is very important to both provincial and federal governments across this country. What I would say is that we have a public, open document that speaks about our capital plan. We're investing over \$19 billion over three years on our capital plan.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Bhullar: Nineteen billion dollars, hon. member.

That's the most significant capital built in this country per capita, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to continue to make those investments.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Planning saves money, but decisions based on political whim lead to waste. When priorities change, goals are moved, and targets are missed, the costs go up. To the same minister: how much extra money is this political interference going to cost Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the first part of the member's question actually makes sense. Planning does save money, and that's the reason why we've actually forwarded planning dollars for the 55 new schools and the 20 new school modernizations immediately. We've advanced the planning dollars now so that by next year's budget, when the capital dollars come around, the planning and design is done, and we're ready to start construction. That's the way I plan on approaching all of our infrastructure projects across the government of Alberta.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If this minister focused less on damage control and more on repairing the damage, maybe the Lougheed legacy would not be crumbling around him.

Finally, to the same minister: how is this minister going to fix this process to ensure that the right infrastructure is evaluated in the right way and receives the right amount of repair at the right time?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a very planned and deliberate approach to catching up on deferred maintenance on various infrastructure projects. As I've said before, Alberta spends the most per capita on infrastructure projects of anybody in this country. We have a \$19.2 billion capital plan as we speak, and of these projects we anticipate that over \$2.6 billion from that is being spent on health infrastructure projects alone. Again, the most per capita in this country.

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

Child Death Investigation Process (continued)

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First this government blocks the Child and Youth Advocate from doing comprehensive, independent investigations whenever a child in care dies or is seriously injured. Now their own quality assurance council has been so frustrated that the chair has thrown up his hands in the air and resigned. To the Minister of Human Services: after you

sandbagged Dr. Dibden so completely, will you now hand over investigations into all of the deaths of children in care to the Child and Youth Advocate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to make it very clear that this government reviews every incident and every fatality in the child intervention system. We have numerous bodies reviewing these cases, including the medical examiner, the Child and Youth Advocate, the Fatality Review Board, in addition to our very own internal review of every incident. From my perspective, how many people do we need to review the reviewers? It's time to get past reviewing this again and get the job done.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, given that Dr. Dibden outlined fully transparent, comprehensive, and robust reforms yet this PC government has ignored the council's recommendation and he ended up resigning, to the same minister: how do you expect Albertans to place any trust in you and your ministry when you continue to block recommendations that could very well save children's lives?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Child and Youth Advocate and the recommendations put forward by a number of bodies that work with Human Services – of the 96 recommendations 55 have been completed, 12 are ongoing, 25 are in progress, and only four have not been implemented.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, given that we know that 18 children in care have died in the last eight months under this PC government's watch, to the same minister: how do you expect the public to believe that the resignation of a well-respected, high-profile chair of the council for quality assurance is anything less than another affirmation of your and this PC government's supreme and profound neglect?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Any time a child in care passes away, it's a very tragic moment for all of us. With the publication ban and the information that's being released every month now through the Human Services website, we are being open and transparent and accountable with Albertans. It's about working not in isolation but with the input from the council, child intervention practitioners, other experts, and, of course, aboriginal representatives to make sure that all community perspectives are reflected as we make continuous improvements.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Chronic Disease Management

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I raised the question of chronic disease management to the Health minister. His answers, quite frankly, left much to be desired. The Auditor General's report was very clear in outlining that the government has no system in place that assesses chronic disease management needs, making it difficult to match its services with demand. To the Health minister: exactly what system will you put in place to determine the demand for chronic disease management services across our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister responsible for the environment.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned in one of my previous answers, this government is committed to managing chronic diseases through what the Auditor General identified as one of the most effective tools, and that's through the primary care system. The PCN evolution work in the coming weeks and months includes enhanced services such as extended hours, same-day or next-day patient access, notifying patients of the PCN they belong to and the services which the PCN provides as well as improved continuity of patient care.

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, given that the Department of Health has not renewed the physician office system program to support the enhanced use of electronic medical records by physicians who currently have them and given that Mr. Monteith, chief delivery officer of the Ministry of Health, said last Tuesday at PAC that "system reform . . . will be difficult because physicians are independent contractors," under the leadership of this Premier and the government it has wasted hundreds of millions of dollars on these systems, and still a universal electronic medical records system has not been developed. When will it be done, Minister?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, as was rightfully identified, one of the biggest barriers to this is trying to work with our front-line health care providers, including the doctors. We will continue to work with them and encourage them and provide them the proper incentives and frameworks and platforms to continue to move forward with proper electronic health care records. Again, there is no excuse in this day and age not to utilize technology to the best of its ability to improve health care outcomes.

The Speaker: Hon. member, your final supplemental.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister is right. There is no excuse for this government's lack of work on this file.

The Auditor General has also noted that the department does not currently have a structured approach or business model to deliver chronic disease management. Again to the minister: given that we spend more on chronic diseases than on the entire Department of Education, how is it possible that this government has no plan to effectively manage chronic diseases in the province?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, you know, the hon. member is right; being able to manage chronic diseases will certainly help us with trying to bring down the costs of health care expenditures in the province. The more that we can keep people healthy and out of the doctors' offices, out of the emergency rooms, out of the acute-care system and the long-term care system, the better it will be for Alberta taxpayers. That is certainly an objective that we have as a government, to manage those issues in a way that does so with the appropriate financial considerations.

AISH Client Benefits after Age 65

Mrs. Towle: Every day clients on assured income for the severely handicapped, or AISH, who turn 65 face a real challenge. That is because currently when AISH clients turn 65, they lose their medical benefits. This sends the client into crisis and increases the risk to the health and safety of the AISH client. I can tell you that it is astonishing to Albertans that a client on AISH who needed help at 64 would be cut off at age 65. To the Minister of Human Services: why are AISH clients losing their medical benefits when they turn 65?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to thank the hon. member for her question, the opportunity to respond, and her advocacy on this issue. As of October 1 clients who are on AISH will receive about \$20 more a month when they start receiving the Alberta seniors' benefit and the old age security and guaranteed income supplement. There's also the special-needs assistance program and the property tax deferral program. Again, we do help AISH clients transition, so it's important for me as minister to hear those, and I appreciate these concerns being brought up.

Mrs. Towle: Given that the prescriptions covered under the seniors' benefit program are significantly different, especially for mental health, and given that when AISH clients have their prescriptions cut off, they often end up in emergency or in our justice system, will the Minister of Human Services commit to ensuring that AISH clients turning 65 will not lose access to the prescriptions that they currently have today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we know that when AISH clients turn 65 – we work with them for approximately a year before they turn 65 – they do get dental and optical assistance through Alberta Health as well as ambulance coverage, but we also know that there are gaps. There are situations where we know there could be gaps there, so I look forward to working with her on this issue. I am concerned about this issue. At the end of the day we want to make sure they can live in a dignified manner and have the supports they need.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you for that, Minister. I also look forward to working with you to resolve this situation.

Given that clients on AISH also lose their access to their nonmedical supports, their caseworker, and sometimes even their housing, will the minister ensure that our most vulnerable Albertans will have access to all of the supports even though they turn 65?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her excellent and important question on this topic. I think it's important to clarify that AISH recipients are in unique circumstances and that moving or having to move is not necessarily a requirement at age 65. It depends on the individual's circumstances and the housing management body, assets that they may have. It's not a policy or requirement of this government. But we do have a number of other programs to help these folks as they age, including the special-needs assistance that was previously mentioned, low-income housing, special-needs housing, and others. I look forward to working with the member on any of the constituent concerns that she has on this issue.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Time and time again Alberta's postsecondary students are asked to make sacrifices. Our postsecondary institutions and partners in innovation and creative sectors get promises of funding, only to be faced with unpredictable

funding cuts. Times are good: cuts. Times are bad: cuts. Times are great and oil is at record high prices: cuts. Now with oil prices plummeting, students are concerned about what this means for them. Can the minister commit to students that they won't be asked to bear the brunt of this government's legacy of waste, mismanagement, and poor planning?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, it seems like the only that that's being cut is the popular support for the opposition party, which has plummeted 21 per cent in the last six months. There's a reason for that, and that is that people expect in this province that we are going to address issues and not simply promote negativity. Here's the issue that the minister of postsecondary education has been addressing: \$2.1 billion being invested in base operating grants this year.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, obviously, this minister should just cut the hot air.

Given that the health of our postsecondary institutions is critical to the long-term economic prosperity of our province and given that they are teaching and training the leaders and citizens of tomorrow, can this government tell Albertans whether or not they are working with postsecondary institutions to ensure they have a sustainable and predictable funding model both now and in the years ahead?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to put some facts on the table for the members just so that they can be educated about our postsecondary system. Alberta invests in our students. [interjections] The latest numbers show that we have the third-highest expenditure for full-time students in the country. We invest \$2.1 billion in base operating grants across the system. [interjections] We've made it clear, the Premier has in his priorities, that we will be committed to sound, conservative fiscal principles and that we'll be prudent and diligent in our planning for our postsecondary education system.

The Speaker: Hon. members, you know the rules. So do I. Please.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, given that the Council of Alberta University Students, the largest student-run organization in the province, representing over 100,000 students, is still waiting to hear from the government, will the minister commit to meet with these students before decisions on the budget are final?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Khan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for the question, and I want to thank him for bringing up CAUS. CAUS is a tremendous organization of student leaders. They do incredible work. I've spoken to the minister. I know that he values their input. I'll be happy to pass along that request, and I hope that at some time in the near future the minister will be able to have an opportunity to meet with the folks from CAUS.

Children and Youth with Disabilities

Mr. Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, any parent who has a child with a disability will know the struggles of supporting the child. The financial, physical, and emotional stress of caring for a child with a disability can be draining. My constituents in Edmonton-Manning who are parents to children with disabilities are very frustrated that government supports are simply not adequate. It is critical that persons with disabilities have the right supports to enjoy quality of life. My first question to the associate minister for

persons with disabilities: why are our most vulnerable citizens, especially . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. associate minister to respond.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on ensuring that all Albertans have the best quality of life. Currently we have 11,000 children and families who are receiving a wide range of services through our family support for children with disabilities. In 2012 we conducted a survey, and 91 per cent of the parents said that they had a positive impact on the family and the child. We will continue to work with the families and their service providers to make sure their individual needs are met.

Thank you.

Mr. Sandhu: To the same associate minister. The government is supposed to be taking care of their most vulnerable youth to the greatest extent possible. Why aren't there services in place to support youth as they are about to start their adult lives?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government is focused on making sure that every youth in Alberta starts off on the right foot, and that absolutely includes youth with disabilities. There are service providers, and we're working with the families as early as the age of 16 so that the day they turn 18, there is a seamless service throughout their lifespan. We will continue working with them to make sure they get the best possible care that is needed.

Thank you.

Mr. Sandhu: My constituents have also told me that adult disability services fall short once the child turns 18 and is no longer eligible for the government funding. How can a person and their family plan for the future when they don't know what type of support they can expect?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to recognize International Day of Persons with Disabilities and, of course, talk about the PDD transformation. PDD transformation is about the individuals. It's about their needs, their goals, and their aspirations. As a government we will continue to make sure that their needs are met in a very consistent and timely manner.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Community Services in Schools

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We often speak about how school facilities can be used to meet the needs of a community, community centres, if you like, but there are serious shortcomings in how we make use of our valuable public spaces. A new school will be under construction in Ardrossan in my constituency soon, which is good news. The bad news is that there is a daycare and a preschool that rent space in the existing facility that may need to close because they have been denied space in the new facility. My question for the Education minister: how are school buildings

actually going to be community centres if education dollars can be used for school space and only school space?

Mr. Dirks: I thank the member for a very good question, Mr. Speaker. The member raises a valid point with the reality that the current education system is focused on funding and delivery of schools and programs for kindergarten to grade 12 students. In respect to the Ardrossan situation I can commit to the hon. member that staff at my ministry will work with the school jurisdiction during the replacement school's design stage to review possible solutions to that issue.

2:40

Mr. Quest: I'll just go to my next supplemental, Mr. Speaker, which will be to the Minister of Human Services. We'll need thousands of new daycare spaces in the coming years in this province, yet in my community there's actually a risk of losing some of that space, which has been used successfully in the old school building. New school buildings are ideal places for preschools and daycares. What are you prepared to do as Minister of Human Services to ensure that these facilities are maximizing their value to Albertans, working with Education and Infrastructure? This is important, Minister.

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last year, as I've said before, we licensed 4,700 new spaces across Alberta, about 100,000 spaces. We know that we license, monitor, and issue for child care programs. We also approve the family day homes and other areas as well. We know that we need to have the conversation of wraparound services and community supports and hubs. I'm a firm believer in that. I think that's a conversation that we will continue to have to ensure that families and children are supported.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just ask the Minister of Infrastructure: are you prepared to work immediately with the Education minister and the Human Services minister to resolve this situation not just in Ardrossan but around Alberta? Our schools need to be more than just schools, Minister.

Mr. Bhullar: A great comment by the member, Mr. Speaker. Our schools in some communities are the only piece of public infrastructure in a new development. I've been saying this very much lately, that we need to ensure that the local communities, the school boards, the municipalities come together early, work on the planning and the design of these facilities early on, so that when we're ready to start construction, we don't have to miss a step and can ensure that the public gets full access to these public facilities.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the bell for Oral Question Period has sounded, meaning that it is over.

In 30 seconds from now we will resume with private members' statements, starting with Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Let us resume, then. Private members' statements, two minutes. Let's go with Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, please.

AltaLink Sale

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday the Alberta Utilities Commission approved the sale of AltaLink to the fifth-largest public company in the world, U.S.-based Berkshire Hathaway. In its decision the commission said that concerns about foreign ownership of AltaLink were outside its jurisdiction; hence, it was not considered. I note the federal Competition Bureau did not consider any factors outside Canadian jurisdiction before it approved the sale. When questioned about this sale, the minister said: I'm sure the regulators will do their job to ensure no harm comes to Alberta consumers. It was confusing.

Sadly, the minister is only partially correct. AltaLink is a fully regulated monopoly in the province of Alberta. It is managed rather efficiently. In all likelihood, it will continue to be managed efficiently. The company AltaLink and its management are not the problem. They do not own electricity generation; hence, they have no conflict or interest in the price of electricity. Berkshire Hathaway, on the other hand, owns electric utility companies in more than seven western states. They own 300,000 kilometres of transmission lines, 28,000 megawatts of generation in the western United States. That's 10 times the transmission and twice the generation capacity of all of Alberta.

Now, with the purchase of AltaLink Berkshire Hathaway controls 80 per cent of the flow of electricity in Alberta. Unlike AltaLink, Berkshire Hathaway has a vested interest in the price of electricity. Now that they own both generation and transmission across an international boundary Berkshire Hathaway can take advantage of a regulatory black hole every day when Alberta imports and exports electricity. There are no rules or regulations to prohibit Berkshire Hathaway from adjusting the flow or supply of electricity in one jurisdiction, only to raise the price of electricity in another jurisdiction.

No one is watching this fox manage the henhouse. Can we as a Legislature put aside partisan politics and do something before Alberta ratepayers suffer?

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 11

Savings Management Repeal Act

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 11, the Savings Management Repeal Act.

Given its clear commitment to sound, conservative fiscal principles and our current fiscal position, the government will not continue with the initiatives set out in the Savings Management Act. The Savings Management Repeal Act will eliminate the Alberta future fund, the social innovation endowment account, and the agriculture and food innovation endowment account. The \$200 million transfer from the heritage fund to the Alberta heritage scholarship fund, which was earmarked to support trade-focused education, will remain in the scholarship fund for that purpose.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, did you have a tabling?

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings, the first being a tabling that I referenced in my introductions today of the farm workers who are here, Constitutional Arguments Concerning the Exclusion of Alberta Farm and Ranch Workers from Labour and Employment Legislation: Executive Summary, which highlights three violations of our Canadian Constitution: the freedom to associate, the security of persons, and equality at law.

The second tabling is a letter from the Premier to Darlene Dunlop in response to her request for a response to these constitutional violations and his willingness to look at those.

The third is a letter from one Philippa Thomas, a farm worker who was injured almost 10 years ago and suffered a very serious injury. She has been living without compensation for a decade, having spent tens of thousands of dollars, and is calling for the inclusion of farm worker rights, including compensation for all farm workers.

The fourth is a letter from Darlene Dunlop printed in the *Prairie Post*, identifying that her family in Frank, Alberta, has received a World War I memorial, a cannon flanked by two machine guns, in recognition that hers was the only family to lose all their sons in the First World War, family members that she feels fought for equal rights for all Albertans and these rights are now denied to paid farm workers in Alberta.

The fifth would be greetings from Eric Musekamp, greeting the Alberta Legislature and on behalf of the Charles Stauffer trust fund asking MLAs to consider making a donation after this farm worker was killed, leaving his family destitute. I've made a contribution, and I hope other MLAs will consider the Charles Stauffer trust fund. The details are here.

That's it, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Let us move on to Edmonton-Centre, followed by the Minister of Human Services.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of tablings here today. The first is from Marian McNair. I believe she is a constituent. She just wants to point out – and I'm glad that the Minister of Health is here – that she's 69 and still working, but she is one of the people who is prescribed a compounding type of medication. She used to be able to get her 300 pills for a \$25 fee. Now, because of the limit on the compounding fee, she is having to go 10 times to get the same number of pills and is now paying \$73.30 instead of \$25 for those same 300 pills.

2:50

Second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a copy of the letter that I sent to the superintendents of all of Alberta's public and separate school boards asking for the same information that was being provided to the hon. Minister of Education.

I was a little puzzled by the tabling yesterday from the minister, which appeared to not contain source data. So, just to remind him, I'm going to table a couple of the originals that we got back from some of those school boards detailing the breakdown of antibullying clubs, diversity clubs, and GSAs. I'll give him copies of the one from the Peace Wapiti school division, Elk Island public, and Wetaskiwin just as a reminder that this is what the source

information looked like and not something written as a letter after the fact.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be filing the appropriate number of copies of letters to the chair of the council for quality assurance and the chair of the implementation oversight committee outlining expectations and priorities.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I was wondering if I could request unanimous consent to revert briefly to question period for 20 minutes so that we could ask the Health minister some questions about hospital infrastructure.

The Speaker: Hon. member, let's deal with your tabling, shall we? Then, if there's a request to revert to something that is acceptable, we'll do that. But go on with your tabling, please.

Mr. Mason: I have no tabling.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, then.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a motion currently in front of the City of Edmonton Youth Council. The motion resolves "that a letter be written on behalf of the . . . Youth Council to local MLAs, the Minister of Education and the Premier of Alberta stating public support for Bill 202." Unfortunately for them, the government has acted with great haste to ensure that the debate that they will be having this afternoon appears to be no longer in order. Nonetheless, it's important for members to know that the City of Edmonton Youth Council was planning on debating this today and likely will be supporting Bill 202.

The Speaker: Are there others? One from Calgary-Shaw, please.

Mr. Wilson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a news release from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta that I quoted from while debating an amendment from the ND caucus earlier this week.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Campbell, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Conflicts of Interest Act, the Report of Selected Payments to the Members and Former Members of the Legislative Assembly and Persons Directly Associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly, year ended March 31, 2014; pursuant to the Gaming and Liquor Act the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission Charitable Gaming in Review 2013-2014; and pursuant to the Results-based Budgeting Act the Results-based Budgeting Report to Albertans dated December 2014.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Statements by the Speaker

Bills Containing Similar Provisions

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have no points of order, but I would like to take this moment to make a point of clarification and make a statement with respect to duplication of bills, specifically bills 10 and 202. I make this statement as a result of the need to do so.

First, as members are aware, Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, received second reading on Tuesday, December 2, 2014. This is a government bill, sponsored by the Member for Calgary-North West. On the Order Paper for consideration is Bill 202, the Safe and Inclusive Schools Statutes Amendment Act, 2014, sponsored by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. I've examined these two bills, and certainly they are not duplicates. Both bills would amend the Alberta Human Rights Act by repealing section 11.1. Both bills would amend the Education Act in various sections. The provisions are not identical but deal with the same issue of preventing discrimination or bullying.

In Bill 202 there are amendments to section 33 of the Education Act while Bill 10 adds a new division after section 35 of the Education Act. Also, there is the issue of parental consent in the Education Act, which is dealt with by amending section 58 in Bill 202 whereas Bill 10 adds new sections after section 58 on this subject. Bill 10 would also, as the title indicates, amend the Alberta Bill of Rights in addition to amending the School Act.

The principle that prevents the Assembly from debating both these bills is that a Parliament or Assembly should not debate the same issue twice in the same session. The nature of the rule and the rationale for it is nicely stated in *Erskine May's Treatise on The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 24th edition, at page 543, where it states:

There is no general rule or custom which restrains the presentation of two or more bills relating to the same subject, and containing similar provisions. But if a decision of the House has already been taken on one such bill, for example, if the bill has been given or refused a second reading, the other is not proceeded with if it contains substantially the same provisions.

On the same page it is stated that

the Speaker has declined to propose the question for the second reading of a bill which would have had the same effect as a clause of a bill which had already received a second reading.

It is interesting to note that on page 544 of the same edition of *Erskine May* it is stated that the rule was laid down in what is now the United Kingdom House of Commons on June 1, 1610, as follows:

that "no bill of the same substance be brought in in the same session."

The decision by the Assembly at second reading is therefore crucial because it indicates that the Assembly has approved the bill in principle and causes the rule against considering the same issue to become operative. This point is also found in *Beauchesne's* paragraph 653 and has been relied upon by previous Speakers of this Alberta Legislative Assembly. I would refer members to Speakers' rulings of November 22, 2005, found at page 1789 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day, and also April 21, 1998, found at page 1558 of *Alberta Hansard* for that particular day, where bills containing provisions similar to those in bills that had received second reading were not proceeded with and came off the Order Paper.

In the matter before us today I find that the provisions in Bill 202 are identical in one section and cover the same ground as in another section in Bill 10. The subject matter in Bill 202 is

subsumed in Bill 10 and would lead to a similar debate and having the Assembly revisit an issue about which it had already voted.

In conclusion, I find that based on the parliamentary authorities and the precedents of this Assembly concerning duplication of bills and the principles associated with considering the same issue twice in a session, Bill 202 will not be proceeded with and will come off the Order Paper.

In making this conclusion and this ruling, I make it with some regret, knowing that the effort that the Member for Edmonton-Centre put into her Bill 202 was very considerable and that the time and commitment she invested into preparing it and researching it was equally so. However, I want to point out that this ruling is very much dependent on the content of bills 10 and 202. Each case is obviously different, and I do not want to be seen as unduly limiting the opportunities for members to craft and debate their own private members' bills.

That concludes this particular statement.

Private Members' Public Bills

Now, with respect to another matter, that being the business for Monday afternoon, December 8, 2014, members may recall that yesterday I tabled a letter from the member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre requesting early consideration of his Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014. That letter is recorded as Sessional Paper 105/2014. The issue of early consideration of private members' public bills has vexed me as your Speaker and two of my immediate predecessors.

3:00

In my ruling of November 18, 2013, at page 2864 of *Alberta Hansard*, I cited four rulings on the subject and how my immediate predecessors have repeatedly requested House leaders' attention to and review of the procedure for early consideration. In the absence of any agreement, however, which is where we still find ourselves today, we are obliged to continue following the protocol, where a member may request early consideration of his or her bill but only when the bill has passed the previous stage.

In this case Bill 201 received second reading on Monday, December 1, and the request for early consideration at committee stage was made the following day. A request for early consideration will not bump a bill where debate has been adjourned or the committee's work has not been completed or a bill that must, according to the rules, come up for consideration on a certain day. As there are no other private members' bills that are being debated nor are there any in committee, then, consistent with our practices, Bill 201 will be considered in Committee of the Whole as the first item of business on Monday afternoon, December 8, 2014, when private members' public bills are expected to be up for consideration. That concludes that particular statement.

I see the Member for Edmonton-Centre. Let me hear what you have, quickly please.

Point of Clarification

Ms Blakeman: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Under 13(2) I just wanted to double-check if the fact that my bill was not allowed to come up for debate affects the decision by the Speaker at all in this context.

The Speaker: Hon. member, may I invite you to please read what I just said in *Hansard* with respect to the ruling, which was carefully reviewed. I did not reference the specific point that you just referenced, but I see you've put it on the record, which is probably a good thing from your perspective. Thank you for doing that.

Let us move on, then.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 9

Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood-Park.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 9, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014. Alberta has a long history with condominiums. In fact, the first condominium development in Canada was built in Edmonton in 1967. Condominium legislation was first enacted in Alberta in 1969. The legislation has been updated a number of times since then as the condominium market and our province have grown. The Condominium Property Act provides the legislative framework for the creation and operation of any form of condominium, including residential and commercial. This act impacts anyone who develops, manages, owns, or resides in a condominium property. These amendments will ensure that the act is appropriately balanced and fair to all parties. It also enshrines a number of stakeholder recommendations and best practices from other jurisdictions.

I would like to take a few moments to set out some of the key amendments being proposed as part of this bill. First, the creation of a new tribunal to act as an alternative to the courts in disputes between parties. This proposal received considerable support during the consultation process. Stakeholders recognized that many types of disputes in condominiums can be addressed without the need for time-consuming and potentially expensive litigation. The new tribunal offers them such a forum. Further work will be undertaken to develop the necessary regulations to support this tribunal's operation. Once this work is completed, this new avenue for settling disputes will be a valuable alternative to the courts and will reflect a significant modernization of Alberta's legislation.

Second, a number of these amendments will also take steps to protect purchasers of new condominiums. Here are just a few examples of the ways in which this bill will do this. Developers will be required to disclose a broader range of information to potential purchasers to assist them in making a fully informed decision. Buyers will be protected from sudden increases in condo fees, also known as fee shock, by ensuring they receive realistic and credible budget estimates of future condo fees. A purchaser's right to cancel an agreement to purchase will remain until they have actually received all the information to which they are entitled. New provisions will be added to the act to ensure that condominium buyers are notified of any delays in occupancy or material changes to the purchase contract and have appropriate remedies available.

Alberta has a great number of developers committed to acting fairly and professionally. Indeed, many developers already comply with some of these amendments on a routine basis. Including these amendments in the act will help to ensure that anyone purchasing a condo in Alberta is treated fairly and can count on high standards of disclosure.

Third, these amendments will also enhance the regulation of condominium managers. Condominium managers are playing an increasingly important role in the administration of many developments. This diverse group of professionals deals with matters ranging from finances to property maintenance to negotiating contracts with suppliers to enforcing condominium rules and bylaws. These are important responsibilities, and it is essential that those performing them are appropriately informed, regulated, and well qualified.

These amendments will assign responsibility for governance of condominium managers to the Real Estate Council of Alberta, RECA. RECA is the independent governing authority that sets and enforces professional standards for property managers as well as realtors, mortgage brokers, and real estate appraisers. As an independent body that is experienced, fair, transparent, and accountable, RECA is ideally equipped to set appropriate standards of conduct and prescribe the necessary skills, education, and competencies needed for condo managers.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Other amendments will update this legislation to ensure that condo owners and boards can take full advantage of modern technology in the affairs of their business. For example, the act will authorize board meetings and voting to be done electronically, provided appropriate controls are in place to verify voter identity. It will also allow documents to be provided in an electronic form wherever possible.

Finally, amendments will update and improve the offences and enforcement sections of the act. The proposed amendments will reduce the overall number of offences, to focus more on especially unfair actions taken against purchasers and owners by a small number of developers. This will ensure that resources can be directed at eliminating behaviour that leaves condo owners in Alberta particularly vulnerable. However, let me be clear. Reducing the total number of offences will not compromise the protections offered by the act. In fact, a number of these amendments are specifically tailored to deter illegal conduct by potential offenders.

For example, we are expanding the role of Service Alberta's condominium director to issue compliance orders, levy administrative monetary penalties of up to \$100,000, and, whenever necessary, commence court actions. Additionally, penalties for offences will be substantially increased to serve as a strong deterrent against inappropriate conduct. Where offences are carried on beyond a single occurrence, they will likewise be punished more seriously. I have no doubt our province's stakeholders will support these amendments and recognize that the enhanced sanctions are specifically aimed at the effective and efficient investigation and prosecution of the most serious misconduct.

Taken together, however, this bill represents a major modernization of Alberta's Condominium Property Act, reflects our commitment to protect Alberta condominium owners, and will help build stronger communities now and into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the next speaker, the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to this bill, both as an MLA and as the critic for Service Alberta. The issue of condominiums is quite important as it's ultimately about private property. Many young people get their first step on the property ladder through a condo. Many seniors also downsize from a single family home to a condo for the first time. Both groups of people find the market confusing and technical. I hope this bill will improve protection for consumers.

I do have a concern with how this bill has been handled. I feel this bill is being rushed through the House without proper consultation with stakeholders. This is a highly technical piece of legislation. It's 80 pages of detailed amendments to a very large piece of legislation. It can be quite confusing unless you happen to

be a lawyer specializing in the condo market. This being the case, I think there should be enough time to consult with stakeholders to look through this bill and make sure it addresses the long-standing issues in this market. As we know, the Condo Property Act hasn't been significantly updated in 15 years. This is our once-in-a-decade chance to get things right. Rushing legislation through will lead to mistakes that will need to be fixed later.

3:10

I have to give credit to the ministry for its extensive consultation prior to the drafting of the legislation. They sought the input of a variety of people, including developers, owners, and the legal community. I do wish more consultation was done after the drafting of the bill. I wish more time was being taken to consult on the actual laws that are being passed. When you consult before and not after, people feel like the job is only half done. You've asked for their opinion in general, but when it comes to what the real substance is, what laws will actually be passed, they are not consulted.

Another concern I have is that Bill 9 in front of us is different from Bill 13, tabled in the spring. As I've said, we haven't had much time to go through the bill in detail. It was tabled on Monday afternoon, and I want to thank the minister for having the evening meeting and giving us the briefing notes at that time. But here we are. I did start going through and comparing the differences between the two bills, and I'm a little concerned that it appears that consumer protection has actually been weakened in this newer bill. Parts relating to the duties of a developer have been removed. It looks to a cynic that responsibility is being shifted from developers.

This shift from developers does concern buyers out there. We've seen a few examples of whole buildings, like in Fort McMurray and Leduc, being condemned, leaving owners with mortgages on properties they can't live in. We can all say, "buyer beware," but are you going to say that to a recent college grad buying his first property or to a widow looking to downsize because she can't take care of her home any longer? This is not idle speculation, Mr. Speaker.

Special assessments are also an issue. In a hot market like we have, contractors and developers cut corners. When that happens, they catch up with the owner, not the builder. We see this with special assessments where owners are on the hook for tens of thousands of dollars because stucco wasn't applied properly and now there's mould. Not many people have tens of thousands of dollars on command for a special assessment, especially when condo owners may have lower incomes. The lower cost of entry into the condo market is one of its primary appeals, but when condo fees spike or a loan is needed for a special assessment, this hurts precisely the people that we are supposed to be helping in the condo market.

This is something that the government has been aware of for years. Municipal Affairs partnered with the city of Calgary to look into issues with building envelopes. I have a quote from an ADM with Municipal Affairs in 2011: it's absolutely terrible and awful what people are going through; the unfortunate thing is that we don't have the tools as yet to provide them with the protection we're building. That was three years ago, Mr. Speaker.

I've served as critic for Municipal Affairs and now for Service Alberta. I know that there is some overlap as the building code and other issues are with Municipal Affairs. We all know how complicated the MGA is.

I'm not here to be only a critic. I think moving legal disputes out of the court system is a good idea. As I said, condo owners typically do have lower incomes, and they're at a disadvantage.

They can't afford massive legal battles with developers. They certainly can't afford to chase fly-by-night developers who close their corporation to avoid legal responsibility for their actions. Giving consumers an avenue outside the court system is a good step.

I also like that more information is being provided to purchasers. As I've said, the condo market is quite confusing for a lot of people. One area I'd like the government to address is disclosure by real estate agents. While that is under a different act, I hope that accountability and transparency can be broadened to protect consumers that work with a realtor in cases of resale.

One last area of concern I have is the amount of rule-making that will lie in regulation. I was elected to represent my constituents. The condo issue is one that I hear complaints about on a regular basis. Condos are increasingly popular. Condos represent more than half of new buildings in the province. This issue matters to me and my constituents. They want me to hear their voice here in the Legislature. Reading through this bill, it seems like I read the word "regulation" on every page.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, this bill is vital to many Albertans, and with such a vital piece of legislation, I think it should be given serious consideration. I think there are some positives in here, but I think we should be slowing it down to get it right and give everyone involved a voice.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With that, I move to adjourn debate.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills has moved to adjourn debate on Bill 9, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: I'm going to call the Committee of the Whole to order. The Committee of the Whole has under consideration Bill 7, the Chartered Professional Accountants Act.

I recognize the first speaker to Bill 7.

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but we have what can be referred to as the Government House Leader's agreement, and on it, when we get into the Committee of the Whole, it's Bill 10 that's supposed to be the first one that's called up, and this is a different order.

The Chair: Clarification, hon. Government House Leader?

Mr. Denis: Thank you. I would ask for the member's indulgence, as we are preparing an amendment relating to Bill 10, if we could just proceed with Bill 7 for the interim.

Ms Notley: That's not what we agreed to.

Ms Blakeman: What is the point of having these agreements and the stuff sent out if the government is not going to agree to it and not going to stand behind it? [interjections] You get prepared for certain people here to speak here in a certain order, and . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, this is the type of thing that should be worked out prior to here. I mean, I've . . . [interjections] Please, hon. members, one at a time. Hon. Government House Leader, I'm going to give you one opportunity to respond.

Mr. Denis: I don't mean to be pugilistic. We can go to Bill 10 if they want to go to some speeches, but we're actually a little bit behind in preparing an amendment here, and that has changed matters that could not have been foreseen over the last couple of hours.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. If that courtesy had been extended to us earlier, we could have rearranged our schedules to have different people here to go in a different order. So nice to have the courtesy extended now that we're already here. If the member could manage to do it maybe an hour or two earlier, it would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Mr. Denis: Okay. Mr. Chair, this was the earliest that I could have done this. Again, not wanting to be pugilistic here. If this member wants to go to Bill 10, and she wants to speak, go right ahead, but we're not quite ready with our item. If you want to go with Bill 10 – I've said that three times now – you go right ahead.

The Chair: Okay. Hon. members, just so we can be productive: Bill 10.

Bill 10 An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children

The Chair: The first speaker to Bill 10 is the hon. Member for Airdrie, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to stand and begin debate with regard to Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children.

Mr. Chair, I did talk at some length yesterday about why I feel that Bill 10 does go toward building a balance of protecting equality, religious freedoms, parental rights, and, of course, very importantly, the protection of our LGBT youth and students in particular. My reasons were given yesterday for that, so I won't go over them again. I also did note, as did the Official Opposition leader in her comments, that there does seem to be a gap in the protections when a student asks to start an antibullying club, whether that be a GSA or a diversity club or any such club. There's a gap there, where if a school board says no to that request, then it really puts the student in, I would say, almost a nonsensical position where they would have to go to court. And, of course, financially that's just not possible in 99.9 per cent of cases.

3:20

What we are proposing on the Wildrose Official Opposition side is two amendments – we will be going over one shortly – that would address that issue. When working hand in hand together, we think that this will strengthen Bill 10 even further to the point where proper recourse will be given to students requesting a GSA whose requests, for whatever reasons, are denied but still addresses their specific needs. I am going to go over those amendments. In fact, I'll table the first amendment in that regard right now.

The Chair: We'll just pause for a moment, hon. members, while that amendment is being distributed. This is the first amendment, so we will call this one A1.

Mr. Anderson: The amendment would read as follows. I move that Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, be amended as follows: in section 2(4), in the

proposed section 35(1), by striking out subsection (1) and substituting the following.

If a student requests a staff member employed by the board that operates the school attended by the student for support to establish or lead an activity or organization intended to promote a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging and that staff member does not provide the requested support, that staff member must work collaboratively with the requesting student to provide a bona fide anti-bullying or other alternative support strategy that meets the needs of that student.

Then 1.1 says that

Both a decision by a staff member not to provide the requested support to establish or lead an activity or organization under subsection (1), notwithstanding any efforts to implement an alternative support strategy, and the proposed alternative support strategy, may be appealed to the board in accordance with section 42.

This is what we are asking to be read in. We're saying: strike the proposed subsection 1 and replace it with what I just read into the record. What this would do is that if for some reason a school board – let's say that it's a faith-based school board – does not want to grant a mandatory GSA, they want to pursue a different avenue, what it says is that if they reject it, if the staff member's school does not provide the requested support, that staff member must work collaboratively with the requesting student to provide a bona fide antibullying or alternative support strategy that meets the need of that student. That's the main change.

We feel that in 99 per cent of cases – I think it's pretty clear. I mean, if you look at the Catholic school board, for example, they already have an alternative antibullying strategy in place. Perhaps that is something that they could use to, obviously, deal with the student making the request to start a GSA. However, this kind of goes further. This says that yeah, you can have that, you can have that strategy, but you have to work specifically with the student who is experiencing the bullying, who is experiencing the isolation and wants to start that club. You have to work with that specific student on a specific strategy to deal with the bullying that they are facing, and that could mean an antibullying strategy. That could mean another support strategy. Obviously, there are many different strategies to deal with this, and often multiple strategies and supports are needed to help students who are being bullied.

That's what this does. It puts the onus on the school and says: look; if you're going to make the decision to not permit some sort of club that's being requested here, you have to work with that student collaboratively to take care of their specific needs and address their specific needs. I think this is a very important amendment. It will work hand in hand with the other Wildrose amendment, which will be coming along shortly here, which specifically says that if the student isn't happy with the support strategy given or promoted by the school after this is all done, what the student can then do is that after appealing to the board, they can appeal to, essentially, the Ministry of Education. There will be a three-member panel set up that will be able to look at the support strategy and say: "Okay. Is this support strategy bona fide? It is really addressing the issues of the student in question, or is it just some way of dismissing the student without having to do anything concrete?"

That will be the second amendment that we bring forward. I think that that's really important because right now the only recourse that a student has if they're told by a school that they can't start a GSA is to go to a judicial review, essentially. That's really not realistic, and it's not really fair to the student. If a student is being bullied, the school needs to deal with that. The

school board needs to deal with that. If they deal with it, but they don't do it in a concrete manner that's actually helping the student, there should be a recourse for that student to go to an independent third party, the panel in the Ministry of Education, and ask for help and make his case in that regard. Of course, that would be at no cost to the student, so they would have that ability to do so.

I actually feel that this is a better and stronger suggestion than just making a GSA mandatory, and I'll tell you why. Bullying has many facets and many layers to it. I think it's important that – I mean, yeah, I guess if someone asks for a GSA and the GSA is provided, that could certainly help, but it could go a lot further than that. The help that that student needs probably goes a lot further than just needing a GSA. They probably need some sort of support strategy, some sort of strategy with teachers involved and so forth that can make sure that the bullying is put to an end. Just having a GSA alone probably isn't all that can be done for that student.

What this would do is create an expectation. It would essentially force the school. It is mandatory. It would force the school and create an expectation at the school that they have to deal with the bullying that is happening in their school and not just for LGBTQ students. Of course, that is the subject that we've been talking about a lot and absolutely has to be dealt with, but it would involve, for example, other issues, whether that be an issue of race, whether that be an issue with regard to gender issues, male-female, and so forth, all of that stuff. If a student feels that they are being bullied based on one of those prohibited grounds and they want to start a club or group and for some reason the school isn't willing to do that, they want to do a different strategy, they have to create a full support strategy to help that student. If that's still not good enough for the student because it's kind of a token gesture and it's not really helping the student with what they need to overcome the bullying that they're facing, then it creates that appeal process to the panel in the Ministry of Education.

What that panel could do is that it will hear both sides, et cetera, et cetera, and it will either be able to uphold it or provide recommendations to the board on how to properly deal with the situation. So if the boards can't get their act together – and in most cases I am sure that they will get their act together. In the vast majority of cases they will handle this well. In that 1 per cent of cases where a board just wants to sweep this type of thing under the rug and doesn't want to deal with it, these two amendments will clearly work towards making sure that that student is supported, is kept safe, and is protected in the school environment that their parents have chosen to place them in.

3:30

With that, I hope that the government will look at this as an opportunity to strengthen this bill. There may be other options available, but, honestly, I don't see any reason why we wouldn't at least put this in to strengthen the bill. The Liberal and the ND caucuses, I know, are against Bill 10, but I hope that at the very least in this amendment process they would think about supporting this amendment to at least strengthen Bill 10 even if they plan on voting against it on the final reading, third reading, because this will protect students better. It will provide for more students. It might not be what everybody wants, and it might not go far enough for some people, but I think it certainly strengthens the bill to better protect LGBTQ students while still supporting the concept of local school autonomy.

With that, I would ask that members on the government side and the opposition side think about this option and support it. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'll recognize next the member, from the third party, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This is a remarkably sensitive, thoughtful, and common-sense approach to some of the issues that are facing us. I commend the member that's sponsoring it and the other members of his caucus that worked on this. This is recognizing that bullying is specific to a child usually and that it brings with it a number of other complications that need to be addressed. I really like the fact that whoever said no to a GSA is now required to continue to work with the students or the student to try and address their situation. I just think it's really nicely done, and I commend them for that.

An Hon. Member: However . . .

Ms Blakeman: Well, it is a nice piece of work. I really think it is, and I think it was very sensitive and was really trying to get at the heart of the matter.

The problem here is that it's building on a false premise. The false premise is what is in Bill 10; that is, it's okay to have cascading rights – that sounds kind of nice – stepped rights or tiered rights or sliding-down-the-slope rights. It's now being institutionalized through Bill 10 that it's okay to discriminate against a group of people. So we have a set of instructions from the government saying: "In the public school system we want you to do this, and we want you to say yes to GSAs. But in the Catholic and the private system: cut loose; do whatever you think you need to do. You're not required to support these students." That's where this would have been very nice because it would say: "Yes, you are. You can't just dump these kids and say: too bad, so sad." That's why I liked it.

I will never accept that it's okay to graduate rights. If you're going to extend those rights, if our public school system in Alberta is going to say, "Right; we recognize sexual minority youth, we recognize that they get bullied and that at this time they need a specific group to look after them and that that is called a gay-straight alliance," then we do it. But where on earth did we get to this point where we say, "Yes, we will prohibit that discrimination and accommodate it here but not here"? That is incredibly inappropriate. I can't accept that. I can't accept that we would excuse a group of people and say: "Okay. That's all right. You can go ahead and discriminate."

I have not heard from any Catholic parents. I've not heard from any Catholic students. I haven't heard from any Catholic – oh, no. Wait a minute. I think there was one teacher. Sorry. I've had a lot of letters. Let me say that there were two teachers, just to be safe, that had any problem with GSAs being provided in the Catholic or the separate systems or in the private system. Just try to put other words in there, and you start to understand how bad what Bill 10 is proposing is. You know, we're going to say: "Oh, you know, those kids that have a different colour: race is a factor; you can't discriminate at them in the public school system, but that's okay if you want to discriminate and refuse to give them support and peer support in this system." No.

We're all the same country. We are all Albertans. We have a public education system that we all pay for, and we agree to pay for it because we want all of our students to come out of it with a quality education and, frankly, equipped to be good citizens, and

this is part of it. What does it say to someone that you're okay here, but you're not okay there? That in itself is a form of bullying.

I recognize that the member was trying to work against that division and was trying to set something up where kids wouldn't be just left or wouldn't be put in that position, but there is no question in my mind that right now the situation that's being envisioned by Bill 10 is to sanction discrimination in certain schools. On certain school property it's sanctioned; it's okay to go ahead and refuse to accommodate a gay-straight alliance. But in the public school system we expect you to do this. That's just wrong on so many levels. I have to say that with most of the people of faith that I work with here and that I know in my constituency or in my personal life, I just can't imagine them saying that it's okay to do this in one place, one location, one set of circumstances and not in another.

I really admire the delicacy with which this was done and the sensitivity. I think there was a real attempt there to address some very difficult situations, but I will not accept anything that is going to build on the inequity that is coming through in Bill 10.

Now, I've heard that the member sponsoring it has been quoted as saying: well, you know, we're going to get nothing, or we might be able to build on this incrementally. We had one caucus member from the government, the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, who said that he didn't believe in incremental rights, and he's bang on. Nor should we have tiered rights or staged rights or cascaded rights. If we are extending something to a group of people, we're extending it. We're not saying: well, you get it if you're in this location or with that faith, but you don't get it if you're over there. That's just not right. It's just not right.

I'm sorry that I can't support this amendment. It's a nice one, but I cannot support anything that is going to build on discrimination and especially institutionalized discrimination from the government, which is not the group of people you would expect to be discriminating.

I know there's been a lot of talk about balancing this – I'm putting air quotes around it – with parental rights, but I have to say again that it's a peer support club that meets on school property off school classroom time. I still don't see how that is an imposition on parental rights. It is not part of the curriculum. It is not part of instruction or exercises. No one has been able to explain to me how this is seen – I'm sorry; that's not correct, Mr. Chair. I have had people contact me and explain what they believe to be true, and I know that they believe it to be true. They're not just saying it to make me go crazy. They are saying it because they believe it. Frankly, what I've heard from them is so awful and so unexplainable in the context of a pretty simple thing, which is to allow a peer support group for a specific group of kids on school property to be given the resources to meet in a room and a staff supervisor or an outside supervisor to make sure, you know, that they're okay in the way that every student club has a staff supervisor assigned to it.

3:40

So a really nice amendment. I can't support it because it's based on the idea that it's okay to discriminate against the same group of people depending on what is the faith of the particular school system and what is the faith of the school location that they are in. Please explain to me how that is proper at all in this world, that we can discriminate against children. We are not talking about adults here. We are talking about children. We are talking about 10- and 11- and 12- and 13-year-olds and 15-year-olds and 16-year-olds. These are not people that we would expect to put through a series of tests or barriers as has been anticipated in Bill 10. Can you

imagine saying to an 11-year old, “Well, I’m sorry, honey, but they won’t allow your kind to have a club, so you need to go and present in front of the school board?”

Some of you are school board trustees. You know what it’s like. This is not a simple thing. This is not a casual encounter. You’re standing in front of a group of people, an audience behind you, trying to plead your case. Can you imagine subjecting a child to that? Why would you do anything so cruel? You’re making them explain why they want to have a peer support group after school in their school. I don’t understand that thinking. I really don’t. I know that it means a great deal to folks, but I can’t understand how anybody can manage to divide it up and say: this person I recognize as deserving of support here but not deserving of support there. That is discrimination. That is the definition of discrimination, that you treat the same people differently. That is the definition of discrimination.

Okay. I’ll just try to put my hair out and sit down. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Next the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I’m pleased to have an opportunity to stand and make some comments with respect to the amendment offered by the MLA for Airdrie. I regret to say that we will not be supporting this amendment, and I think it’s for one simple reason, that it violates the commitment that we think is essential in any legislation dealing with this matter of equality. It seems to be an attempt to build yet another workaround from full equality. That’s the basic principle that we’re working under and the basic litmus test.

At some point the government of Alberta and citizens of this province that have a different view than we do on this will have to come to terms with that. It’s not a matter of changing one’s religious views or persuasions. It’s not about, you know, changing people’s fundamental view of how the world should be, I guess would be a way to put it, but it does become important, I think, for more and more citizens that equality needs to be extended in this case. What this is, essentially, is saying that, yes, you have a right to participate in an effective and proven means of fighting bullying, but you can’t do it here, and you can’t do it with us even though you’re here and you’re with us in that school, so we’ll find you someplace else to go. It is essentially outsourcing antibullying activity in the school, and as such it falls far short of the equality provisions that we are committed to. It’s like saying: if you are of a different race and you’re being subjected to racism within your school, you can go across the street and talk about it there, but you can’t talk about it where it’s happening. That, in my estimation, falls very, very short of what we need to see.

I think there’s another point – and I know my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona referenced this last night – and it has to do with the question of parental rights. One of the columnists in the *Edmonton Journal* has recently written about some of the historical roots of that particular movement. But leaving that aside and talking about parents’ rights, it really says that one group of parents’ rights supersedes the rights of others. If some parents in a school feel that their rights are infringed upon by allowing a GSA in the school, then that also denies the children of other parents the same right to have the GSA.

So one group of parents’ rights then transcends the rights of others, and it’s called parental rights. I don’t accept that. I don’t accept that some parents can say, “We’re exercising our rights; there won’t be a GSA in this school,” and other parents, who have children that are being bullied in that school, are therefore denied

an effective means of protecting their children from bullying, and it’s not allowed to them. Even if they want it and their children want it and they’re encouraging their children to take advantage of it, it’s not available for them in that school because one set of parents’ rights transcends the rights of others. That is not, in my view, parental rights. That is using parental rights as a smokescreen for discrimination. I think that that really fundamentally affects this.

Mr. Chairman, I wish that this debate had been framed a little differently. I wish that we had not been focusing on whether or not, you know, gay-straight alliances were appropriate. I think many people are focusing on the sexual orientation rather than on what, really, it’s about, which is the bullying.

Now, I don’t think any member of this House will stand up regardless of their religious or political views or social views and say that they think it’s okay for gay kids to be bullied. I don’t believe a single member of this House actually believes that or wants that, but the fact of the matter, at least from my perspective, is that that’s the result. That is the result. There will be kids in Catholic schools, in Christian schools, in Jewish schools, in Muslim schools, and in public schools who are gay, and they will inevitably be subject to or run the risk of being subject to bullying.

3:50

So it is, then, incumbent on all of us to ensure that those children are not bullied, that they can take whatever measures they need, whatever steps they need to protect themselves from bullying. I think we have to support that. I don’t think it’s a matter of our religious views or our social views. I think it’s a question of commitment to protecting kids from being bullied and letting kids do what they need to do to protect themselves from being bullied. If we could just all look at it through that lens, I think it might be considerably different for everyone.

Pope Francis said something that I thought was very profound when he became the Pope. He was talking about gay and lesbian people, and he said: who am I to judge? Who are we, indeed? Mr. Chairman, it’s important, from our perspective, that we maintain the principle that no child should be bullied, and if we don’t do everything possible to ensure that that doesn’t happen, then we are falling short on that principle. If we try to establish, as this amendment does, some sort of system of separate but equal, then we are falling short on the principle of equality, and that is, I think, unfortunately, what’s happening here. “Yes, we’ll let you fight bullying. We’ll let you get together with your peers and talk about it, have a support group, but not here and not with us. You’re with us for six hours a day in school, and you face what you face while you’re there, but if you want to deal with it, you have to go somewhere else, or you have to go to someone else, and we’ll help you find somebody. You know, we’re not going to do it, but there you go.”

I think that there’s no expectation that any school system will actively promote GSAs or try to encourage students to form one or join one, but if they want to form one and if they want to join one, then I don’t think we should do anything to discourage them. Certainly, asking them to go off-site or to work with someone else that’s not part of the school that they’re in is discriminatory and will certainly make them feel less than equal, so it will in fact not do enough to combat bullying in schools and may in fact further encourage the bullying of GLBTQ students.

Mr. Chairman, for those reasons, I don’t think that I can support – and I’m sure my caucus colleagues will be taking the same position to not support it – an amendment that does not promote the principle of equality. We have to get there. I’m sure we’ll get there sooner or later. I remember the debate about same-sex marriage and the battles that we had – and we had some of them

right here in this Chamber – with a government that would not endorse full equality. I thought that the Supreme Court of Canada, in ruling on that, made a very wise decision in not requiring any religious organization or any religious person to change their personal views but ensuring that any loving couple in this country would be treated equally, and that's the point. They understood the importance of equality.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Just so the members know, the order of speaking that I've got will be as follows: the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure, or perhaps not, to speak to this matter which, obviously, is so divisive and touches so many sensitivities. I will do my best to not offend any of them yet try to get some of my points across. I personally am finding it rather peculiar to be the one speaking on this subject matter, being a practising Catholic myself, the father of two girls, both of them in the Catholic school system in two separate jurisdictions, one in high school in Edmonton, one in a younger grade in St. Albert, but also an educator, a teacher, a graduate of the University of Alberta from our Faculty of Education. So I almost have all bases covered on this particular subject matter.

Mr. Chairman, I have some very strong feelings, as you may have determined from my vote yesterday, which wasn't easy. As you know, voting in isolation is not an easy thing to do, but it was the right thing to do from my personal perspective, which doesn't make my perspective any better or superior to anybody else's. It is my perspective, and that's how I view how this particular dilemma that we have before us in the Chamber ought to be solved.

Mr. Chairman, there are a few tenets that we have to keep in mind. What we really are dealing with is a matter of human rights. I know, speaking with members in group settings and individually, that all of us in this Chamber agree that we want to provide our children with safe and nurturing environments in school. I believe most of us, if not all of us, in this Chamber agree that if children want a GSA, a gay-straight alliance, that helps them deal with the many challenges that a young person would be faced with if they belong to the GLBTQ community, in particular bullying by peers, we want them to have that support network. If we agree in that respect, there is nothing preventing us right here in this Chamber from actually making that happen. It's that easy. We can make that happen.

We know that even though all school boards, irrelevant whether they're Catholic or public or of other religious groups, provide nurturing, welcoming, inclusive environments, there is a difference, Mr. Chairman. There is a difference between providing a student with an inclusivity club, with an antibullying club, and providing a student with an actual GSA. You may say: "Well, Lukaszuk, you're being unreasonable here. You're splitting hairs. They're providing the student with the service that the student requires with the support. Why are you so hung up about the name?" Well, because in issues of human rights and inequality language is of the utmost importance.

Imagine this, and this is a hyperbole that I will draw. Imagine if you wanted to sign up your child in any school for lessons in a bilingual program in the German language – pick that language, for instance – and upon registering your child, the school administration says, "Well, we will be happy to enrol your child in our Austrian- or Swiss-language program." You say: "What are

you talking about? It's German." "Yes, but we choose not to use that word. We call it Austrian." What's the difference? Same language, same grammar, same syntax. Your child will be learning exactly the same thing, yet there is a difference. You're not willing to acknowledge a certain group. If a child or friends of a child request a gay-straight alliance, that's exactly what they want.

Now, imagine the hypocrisy in telling the child: "We will take care of you, we will embrace you, we will provide you with an inclusive environment, but we will not mention that which is at the core of how you identify yourself and which is at the core of what causes you the issues that you are dealing with in the surroundings, with the lack of support and the bullying. We love you, we appreciate you, we will take care of you, but let's just not mention who you are. We will somehow accommodate you otherwise."

You know, Mr. Chairman, it was difficult to miss the fact that two days ago or yesterday, whenever it was that we had the vote, was the 50th anniversary of the Parks case, of an African-American woman who said: I will not be riding in the back of a bus anymore, and I've had it. She purposely sat in the front of the bus, and we know what the consequences were. She got arrested. Well, in the vein of this conversation, one would say to her: "Mrs. Parks, what is your problem? You're riding on the same bus. You're getting to the bus stop at the same time, the same bus driver. The back of the bus is just as safe as the front of the bus. Why are you splitting hairs?" Yet she insisted to be able to ride on the bus wherever she wanted to.

4:00

We know that the answer to that problem was to allow her to do so because in matters of human rights and equality the concept of different but equal does not apply. If it's true equality, you cannot provide different categories of groups based on which we cannot discriminate. If we find that so difficult to appreciate, imagine substituting the word "gay" with another category on the basis of which we cannot discriminate. Mr. Chairman, imagine if the category was black, and children in a school wanted to establish a black-white group, and imagine if a school board said: no, you can't have that; we will provide a multicultural club for you, but we will not be mentioning the word "black." Imagine what the outrage would be.

That is why, Mr. Chairman, I cannot vote in favour of any amendments that do not speak to the core of the problem. We have children who are in need. These are young, marginalized youth. We know what research shows, how many of these children end up when they lack support. Many of them lack the required support at home. They can't turn to their parents and ask for help. They can't turn to their teachers and ask for help. Maybe some of them could – I know that there are many great teachers out there that would help them out – but they are marginalized, and they won't.

Now they have a group of friends who want to help them out, and we as adults, as parents, as educators, but, most importantly, as legislators are telling them: "No, you can't have that. You can have something else just as good, but you can't have that because you are different, because you are somehow inferior, and you don't deserve to have the club that you're asking for." Any amendment that would require a different name or a different location – yes, you can have it, but across the street at the community hall or maybe in a collaborating public school across the street or in some kind of association or society downtown – is simply, Mr. Chair, not enough.

We have an opportunity here. This is one of those defining moments that come upon us every so often, where we can tell those who choose to bully any group of marginalized kids and send a message to the rest of the Canada and the rest of world that in this province no matter where you come from, no matter who you are, we will not in any way discriminate against you.

I fully agree with the Member for Edmonton-Centre that accommodating that group is in itself discrimination. We don't need to accommodate them. They're no different than you and me, Mr. Chair. They're asking for something that another student may ask for, and for some reason, just because they're gay, we're saying: "No, you can't have it. We have to name it something else. You're equal but separate."

I am very much, Mr. Chair, opposed to any incremental dispensation, as if we even have the right to dispense human rights. Those are innate rights. Those are rights that they already have. We simply have to acknowledge the fact that they already have them. I will not stand for some kind of an incremental dispensation of that. You know, today I was told: "Well, it just takes time. Just give them time. People are coming around to it, and it takes time." Well, it will take much more time if we don't show leadership right here in this Legislative Assembly. Our job is to lead by example and to show those who choose not to take leadership themselves, in their school boards or wherever it may be, that this province, this Ministry of Education will not allow for that to happen in our schools.

Also, Mr. Chair, as a parent, putting on my parent hat, I'm somewhat offended because what if I want to support my daughter in one of the schools, who perhaps may want to set up a GSA? You know, it's just too bad that one daughter that I have is still a little too young, but I can see her actually wanting to set up a GSA about four or five years from now. Why? Just because you're saying that she can't, because she's just that kind of a kid. If some school board was to tell my daughter that she can set up a baseball club and she can set up a badminton club and she can set up her Polish-Canadian club but she cannot set up a GSA, what happens to my parental rights? Those don't matter?

Mr. Chair, we have a chance to do some good work in this Assembly right now. I know that this is touching some of our most deeply held values, but at the end of the day there is no balancing act to be done. This is the fact: we have children among us who require help. These kids commit suicide. These kids are homeless. These kids can't go home and be embraced by their families in many cases. So we can put that on one side of the scale, or we can put the sensibilities of those who simply don't yet feel comfortable with it. How many children do we allow to die until the other side becomes more comfortable with this concept?

It's up to us to decide that in this Chamber, and I will not accept any amendments that simply do not allow our students to set up GSAs no matter where they are. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to start off by saying that I'm actually honoured to follow the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

The Chair: If I may, hon. member, please.

Just to remind all members, we are talking about the amendment. I know this is a very intense subject matter, and I've probably allowed some latitude so far. But I suspect that we'll be talking about this bill for some time this afternoon and tonight, so

if I could remind you at least for now – you will have another opportunity later – to the best of your ability to keep your comments to amendment A1.

Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Chair, just on that comment, I mean, you had an opportunity with four speakers before to remind them about the latitude.

I'm going to speak on the amendment that my colleague from Airdrie brought forward, but I think it's important to acknowledge my colleague for Edmonton-Castle Downs. I'm actually honoured to speak behind him. He and I go way back, have had a mutual respect for each other for a long time. While we've had words at times, we still have, which I think is important, a respect for each other. I think my respect has gone up a hundred per cent because I know how difficult it is for him to be in the position that he's in as a government member because, quite frankly, I've been there. I've been there, and I'm not there anymore, and it's a position that I don't envy.

I want to start off by saying that I want to make it perfectly clear that anybody who knows me in this Legislature knows that I've spent the last 22 years of my career in this Legislature fighting for the protection of children. That started way back in, I think, '93, when I introduced the PCHIP legislation, which is the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, protecting kids from the dangers of exploitation and prostitution.

I advocated in this Assembly on numerous occasions on the issue of bullying. In fact, I brought forward a bullying bill in 2009 – it was a private member's bill – and it was to address the issue of bullying in schools, and it would have included the protection from bullying based on sexual orientation. The bill was focused on providing educators with tools to tackle bullying in school. Unfortunately, it died.

Why I'm going here at this particular time, Mr. Chair, is that I want to note something about some of the arguments on the bill, one of the reasons it was defeated, because it came from educators and administrators. At that time it came from the Calgary board of education, that sent this Assembly a letter that outlined why they did not support the bill. At that particular time, if I may, we were talking about bullying. We weren't talking about the protection of gay children; we were talking about bullying. The main reason that the Calgary board of education at that particular time didn't support the bill was, and I'm going to quote: the removal of the discretionary power also severely hampers the principal's ability to provide a safe and caring environment for its students and staff. Essentially, what that said was that the school board argued that the status quo – the status quo – was enough to provide safe spaces for students and schools. That was 2009.

4:10

So here we go, Mr. Chair. I'm going to fast-forward to 2014, and here we are once again debating how to best protect students from bullying and, specifically, how to provide LGBTQ students a safe place to learn. Now, what bothers me more than anything is the fact that I have not heard from one government member other than the mover, Calgary-North West. The discussion that we're having today truly is bothersome. We spent hours – hours – I think it was on Monday debating the private member's bill from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, and government member upon government member popped up and spoke about this. Not that it isn't an important bill, but I've been waiting and waiting and waiting for a government member to get up and speak.

I just want to touch briefly on an open letter that I received and that I know every person in the Assembly received, that was

addressed to the Premier. It goes on and on – and I’m going to table this – but it talks about a young lady in Fort McMurray who had her picture taken with the Premier and who actually supported the members in Fort McMurray. The mom talks about how she sat down with her daughter and tried to explain Bill 10 to her. She tried to explain the process of an appeal to the school board for students who were denied the opportunity to form a GSA as she has helped to do. This young lady actually formed a GSA in Fort McMurray.

I asked her [the mother says] if she understood what that meant and she shook her head.

This is about the judicial review that’s addressed in Bill 10.

I asked her if she would know how to find legal counsel or begin an appeal to a school board and again she shook her head.

I asked her if doing these things would require the assistance of an adult, and she said yes, of course.

And she goes on and on and on, a very, very telling and compassionate and heartfelt letter.

I have spent 44 years in the gay world, and I have spent that because I have a very close family member who is gay. I’ve had drinks with him. I’ve danced with gay people. I had heartfelt talks with them 42 years ago. I’ve laughed with them, and I’ve cried with them. I remember having to sit down and explain to my children after they were born about what gay people did and trying to explain our very, very good friends that were gay. My younger son at the time said to me, “Mommy, is uncle gay? And I said: “Yeah. Do you have a problem with that?” He said: “Oh, no. Maybe you and I should sit down and talk because I think you’re feeling a little upset about it.” He was trying to educate me, Mr. Chair. That’s the problem that we’re facing. It’s the adults that have to be educated; it’s not the children.

I had a very, very heartfelt conversation with my former colleague from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake on Bill 202. We had a discussion when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre was talking about this particular bill. She explained to me about the fact that she had gone to her riding, and they had supported it. Then she went on to elaborate about the fact that she’d been at a waffle breakfast, and the young lady that was speaking at the waffle breakfast had talked about the fact that it wasn’t the kids that had to be educated; it was the adults. And here we are in the Assembly talking about something that we shouldn’t have to be talking about. The gay folks that I know – and there are many, and I’m sure that some of them are listening; in fact, I know for a fact a few of them are listening – have always told me that they just want to be treated equally. So if it’s okay for us to have a band club or, as the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs wanted, a German club, why is that different from having a gay club? I mean, why is it different? Why can’t they? Why can’t I have a German club or, for that matter, any club I want? If I want to establish a prayer club in the school, so be it. I think that’s the problem with what we have right now.

So while my colleagues from Edmonton-Centre and Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood don’t like the amendment, it’s a damned if you do and damned if you don’t situation. We’re trying to make an amendment, from my colleague from Airdrie, in regard to getting this bill through the process, and I understand that the government is. As my colleague from Airdrie mentioned, I am going to be presenting an amendment on an appeal process so that somehow we can provide protection for these kids.

My colleague from Highwood talked very passionately about all of the gay kids that she’s encountered over the last year and some of the very, very sad stories. I am now, on this little iPhone that we all carry around, getting e-mail after e-mail from not only constituents but people who’ve known me over the last 22 years

about how they particularly feel about what we’re discussing and how it is important to stand up and talk about the importance of the protection of students.

I’m going to just try and get into them, 15 e-mails already. If I can, I’ll find some of the e-mails that I’ve gotten. Some of my colleagues, I can see, are CCed on this. It says:

I am writing to you as a member of the PC Party and an Albertan. Bill 10, that was introduced this week, has been personally embarrassing to me as a member of the party. Not only does this legislation appear to not have been well thought out; it appears to be more of a political document rather than one that reflects the spirit and intent of legislation when it applies to the rights of individuals, whether they are of the age of majority or not. As a youth I struggled with the very issue Bill 202 sought to address. While in its original form it was clearly not palatable to the MLAs of the party, a series of amendments could have sought to make compromise.

As a youth I could barely understand my own sexuality, particularly being raised in a Catholic family and a Catholic school system, yet Bill 10 would challenge those same youth to expose themselves publicly through a judicial system in order to form a club in situations where such actions are rejected by the school and/or the board of trustees. Adults can barely understand any judicial system. Adults can barely afford legal representation. How could a student possibly afford to navigate this same system? They cannot.

I seriously hope that Bill 10 is amended to remove and provide an appropriate process for the minority constituents it affects. Should Bill 10 proceed and receive assent in its current form, I will be a vocal and active opponent of its use, providing support to students who challenge it through the talents and resources available to me.

He says:

I look forward to seeing meaningful amendments of substance from the Justice minister.

He names him here.

I have never had to defend who I am as much as I have since moving to Alberta nearly nine years ago. Youth are our future, and they should be encouraged to shape the world around them. Leaders everywhere, including government, should support this value not disable it.

Then he goes on to say where he can be reached. He says:

I look forward to seeing some better results from this government when it comes to this issue. Today disappointment is the only thing on the scoreboard on this topic. Very sincerely.

And he signs his name.

4:20

Mr. Chair, I don’t think there’s anything more heartfelt or passionate than what this Assembly has to do, and they have to start listening to these vulnerable children. I think it’s important as legislators that we step back and we take a deep breath. There is no reason in hell that this bill has to pass right now, today, or tomorrow. What they can do, if the government is sincere, is that they can take some time, they can go back, and they can talk to people that this bill affects.

The Member for Calgary-North West said that she had talked to stakeholders. Well, I can tell you that the gay community that I’ve talked to in both Calgary and Edmonton don’t recall hearing from her. I want to put that on the table because if she has talked to people like Kristopher Wells, I’m okay with that, but there are other people besides Kristopher in the gay community, and I’d be pleased – pleased – to sit you down with many of them so that you can hear from them. I’m hoping that we can get more information on who you’ve talked to and the rationale behind this bill.

What I’m going to say is that I’m going to support the amendment from Airdrie. It’s a step. We’re going to be tabling

another amendment in the House in regard to an appeal process, which I think may be a saving grace before we go the judiciary route. It's very successful under the department of children's services. It's easy to do. You go to the appeal panel, that's set up by the Minister of Education, and you put your case. We can have advocates before them. Then the appeal panel can make a decision that can go back to the school board on whether they, you know, confirm what the school board has said.

It's important, Mr. Chair, and I'm asking the government members to just reflect about what we're discussing here. Take a minute. If I'm getting e-mails as a Wildroser, the government members have to be getting e-mails. They have to be hearing from people across this province.

It's funny when you start hearing from the children in this province, anyone under the age of 18. They're reaching out, and I think we owe it to our children in this province.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, I'm going to give you the speaking order as I have it, people that have indicated to speak next. I'm also going to ask the members in the Chamber if you could keep the side conversations down, please. It would be much appreciated.

Again, I'll remind all hon. members that we are speaking to amendment A1. There will be other opportunities to speak to the bill, but if you would confine your comments to A1, it might help us get through in just a little bit more order.

I will recognize the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House Sundre, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Calgary-Shaw, followed by Battle River-Wainwright.

Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I fully appreciate what you're trying to do to keep the debate. Unfortunately, I think you're pushing against a tide, but I wish you well.

I want to comment on what each member said prior to me getting up. The members for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, Edmonton-Centre, Airdrie, Edmonton-Castle Downs, and Calgary-Fish Creek, each in their own way, articulated why they were either going to support or not support this amendment as they talked about discrimination and about rights.

Now, the issue for me is simply this. I agree with each and every one that spoke prior to me, but I'm going to look at this in a different context of how to frame this debate on this amendment. I said in my opening speech in second reading that I will support any bill that will help reduce the suicide rate in teenagers, and I will constantly work towards that. We're talking about discrimination and the GSAs. These bills – and when I say “these bills,” I'm referring to Bill 10 and to the bill that was just taken off the Order Paper, 202. What both intended to do was to legislate a process that had a proven record of reducing teenage suicides.

Discrimination is already illegal under our Charter. Discrimination against sexual orientation is illegal according to our Charter. So the rights exist, but clearly we absolutely know, everybody here, that discrimination still exists. So to cut to the chase, I'm going to support the amendment, and I'm going to support it not because it gets to where we need to go, but what I am absolutely in favour of is legislation that would legitimize the process that has been proven to reduce teenage suicides. To me, this is about life and death.

Granted, it is directed at the GBLTQ community. Granted, it is about discrimination, but the fact is that we know there's a segment of this group that has a high suicide rate. And we know that what these bills intended to do was to implement the processes, which are known as GSAs, that actually have a proven

record of reducing suicides. With that, I cannot in good conscience cast a protest vote even if I could get an incremental step towards getting this past at some point in time where we absolutely contribute to the reduction of the suicide rate amongst teenagers, particularly these gay teenagers, that have such a difficult time dealing with discrimination.

So it's a double-edged sword. Is the bill getting there? Well, the arguments are out there, and I happen to agree with most of the arguments. I'm pretty much opposed to the bill. Is there such a thing as balancing between the rights of parents and discrimination, that is protected in the Charter? I do not believe that whatsoever. Discrimination is illegal, and we are still dealing with the fact that we're confronted with discrimination and how to reduce that, how to bring people in compliance with our Charter, and how in the end we can reduce teenage suicide rates. I will take every small step on that way to reducing teenage suicide rates.

To me, it's about life and death, and the benefits that have been proven by these GSA clubs are clearly something that if the government came up with something better, that was proven, I'm all for it. I would not hesitate. But we have a long way to go as a society because of just the way we're debating this amendment today, the way we are debating these bills today.

We're not there yet, and we do have a long way to come and a long way to go, but I will support every little inch. Even though I realize the government has all the votes – they will decide this amendment as they will decide all the amendments here – I will not vote against any amendment or bill that would get us partway there, one-tenth of the way there, and I will gladly support the bill that will get us all the way there. I will do whatever I can do to help reduce that teenage suicide rate, and I won't stop until we get there.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The next speaker, the Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a true pleasure to rise and speak to this amendment and to the bill in general, that we are debating here today, Bill 10. You know, I want to thank the members for Edmonton-Centre, Edmonton-Castle Downs, and Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for their thoughtful and very meaningful points that they've made here today. This is not an easy issue. It's not an easy issue for anyone. Unfortunately, it should be a very easy issue because, as has been said time and time again, this is about simple rights. This is about finding out what it means if you are an LGBTQ student who is struggling to get by, wants some support, feels your best place to get it is from your peers in your own school, in your own environment.

4:30

It's taken me a while to get here. I'll admit that this was an issue that I wasn't entirely familiar with even when Motion 503 first came, but this has haunted me ever since. It has been deep in my conscience that we missed an opportunity then, and I'm fearful, Mr. Chair, that we are going to miss an opportunity now.

I think that the Member for Edmonton-Centre put forward a very strong piece of legislation in Bill 202. It's, unfortunately, no longer on the Order Paper, and now what we're dealing with is very clearly a piece of legislation that was tossed together out of sheer panic, and we're now waiting on the government to toss together amendments that are being put together out of sheer panic. It's ludicrous that we're debating human rights legislation and it's being written on the fly. It is absolutely insane, but here we are.

Here is the philosophical problem that I have with an amendment like this. I recognize that in this Assembly the government is going to pass this bill, and we can either allow them to pass a total piece of crap . . .

An Hon. Member: Language.

Mr. Wilson: I will withdraw that.

. . . a total piece of rubbish, or we can try to at least do something. That is the philosophical question that I'm struggling with right now. Do we reject amendments based on the principles that have been laid out very clearly by other members in this Assembly today? And they're absolutely right. They're bang on. Rights are rights; it's that simple. Or do we reject it and allow this poorly written legislation to do undue harm to our kids? It's a tough, tough question, Mr. Chairman.

You know, I was proud to stand up and vote against this bill last night. It was the right thing to do. I probably will be voting against it in third reading as well because I don't believe that anything short of coming full circle, back to what the Member for Edmonton-Centre had originally posed in her legislation, will be good enough. That being said, when we look at the options, I'm not sure that I'm prepared to dig my heels in the sand and say that it's all or nothing because those who are prepared to only get what they need are inevitably going to get nothing. I think that it is a problem for me right now.

Do we support it? I think we need to. I think we need to have this amendment in place. I'm not sure what the government is going to bring forward, but right now the reality is that this amendment makes this bill better. It catches kids that this government is willingly allowing to fall through the cracks. I fully recognize that it's not everything that we want and that it's not a hundred per cent. You know, we're not there, but the alternative is just not good enough.

In this case, with this amendment, I thank the Member for Airdrie for coming up with this. I know that all members of our caucus and particularly the Member for Airdrie have spent a lot of time coming up with what he feels is a way of balancing many of the rights. We've often heard that as we debate this bill, balancing rights. There are a lot of rights that we're trying to balance, Mr. Chairman. We are trying to balance, you know, freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of association, the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation.

That's another problem with this bill. As it's currently written, we're putting into the Alberta Bill of Rights that we will not discriminate based on sexual orientation, yet in the very same piece of legislation we are giving our school boards the authority to discriminate based on sexual orientation. I am very much disappointed in the way that the government has handled this, but we're here. The choices before us are simple. We can either help them see the light and try and give our kids a chance, who they've clearly turned their backs on at this point, or we can continue to fight and hope that in time they get it right. My gut is telling me right now that we need to do what we can to catch as many kids as possible, and I think that in that sense I will be supporting this amendment, and I thank the member for bringing it forward. I would encourage the government to do the same. I look forward to the continued debate on this amendment and on Bill 10.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Again, just a reminder to members to speak on the amendment as much as possible.

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to talk on the amendment. I voted in favour of second reading of this bill because most people in this Assembly know that Committee of the Whole is where you get to bring forward amendments. I've seen many bills that I didn't care for to begin with get corrected and carry on after that, and I was very curious to see what sort of amendments would come forward, which is why I supported it in second reading.

Personally, I didn't like the bill, Mr. Chairman, and was hoping for amendments because, frankly, I think it's absurd to ask students to go to court to fight for the right to set up a GSA. I also personally think it is abhorrent and ridiculous that we would ever suggest that our school boards would have the right to tell students whether or not they can set up a GSA.

I've read this amendment as proposed by the member. I really respect the member for bringing it forward, and I understand what he's trying to do, but in my mind, Mr. Chairman, this amendment still isn't good enough. I'm very curious about what sort of amendments are going to continue to come forward, but this doesn't go far enough.

School boards are created to enforce education policy, Mr. Chairman. That's what they're there to do. They deal with education. Gay-straight alliances haven't got a thing to do with education, not one single thing, so in my mind no school board should have the right to tell students that they're not allowed to set one up.

I can say this because I am Catholic. I converted to Catholicism because my wife is Portuguese; she's Catholic. We send our kids to a Catholic school, so I feel able to say this, Mr. Chairman. Some people have called and argued with me that Catholic school boards have a different right than public school boards in that they're faith based. But my understanding from all my studying of the Constitution is that that enables Catholic school boards to teach their faith within the schools – teach their faith within the schools – not enforce values on their students. I mean, to simply suggest that they have that ability – is it going to be now that students are going to get docked grades and not be allowed if their parents get divorced or split up or something? I mean, they don't have the right to enforce those values. They have the right and ability by our Constitution to teach faith but not to enforce it.

One of my kids is six, and my oldest is turning nine shortly after Christmas, Mr. Chairman, and I believe I teach them values. In fact, most of the parents who have called me rather upset with some of this have said, "I want the school board to be able to enforce our values." I said: "Great. What if the school board has different values than you and then you don't like it?" "Well, no. You're right. Parents should have the ultimate authority to teach kids their values." I said: "Great. Then you can't have it both ways. You can't say that the school board can enforce them as long as I agree with them but that they can't have the ability to enforce those values when I don't." And they all agreed that parents have the ultimate responsibility for that.

I've taught my boys that they need to be fair, that they need to be equitable, that they need to love, that every single person regardless of their disability or their race or their colour or their sexual orientation or the colour of their hair, what clothes they wear, is equal, and it doesn't matter whether you're Catholic or Muslim or Protestant or have no religious values at all. Everybody lives by those principles in their hearts, or they have bigger issues to deal with.

So if my boys, I was thinking, were in school – it doesn't matter if it's a public school or a Catholic school – and they saw friends that they have in junior high or high school that are gay and being picked on and they decided they wanted to set up a gay-straight alliance, I taught them the values of defending people and to stand up for people and to have everyone be treated with respect. There is no way I would accept a school board of any religious background or nonreligious background to dictate to my sons whether or not they're allowed to partner with gay students to set up a gay-straight alliance.

4:40

And, heaven forbid – I don't know – what if one of my sons needs a gay-straight alliance because they're being picked on or bullied? The school board is going to tell them what values they're going to be able to stand for, those kids that want to defend each other and protect each other? Ultimately, it doesn't matter what your religious faith is. Agree that everyone is equal before God or created equal, whether or not you believe in God. Dictating what we're going to allow our students to do when it is something that has absolutely nothing to do with education is absurd.

Now, I still believe we could probably come forward with amendments that can fix this. I hope we can. For me, this is about my sons. This is about what they are going to be allowed to do in the school to help defend people who are weak, who are picked on, who are bullied or are treated without respect, Mr. Chairman. That's what I taught them. I believe they can make those judgments and create the allegiances and the clubs and the friendships that they need to stand for those continued values. It doesn't need to be dictated by a school board, and it in no way infringes on the school board's ability to enforce educational policy, which is what they're elected to do.

This amendment, again, to the member, I really appreciate. I just don't think it goes far enough. I hope that we come up with an amendment that does, or I still won't be able to support this bill in third reading.

Thank you.

Ms Notley: Well, that was fun. I've got to say that I am pleased to be able to stand up after that. Let me just offer my rare congratulations to the Member for Battle River-Wainwright for a very passionate and extremely articulate defence of what is, I think, a growing number of people's position and his defence of the issue of parental rights.

As I say and as I've said before, I too am a parent, and I get deeply offended when I'm told what my kids can't do. It's one thing as a parent to say: "I want my kids to do this. I want my kids to have the opportunity to do this." It's quite another thing to be told that a different parent has a right to tell me what my kids cannot do. That's why I think this whole notion of parental rights, regardless of the insidious nature of its origin, at this point is logically fallible and doesn't make sense. The real rights here are the rights of parents to promote a certain set of values for their kids and to actively have those kids engage, not for another parent to tell me that my kids can't do that unless my kids are breaching the Charter of Rights and Freedoms by doing it.

Now, I want to say that that was an excellent defence of the general position I think those of us certainly in my caucus believe in. I also want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs as well for his comments. I found them very helpful when he talked about issues of identity and issues of language and how, you know, if for some arbitrary reason somebody said that you couldn't refer to a child's ethnic background as German, that would not make any sense because that's who they are and that's

their identity. Why would you be told that you can learn whatever language you want, just don't call it what it is?

Ultimately, I think that's the problem with this amendment. It still allows for this notion where a school or a school board could essentially refuse to call something a gay-straight alliance, and it still allows a school or a school board to refuse to protect gay kids from bullying by using the strategy of saying: "You know what? I know it's really hard sometimes when you go out there and you get bullied, but know this, that you're special. You, like any other person in this school, are special. You're important, you're loved, you're smart, you're a good athlete, you're not a good athlete, but you're a great singer. Who knows? But you're my friend, and I care about you, and the fact that you're gay may actually have something to do with it, but either way it has something to do with it because it's a good thing, and I care about you." That's what is the most effective means of ensuring that a child who is bullied because of their sexual orientation can recover from the pain of being bullied. That's how kids recover from the pain of being bullied. Anybody who's ever been bullied – and probably some people in this building have been – knows that the fastest way to recover from being bullied is by finding friends who tell you that they like you and they value you for who you are. That's how you recover from being bullied. You don't ask for someone to be punished because they were bullied. You have other people tell you that you're a valued person and you're a valued human and you're loved and you're cared for and you're respected. That's how you overcome bullying, and that's what these clubs do.

This amendment would basically say that we're not going to let you have a club that will tell you that you are valuable and you are smart and you are creative and we love you for who you are, including the fact that you are gay; we're not going to let you have a club that does that. We will let you have a club that teaches everybody that being mean is bad, but we're not going to let you have a club that lets you talk about your own experience as a gay kid and what it makes you feel like when you're told that your experience of being gay is less than somebody else's experience of being part of the human race. That's why this amendment won't work, and that's why generic antibullying programs won't work.

Implicit in this is the acceptance that it's okay for people in power to say: we don't like the word "gay," and we don't like the word "alliance" associated with the word "straight." Implicit in this amendment and implicit in the bill is the belief that it's okay for someone else's parent to tell me that I can't say "gay" and "straight" and "alliance" to my kid on the school property. Implicit in this bill and this amendment is the idea that it's okay for either a school board or a school or a principal to say to a kid who's being bullied: "We don't like to use that word here. Can you dial it back a bit and be a little bit less who you are? Would that be okay with you? Could you just drop it down a notch and try to be a little less gay and don't talk to people about being gay?" It's like telling a child of colour: "Could you be a little less coloured? Could you be maybe a little more white?" I mean, that's what this implicitly says. That's what this bill implicitly says, and that's what this amendment implicitly says.

I know that the intention was good within a context sort of. I know it was. But the problem is that it still essentially restates what is fundamentally wrong about this bill and what is fundamentally wrong about any school that receives 1 cent of public dollars from this public body ever saying that you can't say the word "gay" in a school. It's like saying that you can't say the word "girl" in a school, you can't say the word "wheelchair" in a school, and you can't say the word "black" in a school. Would we ever accept that? No. So why would we accept any school, school

board, principal, or someone else's parent saying that you can't say the word "gay" in a school? You just wouldn't do it. You guys need to understand that the construction of Bill 10 is fundamentally and foundationally flawed and is absolutely incapable of being repaired and that instead what needs to be put in place is the effective outcome that was suggested through Bill 202, which is a statement that no school board will ever say to their students, "You cannot talk about being gay," because that's wrong, full stop.

Now, I said this before, but I think it's really important to remember. The Edmonton public school board allows for gay-straight alliances where kids ask for them, and the Edmonton public school board also has faith-based schools and programs within it.

4:50

I want to make this very clear. I believe very strongly, myself having been raised in the Anglican Church, knowing many, many people who are Catholic and who are very engaged in their Catholic faith and knowing many people who are in other churches as well that the vast majority of them do not define their religion by the prohibition on saying the phrase "gay is okay". They don't. They really don't. You can learn about faith, you can learn about religious doctrine, you can learn about those things without negating the value and the respect and the equality deserved by all Albertans who happen to be members of sexual minorities.

This is not a complicated concept, my friends. It really isn't. It just can be done. In the same way that historically you may have been able to dig deep enough into some type of religious doctrine to find statements that suggested women are less than men, we wouldn't accept that now. We wouldn't accept that in our publicly funded schools now. So why would we accept this? We just shouldn't. The fact of the matter is that equality is equality is equality. Either we stand for it or we don't. We don't do it halfway for some rights and all the way for other rights. Either you're for equality or you're not for equality.

For that reason, we cannot support the amendment that was put forward by the Member for Airdrie. We continue to be deeply troubled by the assumptions inherent within Bill 10, and we will continue to fight against its passage. We will hope that eventually this Assembly will rethink its refusal to deliberate upon and ultimately accept the values which were reflected and promoted through Bill 202.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Are there others on the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the vote on amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West. [interjections] No. That was on the amendment.

Back to the government, and then I'll come back to the opposition.

Ms Jansen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd like to propose an amendment to Bill 10. If we could distribute it right now.

The Chair: Hon. member, you may speak to amendment A2.

Ms Jansen: Thank you Mr. Chairman. I would like to propose an amendment in Committee of the Whole on Bill 10 that would further this government's commitment to a zero-tolerance attitude towards discrimination of any kind.

I think we can all agree that Alberta is a place where we want to see respect for all people of all backgrounds. That is something I feel very strongly about, as do my caucus colleagues. It's also a place where we put the utmost value on individual freedoms. That's why it's so important that we find the right balance. We have been listening very closely to the dialogue this week, and that is why I propose the following amendment.

Part A. Section 2(4) is amended by striking out the proposed section 35.1(3) and (4) and substituting the following:

- (3) A decision of the board under section 42 with respect to an appeal relating to subsection (1) is final.

We are removing the reference to the courts. It is still subject to judicial review, which is the same for any agency, board, or commission, but we realize that that is complex and confusing. Further,

- (4) If, in a decision referred to in subsection (3), the board decides that it will not support a student in establishing the organization described in subsections (1) and (2) as requested by the student, the Minister shall facilitate and support the establishment of the organization.

What we are saying very clearly, Mr. Chair, is that Alberta kids who want a GSA will get a GSA when they ask for one, and if they can't have it in their school, Alberta Education will help them get their GSA.

Part B. Section 2(5) is amended by striking out the proposed section 58.2(2) and (3) and substituting the following:

- (2) A decision of the board under section 42 with respect to an appeal relating to subsection (1) is final.

Part C. Section 3(5) is amended by striking out the proposed section 16.1(3) and (4) and substituting the following:

- (3) A decision of the board under section 123 with respect to an appeal relating to subsection (1) is final.
- (4) If, in a decision referred to in subsection (3), the board decides that it will not support a student in establishing the organization described in subsections (1) and (2) as requested by the student, the Minister shall facilitate and support the establishment of the organization.

This makes GSAs accessible to every child in a school in Alberta. We have a commitment to providing supports and services for GSAs in particular – we believe this strongly – to children if the board refuses. We respect a local board's autonomy. We know that our boards will do the right thing. On the rare occasion that they won't, the students will have the Ministry of Education behind them to set up their GSA in every instance where a GSA is refused.

Part D. Section 3(12) is amended by striking out the proposed section 50.2(2) and (3) and substituting the following:

- (3) A decision of the board under section 123 with respect to an appeal relating to subsection (1) is final.

Mr. Speaker, we have worked hard to balance the rights of schools, parents, school boards, and students. However, it has always been our objective to put the rights of the students first. We have listened to those concerns. We do not want our Alberta students to have to navigate a court system. They don't have to; they have us.

This amendment will clarify that in the event a student is denied setting up a club, the Minister of Education will facilitate and support the establishment of such a club. We will help Alberta kids get their GSAs. This government stands up for the rights of all students, and we are very proud to further our commitment to children with this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Again, I'm trying to work through: Airdrie, Edmonton-Centre, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Anderson: I shall be brief. Again, I want to make sure that we try to keep a good tone in this House when we are talking about these amendments and have respect. I've got to say that I find this to be just – if you could please clarify. It's a little bit mystifying because we just talked about an amendment that apparently didn't go far enough, but now I'm reading this, and it says: "If, in a decision referred to in subsection (3)," so if a board refuses to establish a GSA or other group, diversity club, et cetera, then it says that "the Minister shall facilitate and support the establishment" of that group. Now, the problem is that there's a period at the end of that sentence, and what that would infer, then, is that it would have to be off-site. I guess I don't understand the purpose of it because I don't know if what the kids are looking for is an off-site GSA from the school. I don't understand that.

5:00

The purpose of the previous amendment was to make sure that the child who is requesting the GSA – if, for example, there was a faith-based school that said, "Can we do it a different way and call it something else?" or whatever, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, whatever it is, they would have to work with that child on an actual support strategy for the bullying that the child was facing in the school, not push them to go outside the school somewhere.

I guess I'm just a little confused about it because I thought the point was to try to help with the bullying that the child was experiencing in the school. If the answer to starting a GSA is no, then why would the government of Alberta come in and start a GSA on nonschool property? I just don't get it. I don't understand it.

I just think that it would make a whole lot more sense if what we're trying – I think process is becoming a little bit more important here than outcome. The outcome is to protect the student who is being bullied in the school. Now, we might have a different view about how to best accomplish that, but certainly one would think it would be a better suggestion to have that school be responsible to ensure that there was an antibullying and support strategy for that specific student in their school and that that would be more important than just simply saying – the school can essentially say, "Sorry; no," to the GSA and then send them to the Ministry of Education, who starts a GSA outside of the school. I don't understand that.

This is a confusing amendment although, as I've said many times, I support many of the points in Bill 10, and I understand the balance with local autonomy that you're trying to achieve and, you know, the balance with religious liberties. These faith-based schools are trying to make sure that their curriculum and extracurricular activities are consistent and all that. I get that. I understand it. But I'm not understanding how we're addressing the bullying issue here with this amendment. So I don't think I can – well, I know I can't support it.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-North West, did you care to respond at this time, or did you want to wait till after successive speakers?

Ms Jansen: I'll wait until the speakers have spoken.

The Chair: Okay. The Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I'm responding now to amendment A2, brought forward by the government. Two

things are happening here. One, this amendment is institutionalizing segregation, that a certain group of children will be over here and another group of children will supposedly have their own GSA somewhere else. This is segregation. This is not an improvement on what we're trying to do. This is not moving forward. This is saying that if the kid is bullied in this school – sorry.

My second point – and I guess this is what's really making me angry – is that this is the government, the Minister of Education, backstopping discrimination in schools that say no. It is backstopping that discrimination by saying: okay; we won't make you do anything here; we'll go off somewhere else and segregate these children and take them somewhere else.

Mr. Mason: To be with their gay friends.

Ms Blakeman: To be with their gay friends, says my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

That's segregation. Surely to God, we have passed that. Have we not in North America managed to move past that point? Have we not learned the lessons from apartheid? Have we not learned the lessons of the civil rights movement in the States? I mean, I was a baby then. I'm well into middle age now. Have we not learned these lessons? How is this helpful to a child, to be told: "No, our school won't address your request for a peer-support group for at-risk kids. We will send you to the Minister of Education, who is going to do something else for you."

You know, folks, why don't we just vote in support of GSAs? Everybody is dancing around it. I think that's what we need to do, and I think it's possible to do that here, today, now. That's what needs to happen. I think it's pretty clear to everybody that that's what's needed: peer support groups for at-risk children who are of a sexual minority or have gender identity questions. That's all we need to do. But to allow the Minister of Education to officially – officially – backstop discrimination by a school towards an identifiable group of people and treat them differently than they are treated in a different school is backstopping discrimination.

I believe that the Minister of Education is here to set the policy on the curriculum that our kids are taught, but there are a number of other things that get encompassed in that, and I just cannot believe – I'm like my colleague from Airdrie. We come down on different sides of things quite often, but I think we're in the same place on this one: are you kidding me? Seriously? This government just voted down an amendment where, with a bullied kid, it would have been required to deal with that child? The government just voted that down so that you could officially give your blessing to a school to be allowed to discriminate against a child?

You are good people. You came here to do good things. I know you did. Every one of us got elected here to do good things for people. Please do good things today. We can help a group of children. We can get out in front of them. We can actually do something in this Legislature that is far reaching, that has a tangible effect, a tangible, positive effect on children in this province. We can do that today.

But saying that it's okay for this school to discriminate because we're going to take the kid away somewhere, really identify them, really make them stick out, really discriminate against them, to take them somewhere else to, I hope, give them a gay-straight alliance, a peer support group – and the Minister of Education will foot the bill. I'm assuming there's money involved. Are they going to take their peers, too? How do you know who wants to join this group and who doesn't? Do you bus them all somewhere? They're all supposed to meet at the front door for the discriminated group? Show up at the front door at 4 o'clock and

we'll bus you all somewhere else? This is not making sense anymore. You've tried so hard not to do this that you have come back around, and you're kind of kicking yourself in the butt, frankly, in trying to pretzel yourself around this issue.

Please, for these kids this is not curriculum. These are children. These are our children, our youth. Please do not allow this amendment to pass, where we would be institutionalizing – really institutionalizing – discrimination against our children. That's what this is. It's segregation. That's what it's saying: we're not going to treat all kids the same; we're not going to recognize that bullying is about pulling a kid out and saying, "you're weird and different, so I can pick on you and do things to you." Now you're making the Minister of Education the bully because he's the one that's going to pull that different group out.

I recognize that you are trying to do the right thing. I recognize that this was done with a good heart and that you are trying to solve some problems here, but it didn't solve the problem. It actually made it worse. You made the Minister of Education into a bully and allowed discrimination. Well, that's what it is, you know. A bully pulls somebody out and makes a big deal out of them. I know you're trying to do the right thing, so please do the right thing. Just allow these kids to have gay-straight alliances, their peer support groups, in their own school.

5:10

Please, don't make this any more complicated than it needs to be. I'm going to ask you to vote this down and allow another amendment on the floor that is going to give these kids their peer-support groups in their own schools, where they can go and be with their peers, not get bused somewhere or sent down the street or told to meet on Saturday mornings.

It needs to be in their own school where they can go at lunch and go: "This is what just happened to me. What am I supposed to do? Do you think this is wrong? I don't know. I want to talk to my friends about it." That's the point of a peer-support group, and that's what we were trying to accommodate. What we're trying to allow these kids to do is to help each other. Please allow them to do that. They're actually kind of better at it than we are. Right now I'm sure this is not the outcome that you expected, institutionalized discrimination and segregation for these kids. It's just not right. Please, we can do better than this. We can do better than this.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I wished that the Member for Calgary-North West had provided more information in her remarks about how this is going to work in practice, because, you know, without some context, it simply just doesn't make a lot of sense to me.

Now, this is a government, Mr. Chairman, that has no fear or trepidation about stepping on school boards when it suits them. They took away the right of school boards to set taxes and collect their own money. They fired school boards when they chose to. They take away the right of the school board to appoint their own superintendent without government approval. They trample on the rights of school boards all the time. Now all of a sudden they are very, very careful to protect the authority of school boards to disallow gay-straight alliances, and all of a sudden they're big, big champions of the rights of school boards.

Now they're going to get rid of the silliness about going to the courts. I mean, I thought that was hilarious. I had this image in my

mind of kids pooling their allowances to go to the Supreme Court, you know, in order to challenge a school board's decision. That's gone, but now the board's decision is final except that, Mr. Chairman, now the minister is mandated to provide a GSA. So what, then, have we protected on the part of the school board?

There are two choices. The member didn't clarify this at all when she enthusiastically reversed her position for the third time, and we don't really know in practice how it's going to work. Is the minister going to be responsible for making sure that the kids can meet in the school as if they were any other club operating as an extracurricular club within the school, or is the minister going to find some other place for the kids to meet? That's a huge difference. If it's the latter, then it is exactly as the Member for Edmonton-Centre said. It's institutionalized apartheid of gay students. It is a separation, very much akin to the segregation policy that existed in the southern United States up until the mid-1960s, a separation, separate but equal. You can have your own water fountain, but don't use ours. That's what that is.

Now, if it's the other alternative – and that is that the minister will make sure that the students in the school can have their GSA as if they were any other extracurricular body – then what we're doing is just putting window dressing on the rights of school boards, because you're basically saying: "Well, you get to say no, and then the minister is going to come in and make sure that in practice your decision is irrelevant and has no bearing. You've lost control over what happens in your schools and whether or not the kids have the GSA, because the minister is going to do it."

So we don't know which it is. We don't know how this is going to work, and, quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, I don't think this is anything more than words. I don't think this is about making sure every kid has access to a gay-straight alliance. I think it's just about creating the impression of blowing some smoke so that either the school boards don't know that their rights have been taken away by the government, because the minister is going to assume those rights, or on the other hand they're just going to try and pretend that students have the same rights as everyone else and that they're actually equal, but actually they're not going to be equal. You know, it's an attempt to create the impression of two different things at the same time, and they can't both be right.

I think this amendment is not suitable, won't solve the problem, and I don't think that the people who've been so critical of the government in the last few days are not going to see through this. I think they are absolutely going to see through this and see it for exactly what it is, a desperate attempt to try and square a circle that can't be squared. You know, you have to do one or the other. Either you have to say, "You know what? Kids have a right to have a GSA in a school regardless of what a teacher, a principal, or a school board might say," or you've got to say, "They can't." We don't know what that is because the mover of the motion didn't tell us. I would hope that she would tell us. Sooner would be better.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are there other speakers to amendment A2?

Ms Jansen: Yes, Mr. Chairman. If you're looking for clarification, I'm happy to provide clarification on that. Nothing in this amendment stipulates that the GSA has to be off site. Nothing in the amendment stipulates that. I appreciate that you haven't had a lot of information, but to go to a place where you bring up terms like segregation is very unhelpful to this conversation.

You can see that our end goal here is very simple. We are trying to make sure every child in every school in this province has the opportunity to take part in a GSA. That's what this amendment

does, and we certainly hope that you appreciate the spirit of this amendment and the fact that that is what we are looking to do.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, just briefly, before we get to the next speaker, might we revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (*reversion*)

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the indulgence of my colleagues here. I just want to take the opportunity. We have a couple of keen, interested parties who've joined us: the mayor from Sturgeon county, Mr. Tom Flynn, a long-time friend of many of ours and a hard worker for many Albertans; Ian McKay, the general manager from Sturgeon county; and Pat Tighe, one of the councillors from Sturgeon county. They've just had a meeting with the Minister of Transportation. I appreciate them taking the time.

Bill 10 **An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights** **to Protect our Children** (*continued*)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. I think I just need a clarification, honestly, because then I will know how to vote and I think many of us will know how to vote on this. Does this amendment make gay-straight alliances mandatory in all schools across all boards in the schools themselves or not? If this amendment is passed, are gay-straight alliances now mandatory in every school, "in" being the keyword, or is that not what the amendment says and they can either be in or out of the school? Could it be either/or? Can we just get clarification on that?

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

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. What we are saying here is that we are asking every school to be accommodating of a GSA where one is asked for, and we sincerely hope that in every school where a student asks for one, one will be provided. Where the school board says no, that student now does not have to go to the court. They come to the Alberta Ministry of Education, and we will provide that GSA for them, hopefully within the school environment, but if that is impossible, we will make sure they get the GSA regardless.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.
5:20

Ms Notley: Okay. Well, you know, for just a minute I was sitting there with bated breath thinking: oh, my goodness, maybe we've actually achieved what was originally set out to be achieved by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. For just a second. Then she said: if possible, but if it's not possible, then it will be somewhere else. Notwithstanding how hard it was for you guys to hear the words "apartheid" and "segregation" and "water fountains" and "front, back of the bus," all that kind of stuff, unfortunately that gives meaning to that analysis. Either the GSA is in the school or it's

not in the school. If the GSA is meeting across the street in the 7-Eleven parking lot, it is being treated differently than the other school clubs. The kids who have been bullied, who are desperately seeking support and remediation from that bullying, are being treated differently than kids in other school clubs.

We've been writing this pretty much throughout the afternoon. People are probably in the backroom there drafting as we speak. You know, I would love to see this government come in with a subamendment to their amendment adding the phrase: in the school the student attends. You know, frankly, if you could make a subamendment and add that phrase, I think we'd have victory. It would be a fabulous display of democracy doing what it's meant to do. As we kind of came up with that collaboratively and collectively on this floor, it would be great.

Without that, though, unfortunately, those four or five words that I just laid out are the very heart of the difference that we've been talking about over and over and over again here. You can't treat kids differently. You can't treat clubs differently. You can't institutionalize and/or show respect for a school that refuses to allow their students to use the word "gay" combined with "straight" and "alliance" in a club that exists at the school that is voluntary to attend outside of normal school hours and which is not part of the curriculum. A school board which prohibits that should not be encouraged, should not be protected by this legislation, and, quite frankly, Mr. Chair, should not receive public funding from this Legislature at all.

I will simply say that I am imploring the member opposite or any of the members opposite to bring forward a subamendment to add the phrase: at the school attended by the student who made the request. If that happens, then we're good to go. It's kind of a weird path to take. We would have gotten there with the Member for Edmonton-Centre's bill a lot faster, but we get to the same place if you add that phrase, and you will have my complete congratulations and support if we get to that place. But without that, we have a problem, and we have a very real problem.

As I said before, I talked about what's implicit in this legislation and the assumptions that are included in it, many of which are deeply troubling to me for a number of reasons that I think I've articulated several times already, so I'm not going to do that again. But I'm going to say that I'm looking for that subamendment from the government because that would fix the problem. I'd be interested to hear whether there is any willingness over there to consider such a subamendment.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to finish up by reiterating that nothing in this amendment stipulates that this would be off site. We believe that within this amendment we are fulfilling our promise to respect school board autonomy and still provide the opportunity for students to have a gay-straight alliance. It would be called a gay-straight-alliance, and we want to make that perfectly clear.

You assume that we're taking kids away from their school. We are hopeful that schools will accommodate students every time a student asks for a GSA in this province. What's the endgame in all of this? We want to make sure that every student in this province has access to a gay-straight alliance. I believe we are doing that with this amendment, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: I don't understand why the government is trying to preserve a school's or a school board's autonomy when that autonomy is discriminatory. Why is this protection being offered to schools or to school boards? This is public education. We all share in that. It's a co-operative effort. As I was just saying to my colleague, they're in our communities. We don't send our kids to boarding schools somewhere else. The schools themselves are in our communities. They often are community hubs. They have other things in schools.

I am failing to understand why there is such a determination, a stubbornness by the government – I'm going to air quote this just so that we know what we're talking about – to respect school boards' autonomy. What I'm seeing here is the autonomy to discriminate, and I don't understand why the government is not choosing to say: "Schools will do this. It's not curriculum. It is a peer support group. It's an after-school or outside of school time activity." I don't understand why this government cannot say to schools: "You will do this. On this particular issue you will do it because that's who we are. We don't discriminate. We don't take kids aside."

I don't think schools should have the ability to say: you cannot have a GSA. Why? Why are we protecting this for schools and for school boards? Why is the government protecting the ability to discriminate amongst their children, amongst their pupils, and say: "Book club? Great. Math club? Great. Basketball team? Super. GSAs? No." What is behind this? Why are you doing this to protect a school board's or a school's autonomy to discriminate? That's what's happening. I know that's not what you want to do, but what you are now presenting is – you know, a kid is now going to have to go to the Minister of Education. Knock, knock, knock. "Dear Minister of Education, my school turned me down. They wouldn't do this. They discriminated against me. They won't allow me to create this after school club like how everybody else can have their after school club, peer support group. Now I need the ministry to do it or the minister to do it." I cannot imagine how the minister can go back to the school and say, "Well, you wouldn't hold it in this school, but I'm the minister, and I'm going to hold it in your school." What? You're going to rent a little piece of it? How can you possibly do that?

Why are we making this so hard? The point here is that at-risk kids can leave their classrooms and go to a place in their school where they can have an organized peer support group. Why are we trying so hard not to let that happen? That's what I don't understand. Please try and explain that to me. Maybe I can understand why you're doing this. I just don't see right now why you're making it so complicated, why you're allowing segregation, encouraging it even, and why kids can't just have a peer support gay-straight alliance in their school, easily accessible to them, without having to go outside and go to the ministry and beg them to intervene and put it on somewhere else. Please, this is easy. Please just let these kids have their GSA in their own schools.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Other speakers? The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

5:30

Mr. Mason: Thank you. Mr. Chair, the hon. Member for Calgary-North West talks about: we hope, we hope, we hope. You know, well, hope springs eternal. I've been here for 14 years, and I still keep hoping the government will do the right thing. I'm hopeful, but it doesn't happen. That's the problem with this amendment. It comes back to what I was saying, and that is that you either are going to overrule a school board and just pretend to let them make

the decision, or you're going to accept the school board decision and continue to allow them the right to deny GSAs. Then you're going to take the kids somewhere else and connect them with kids that may or may not be from their school, not in the place where the bullying and the education are taking place.

That's not good enough. That's discrimination. That's not equality. That is treating them differently than other kids. So it's perpetuating the discrimination that we've been talking about. It is, in many ways, a segregation of those kids. When they come together to talk about the bullying, they are treated differently than other kids that come together to talk or do the things that are important to them. That is the difference. The amendment doesn't fix the problem. The amendment is nothing more than window dressing that leaves essentially the same situation as exists now and that existed with the original government bill, Bill 10, and that is to allow GBLTQ students to be discriminated against in the education system.

As I've mentioned before, this government has no qualms about taking rights away from school boards when it comes to taxation or firing school boards or taking away their rights to appoint their own superintendents – they'll trample on the rights of school boards whenever they want to and whenever it's convenient – but this one right, this one power of school boards that they're intent on protecting is the right to discriminate. Now, that is hardly – hardly – a commitment to, one, equality rights or, two, the autonomy and independence of school boards. Mr. Chairman, it's neither. This government should be ashamed of itself.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is correct. Really, this is not something to be proud of.

The Member for Calgary-North West says that we're overreacting over the fact that GSAs would not be in the schools. She says: we hope they will be in the schools. Now, here's the thing. We often say: we hope people will pay their taxes. We don't typically write legislation which then says: if you decide not to pay your taxes, that decision rests with you, and there's no appeal from it. We don't do that. It is a profoundly disingenuous argument to say: we hope that they allow it to be on school property. Either they compel it to be on school property, or they understand that the same boards which are exercising a right, that they have given them, to discriminate against gay students and their friends, are now being supported through this bill. That's exactly what happens, that and nothing else. Everybody should understand that this is really just a smokescreen over anything else. We are crystallizing and clarifying the rights of school boards to say no and, within that "no," whether it's on the property.

Now, the next issue here. I just want to get into a little bit of the other part of the amendment because that, too, is problematic for me. It talks about facilitating and supporting a GSA. Now, I haven't written a lot of legislation, but if I want to legislate the government's obligation to put in a GSA if a kid asks for one, I don't say, "Facilitate and support"; I say: "Establish. The government shall establish." So I'm not quite sure why we have "facilitate and support" because I don't actually know what that means. Does that mean, like, you tweet about it: "Hey, sure hope you get your GSA. I'm sure supportive, there, girl. I hope you get it, you know?" Do you do some advertising to try and get people out to it? What do you do? What does that mean? It doesn't mean anything. The language is not good.

The other thing that's very clear to me because of the very clear confusion around where the GSA will take place is the question of: how many GSAs? Let's say I'm in a small Christian school on the very north end of Edmonton and I'm told that I can't have a GSA and the school says: nope, not going to happen, yada, yada, yada. So what happens? I call up the Minister of Education, who says: "Oh, you know, don't think too much about my background. I am here for you, and I'm going to make sure that you have access to a GSA." And then he says also: "We have a GSA. We're running it at a recently vacated retail outlet down in South Edmonton Common. That's where it is. Edmonton's GSA, for those of you who can't have one in school, is somewhere down in South Edmonton Common." I mean, we don't know. We don't know how many GSAs there will be.

We don't know if there will be a GSA in the surrounding parking lots of every school within which a student contacts their good friend the Minister of Education on the phone: you know, is it going to be around their school or not? We don't know. We don't know if it's just going to be one per city of Edmonton.

Ms Blakeman: I know. It'll be in a portable.

Ms Notley: Well, yes. Actually, when I laughed out loud and I distracted the Member for Edmonton-Centre from her comments, somebody on Twitter actually made the comment – it was really quite amusing – that now we understand what the portables were for. We can just have a traveling GSA portable around the city of Edmonton.

An Hon. Member: One for every school.

Ms Notley: Maybe one for every school. Maybe one for every three schools. Maybe one for half a starter school. I don't know. I mean, this is so unclear.

When you consider that what we're talking about is issues of equality and we are talking about ensuring that kids at a school can invite their peers to join a gay-straight alliance so that they can develop a network that will help them recover from the pain of being bullied – let us just be clear – calling up their good pal the Minister of Education and being told that there is a GSA every second Thursday halfway across the city is not going to be an answer. There is nothing in this legislation that tells us that that is not the answer that they will get. So it's just not good enough.

I'm just perplexed by this. I'm astounded because what we have now done is that we have very clearly in this piece of legislation crystallized the second-class nature of the equality rights enjoyed by members of sexual minorities in our education system.

Ms Blakeman: But they're not second-class. They are protected.

Ms Notley: This government would like us to not protect them.

GSAs are a natural extension of an equality right which should be equally applied to all minority groups in the province. By allowing certain groups to say that those GSAs can't be in the school where requested, we are treating them differently. That's all there is to this.

Now, I want to just go back because I did do a little bit of research. I keep talking about the EPSB example and why this ought not – I truly believe that if I were to poll every Albertan who considers themselves religious right now, the answer to the poll would be this: religion and equality and respect for people who are gay are not mutually exclusive. They are complementary. Faith and equality are compatible, and I believe that the majority of people who describe themselves and identify as religious would agree with that statement.

I did just do a little bit of work. In the EPSB, where they have essentially said that GSAs must happen in every school where they are requested, 3,800 kids are enrolled in faith-based programs. So if there are 3,800 kids and their families in Edmonton who are comfortable with their children receiving a faith-based education which happens to coincide with some students' rights in that school to request and have a GSA after school, how can this be so hard? Why can't we follow the example that the Edmonton public school board has set? Why can't we follow the example that the provinces of Manitoba and Ontario have set? Why does this have to be so hard?

5:40

I honestly believe that the vast majority of people don't see the problem here. I think that you folks are listening to the wrong people, and in so doing, you are unfortunately, as I say, crystallizing a second-class set of rights, and you are crystallizing a legislative statement that you think it's okay for there to be a second-class set of rights for certain minority groups in Alberta – and in particular we're referring to those who are members of sexual minorities – and that is unfortunate.

I propose to you ways to fix this. Just a few words would take this from an incredibly offensive piece of legislation to a victory for equality. About four or five words, that's all it would take. But I'm not hearing anybody come forward on the government side to put those words in, and it's very disappointing. So in the meantime we have to aggressively resist this piece of legislation and make it very clear that should it pass, you will have actually made this problem worse, I think, at the end of the day. It is not a victory for anybody. It's really quite a sad day for people who believe in genuine equality in our public institutions.

The Chair: Are there other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I feel compelled and need to stand up and let my opinion stay on this one. I want to begin by saying that I really appreciate our Premier allowing this one to be a free vote, and I really appreciate our government caucus trying very hard through an amendment to make the issue more amenable to what I think is the right direction to go. But despite all the effort put on the table, I still have very strong reservations to supporting this bill. I'll share with you wholeheartedly where I'm coming from.

The Chair: You're going to speak on the amendment, hon. member?

Mr. Luan: Yes. About the amendment.

The Chair: Thank you. Carry on.

Mr. Luan: The amendment as it stands now is in the right direction but not far enough. Where I have issues with it is that it won't name that the establishment of the organization will still be on the property of the school where it was rejected. I think that when we talk about the rights in this bill, the number one, overarching principle here is that we have to protect vulnerable children in the name of freedom from discrimination against their sexual orientation.

I heard our Premier talk and our ministers talk about this over and over. In Alberta, in our schools there's no room to have discrimination against the minority groups. In this case sexual orientation is the question on the table. When I heard that, I was all for it. But when we started looking at the details, particularly

about this amendment, we started dancing around with that, and it's no longer a statement of no conditions. There are conditions attached to it: not in my church, not in my belief, not on my property. That's where I think things go wrong.

I speak about this from my heart as a social worker. I practised over 21 years. My profession over the years taught me that when we want a just society at a time when vulnerable populations are at risk – in this case it is the gay and lesbian students who are being discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. They are fighting with a system that fundamentally doesn't accept them. This is where, I think, in my heart, I really have to stand up. I respect our colleagues. I respect our Premier and the free vote and everything else. I respect our democracy, that we can have this very free discussion among us in this House. I want my opinion to stand in regard to this one, that I think is so fundamental. It's to the basics of what we believe.

This is no different than what I view as racial equality. I am Chinese, and that I am able to stand here today to talk about this is a result of hundreds of years of our forefathers who fought this injustice years ago. You all know this, that Chinese-Canadians a hundred years ago were not allowed to vote. They didn't belong here. They could work here, but they belonged elsewhere. What we're dealing with today gives me a picture in my head, reminding me of a scenario like this.

There was a time in Chinese-Canadian history when there were signs to say: "We allow you. We permit you to be part of us, but you have to comply with what our traditions are here." One of the traditions back years ago for those hard-labour Chinese was: "You belong in the laundromat. That's your community centre." When they'd go to an upscale restaurant, there were signs saying: "Chinese are not allowed here. Dogs are not allowed here."

One of the reasons this debate really hit my heart is that I feel compelled that we are at a time in history when we are discussing the issue of another at-risk, vulnerable population. Are we treating them equally? Are we welcoming them the way they are? My stand as of today is that we're not. We're imposing our value system onto what they are.

One of the examples I find is that when I read about and learn more about the gay and lesbian community, it's different than when I actually have people who are closely working with me share their story. I'm going to share with my colleagues a personal story. I have permission from a friend to share this in the spirit of contributing to the debate and helping others who are at risk.

This is a close friend who works as a professional. She married a loving husband who happened to be gay. Over the years they lived in China. The husband is a company executive. They have a daughter. They have a perfect family from the outside. Both are well-established professionals with good incomes. But the truth is that after years and years of struggle one day her husband said: honey, I want to die. She couldn't believe why. He said: "I can no longer pretend who I am. I'm trying to conform. I'm trying to be somebody that is not me. Yes, we have a lovely daughter. But I really don't have that desire."

You can imagine, it was like a bomb dropped into a very happy family. Nobody in the world knows why it happened. My friend went through a horrible time. At first, she was resentful. She couldn't understand. They went to counselling, all kinds of support. But at the end of the day she became his best friend, the biggest ally in supporting him. She said: "Honey, I don't want you to die. We will fight this together. We will find a way that we can have justice in here."

They could not stay where they were in China because the overall conditions were unacceptable to it. They researched the world, and guess what? Canada is one of the most open,

welcoming places, and they decided to come over here. Over the years she helped him to explain to his family that this was not his fault. He was born like this. He tried for years to be somebody else, to the degree that he would rather die than continue to pretend he was somebody else.

I must say that when this story was shared with me, it was profound. I had years of social work experience. I had read stuff. I'd learned it in an indirect way. But it hit home so close to me through a close friend like that. I really believe that my knowledge about understanding this community was elevated to a much higher level.

5:50

One of the reasons I think I have to stand to strongly debate this, to share this is that I believe we need to do the right thing. History is moving forward on this. I highly urge my colleagues in this House to think about this. Would you rather be on the wrong side of history? In this case I urge that we need to go all the way to make sure there's no discrimination in our schools.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's my honour to rise and speak, as most can guess, in complete opposition to this amendment and to this bill in general. But I do want to take a moment and thank the hon. member for his words, for his story, for helping all members and Albertans have a sense of the damage that this amendment and this bill will do. I found your words very moving, hon. member, and I want to thank you for them.

I want to thank as well the other members that have been debating all afternoon in this House, those who have broken ranks and spoken and shared their words according to their conscience and to what they know to be right.

You know, for myself fighting for equality is one of the reasons that I first joined the Alberta NDP, the party that stands up for everyone and especially the little guy. I hope that there are members on the other side that are regretting ever bringing forward this bill, which effectively torpedoed Bill 202 from the Member for Edmonton-Centre, which would have actually given our kids the tools they need to be safe in our schools. That's, again, what this comes down to.

I encourage you to look at the conversations that are happening on Twitter as far as what is at the heart of this debate. It's about giving our kids and our students the tools that they need to create these safe spaces. When we talk about equality and social justice, we're talking about treating people equally and fairly. This amendment ships them off from the school to some undisclosed location to have a meeting in secrecy. I don't understand that, and I don't understand the premise of where this amendment is coming from.

The thrust behind this bill is, like I said, equality and dealing with discrimination. So I find it jaw-dropping that an amendment comes forward which essentially discriminates against kids by saying: "No. Your club isn't allowed to be at the school. You need to go somewhere else to have your meeting." We're talking about, again, an extracurricular club. We're talking about voluntary. We're talking about something that is initiated by students. I don't know if it was written with this intention, but as the hon. member that previously spoke said – I mean, he nailed it – the spirit of this amendment is really a NIMBY amendment. "Not in my backyard. I don't want it here. You can go do that somewhere else."

For that reason and many others, I obviously will be opposed to this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Are there other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: I just want to maybe suggest – I mean, we only have five minutes left, and I'll certainly give the floor to the NDP opposition leader – that perhaps it would be a good idea before we move forward with this amendment and voting on this amendment to maybe talk about it a little bit more. Let the government caucus talk. Let the opposition parties talk. I think there has to be a decision made about what direction we're going here.

If the idea is to make GSAs mandatory, then there has to be a decision to make them mandatory. Period. If the decision is that we want to respect local autonomy but still want to find a way to help the student directly, concretely deal with the bullying that they are dealing with, then we have to make sure the amendments accomplish that. The problem with this amendment is that it doesn't do either. It doesn't make them mandatory, but it also doesn't do anything to help the student. All it does is say that they can have a meeting off somewhere and have a GSA. Well, a student can go into their house and start a GSA club. You know, this just doesn't do anything.

I think to avoid using certain folks as political footballs and so forth and given how divisive this conversation can be, it would be, I think, a good exercise to actually discuss exactly what the strategy is here, what we're actually trying to achieve, and then write a piece of legislation or a set of amendments that actually achieves that outcome because I just don't feel this does either. I think there's a willingness among, certainly, our party and I know among government members and I believe, clearly, with the Liberal and the ND opposition to at least discuss what our objective is here. Are we going to make these mandatory? If we are not going to make them mandatory, we have to address the bullying issue. It's got to be either. This amendment does neither.

Hopefully, we can have that discussion moving forward and actually come to a good piece of legislation. Thanks.

Ms Notley: Very quickly, just to be clear, what Bill 202 would have done was not to make GSAs mandatory. What they would have done is they would have allowed students who wanted them to set them up, and the people who wanted to join those students could have joined them, but no one who didn't want to be part of it would have had to be part of it. So that's the first thing.

The second thing is that I implore people over there – because I think people are really genuinely thinking about this – that if this amendment fails, we can come back after dinner and consider other amendments that might actually get us to a better place. If this amendment passes, we may be ruled out of order for finding better ways to fix this.

So I urge you to think seriously about whether it's possible for us to do the right thing tonight. Don't allow this amendment to pass in its current form.

Thank you.

The Chair: Other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Young: Well, thank you very much. It's a privilege to speak on this topic. Every child has the right to be supported. One of the things I haven't heard is that every child also has the right to support other kids.

Mr. Chairman, I sat down at my kitchen table the other day, and I asked my daughters, 11 and nine: do you know what it means to be gay? They said: well, it's when two guys love each other. I said: well, what about girls? They said: oh, that would be a lesbian. It just matter of fact because they don't care. I had another conversation with my 11-year-old today – they are at a Catholic school – about whether there is anybody in their school that's gay, and she's, like: no, not that I know of. The reason I said I was asking is because some people get bullied because of that. It was really foreign to her because they just doesn't really care. But we care here. We seem to have this angst about putting this restriction here.

I go back to the Charter of Rights or whatever, and I hear about equality rights and equality of association, and those are the fundamental things. When I hear stories about kids who – I mean, even the most well-adjusted kid when they're in their teens or young teens is struggling with their own identity, and when you are struggling with other issues and don't have the support at home. . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt you, hon. member, but it is 6 o'clock. The committee will stand adjourned until 7:30 tonight, at which time, when we return, I'll recognize you first to speak if you are so inclined.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, December 3, 2014

Issue 12e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 3, 2014

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'll call the Committee of the Whole back to order. I'll give you a brief moment to settle in.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

Bill 10

An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children

The Chair: I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was speaking. I'll offer you the floor again, sir.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I support gay-straight alliances. I also feel that children in our schools should be accommodated wanting to have one. I've had many conversations with friends of mine, mentors. You know, in some of those conversations I would say that it's unfortunate that we need to have gay-straight alliances, but we do know that they work.

I would also express to friends of mine about how I'm indifferent about what your sexual orientation is. It doesn't matter to me. In the last little while I think I've changed my tone on that. I think it does matter. I do care if you're gay, straight, or whatever. I think we need to recognize the diversity and importance of everybody and value that and support every kid in our school. When we get to a point of not just being indifferent but celebrating our diversity, I think that's what we really want to achieve.

Speaking to this amendment, when I looked at Bill 10, I had some concerns about asking children who wanted to form a gay-straight alliance and were denied to go through the courts. I felt that was unreasonable. These are young kids who are looking for support. They may not have support at home, and they're looking for that support with their peers through a gay-straight alliance. This amendment recognizes that if a child is denied that right to have a gay-straight alliance, then the Ministry of Education will come out in support and close that gap. It's unfortunate if they are denied it because every kid should be supported, but if the school boards fail to do that, then the Ministry of Education will step in and do that. I think that's a move forward.

As I was speaking of before the break, Mr. Chairman, I also think we need to underscore the fact that this isn't just about kids looking for support. This is for all kids looking to provide support in a school setting, at the school. I'm willing to support the movement forward on Bill 10 with this amendment and want to recognize that the support we give for our kids, all kids: we're not going to solve that with legislation. I think it rests in a responsibility in all of us.

I want to actually thank the Member for Edmonton-Centre for bringing up this issue for me. In my family we've had the opportunity to speak to my young daughters about this issue. Like I said, I was indifferent about the issue. It didn't matter. But I think we need to care and proactively engage in the conversation that it's not okay to do any kind of bullying. I was actually surprised and taken aback when her response, from an 11-year-old girl, was that it doesn't matter; we don't care. I want to thank the member for bringing for that issue up.

Like I said, I support gay-straight alliances for all children, and I'm going to support this amendment because it does close that

gap in the absence of them being afforded that right that I feel they should have.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. Member.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The amendment is an improvement, but it's still based on the premise of "equal but separate," and I can't support that. The Charter doesn't support that. The fact is that – and we've been over this – the issue of discrimination is protected within the Charter. If students are going to be allowed to start clubs, it is the right of a parent to not allow their child to be a member of a club. That is not under attack here, but what we are dealing with is trying to create a process to work around what is a Charter right, which is: do we discriminate against students that are gay? Trying to create something separate but supposedly equal in my book is a cop-out. We need to face up to the fact that this is a Charter-protected right. What we're trying to do is create a process. And it's a proven process, these gay-straight alliances, where they have reduced discrimination and, more importantly, they have reduced teenage suicide. The data supports that.

So for this to be requested and implemented as an after school activity is something to me that every school board should not only invite, but they should never have the right to allow any type of discrimination based on something of this magnitude. There is so much misunderstanding on what this is about. I've gotten some hate e-mails that aren't even on base with what we're actually talking about here. The legislation that has been brought forward, as I stated earlier, was about creating through legislation a process so that these students could have gay-straight alliances.

There is not a member here that has stood up and said that they're for discrimination, and I know that. Nobody has said that. Everybody here is opposed to discrimination, but we're starting to split hairs on how to work around a very sensitive issue that nobody wants to face up to, which is that we're confronted with discrimination on a regular basis. Here it is, right here in this Legislature today as we debate this. All the process is is that students have a right to create these clubs, that they cannot be denied that right and treated differently just because they're gay.

As other members have brought up, if they were forming their baseball club, their hockey club, whatever other club – they have those clubs – they're not denied that. This is the same kind of right, and it doesn't infringe upon parental rights at all. It's not even part of the process. If a parent has an issue with a club that a child belongs to, that parent has the right to keep their child from joining any club. Unfortunately, in this type of situation I think a child that is being forced not to be in a gay-straight alliance club might be the child that probably needs to be there for some education, but that's another matter.

What we're confronted with today is the basic, fundamental right of these kids to establish an organization that does two things, in my view, two very important things: it cuts down on discrimination and it reduces teenage suicide. Those are two admirable points that I cannot oppose in any way, shape, or form, but I cannot – I cannot – support the bill or the amendment if it's going to create this separate but equal. It's ingrained in me. I come from a background that goes back to the civil rights era, that I'm quite familiar with, and I remember all the arguments. They haven't changed. All we now have done is changed it from dealing with black issues to issues of sexual orientation, and the arguments are the same. The fear and the ignorance are the same.

It's interesting because the kids, particularly people generally under 30 and under 25, don't even understand why we're debating this, many of them. It's just absolutely amazing.

7:40

So with that, Mr. Chair, as I look at this, I applaud the government for trying yet again. It's a good attempt, but it comes up short. Separate but equal is fundamentally wrong because separate but equal discriminates. We've seen it. It does not succeed. It is not a solution. These kids have a right, just as every kid has a right, to form these organizations. We cannot discriminate and say: "You can form that, but it may not be on the school property. We'll push you off the school property." That is fundamentally wrong, in my view. That's treating them differently than any other student, and I cannot abide by that.

I will vote against the amendment. I'd love the government to try yet again. Let's not go home till we get it right.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to go on the record with respect to the amendment. I also support gay-straight alliances and, for that matter, I support and I will continue to support any initiative which seeks to support the mental health and the mental well-being of every young person in this province. I think I can safely say that that's a sentiment that unites all of us in the House. Just in the way that it wasn't that long ago that many of us were afraid to talk about mental health and mental illness and many other issues that come into play, particularly with young people, we're fortunate to be standing here in a Legislature today debating a number of amendments that actually seek to defend and to support the rights of and the opportunities for these students.

That said, I think, Mr. Chair, this debate has not really focused fully on what this amendment seeks to achieve, and it is not a small thing. What the amendment does is that it takes a Constitutionally protected right, which is specific to Alberta in the Alberta Act, the protection of the rights of school boards and the autonomy of school boards, which is stronger in Alberta, I've been told, than in any other jurisdiction in the country, and it says that where school boards will not grant the opportunity for students to form gay-straight alliances, the government, the people as represented by the government, will step in and will assume that responsibility on behalf of the school board. That is no small thing.

That challenges many of the assumptions and the values that people hold dear with respect to the role of democratically elected school boards. It also affirms the belief, a belief that I share, that government has the responsibility to act always on behalf of the most vulnerable citizens in society. This is in no way to suggest that students who want to form gay-straight alliances are in any way weak or unable to fend for themselves. I think we've all seen, Mr. Chair, that they're quite capable of making a very loud statement on a very serious issue, and they're not looking for us to provide support to compensate for any inadequacies on their part. What they are simply looking for is for government and for this House to recognize the identity that they have claimed for themselves, to recognize that as full and equal in society, and to show that the government, in particular, as representatives of the people, as elected by the people, is willing to step in and take

remedial action where other autonomous entities, in this case school boards, are not willing to take that action.

The second thing I want to say, Mr. Chair, is: all of that said, I'm going to support the amendment. One, because of, I think, the courageous stance it takes with respect to the role of government, reaffirming what I think the role of government is, one I think that most Albertans share. But I think how we get there actually matters as well. This amendment actually contemplates the importance that needs to be attached to how we get to dealing with a school board if after this discussion we're ever to see what I think is an unlikely situation, that a school board deny the opportunity for a gay-straight alliance. How we get there in terms of providing students that opportunity really matters.

I guess, Mr. Chair, it comes down to whether we want to support legislation and an amendment that invites an adversarial process that undoubtedly would take parties through the courts, would pit Albertans one against the other in terms of their values, legitimate values, which in specific instances can conflict. Do we want to merely pass a bill that facilitates an adversarial process and really doesn't work to support the students at hand, or do we want to provide an opportunity in legislation for the minister of the day to work collaboratively, as I think all of us would expect a minister of government to work, with a school board to not only change their action but to change their minds and to change their hearts if that's what it takes? That is what this amendment provides for.

In my view, narrowing the scope beyond the statement that government will intervene and will facilitate and support and ensure that students have access to GSAs when they are denied invites, in fact, more of the conflict and more distraction, quite frankly, from the interests of these students and from providing a supportive school environment and supporting and fostering a community that supports them and identifies them and recognizes them than we would like to have.

In summary, Mr. Chair, I support the bill, and I support the sentiments that are expressed in the bill and the values that are represented in the bill in the same way that everybody else does, but my point is that it matters how we get there. If we elect to be very prescriptive in terms of the legislation, we invite, I think, more of the conflict and debate and animosity that we have seen that has brought not just the cause of this community and made that cause so difficult but for many, many other vulnerable communities in our province as well.

Mr. Chair, what I say is: let's support the amendment. Let us have the Minister of Education and the government work as we would intend them to work to respect and to collaborate and to try to bring about a solution within a particular school community if an unlikely situation like this were to arise. But let's not invite more conflict and more adversity within the system by being prescriptive in terms of the amendments here and then sparking a whole other debate in other quarters that will do nothing but detract from the cause of these very students that we're here to support.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to share with the Legislature this evening that during the supper hour I went over to city hall, where the City of Edmonton Youth Council was debating gay-straight alliances and what the position should

be of the Edmonton Youth Council. It was a very good debate, very engaging, with remarkable young people.

I was struck by the juxtaposition of debating this particular bill here in the way that we are, the way we've deviated from a very simple, straightforward issue that we should confront head-on, and how they were approaching it there as the Edmonton Youth Council at city hall. They were very collaborative, very supportive, looking for organic ways to solve the problem. Here we have people throwing on layer upon layer in a direct adversarial sort of context that serves to create amendments and, potentially, laws that will only cause more strife and confusion for the future. We, this generation, which is mostly considerably older, owe it to that generation that's debating at the Edmonton Youth Council today to make sure that we move along with the course of history and ensure that we have equality and social justice here in the province of Alberta that fits with the society which we are responsible to govern.

I ask each of you here today to step back at least 10 paces from the various versions of this legislation that we've seen over the last couple of weeks and look to see: how can we make this a more equal place and a more just place, not just for the next few months but for the next generation and past that as well? If we seek to divide and make different sets of equalities for different types of people, we can only hope to fail, and that's what we're doing here today. We're creating a situation where we're going to differentiate between different kinds of clubs according to what outcome it is based on.

7:50

People all want to talk about this as well. In case anybody didn't know, this is, like, the conversation point across this province here this evening and will continue on. Someone at city hall said: "Well, you know, what about the football club? What if it offends me and offends my sensibility to have a football club? Should it also be excluded, or should we have the school board give that capacity to exclude that club?" I thought: you know, how simple, again bringing back all of these sorts of convoluted arguments we had last evening and then over the week and put it back to some simple thing. If we make different rules and different laws for different people, different groups, then we can only seek to a take step backwards as a society.

Again, taking a bad bill and creating some convoluted version of it only seeks to dig us further into a hole, Mr. Chair. Certainly, we know that if we don't make leadership from the top here in this Legislature, then we'll only see more of the same. The reason you don't see gay-straight alliances in certain school boards is because the people in the top positions are quashing those people who would want to have a gay-straight alliance. The teachers and the students organizing these things know that they're not being supported by the school board. Who really wants to go up against that sort of confrontation?

This does not change that. You're creating some sort of rarified air by which the ministry will swoop in and create a GSA in a place where they voted to not have it, either from the school board or from the school or whomever else. I mean, what a load of utter nonsense, Mr. Chair. What an obtuse way to organize these things. Certainly, those of you who have been brave enough to speak out against this and not just, you know, come out of some whipped position that you hope to personally gain from: well, good for you. Right? That's all I can say.

Again, we need to lead from the top here. We need to make sure that we create the laws. After all, if we make a law that compels gay-straight alliance clubs – you know, if there's a choice and people want to make those happen in school boards, then we can

make a law to do so. There's nothing stopping us from doing that. This idea that certain school boards or trustees might want to do it the other way around is completely an inversion of how laws are made here. We can make the law here, and they can follow it. It's as simple as that.

I'm seeing people tweeting in on this thing tonight from all over the province. I notice that Jon Cornish, a football player from Calgary, is urging us to do the right thing on this law to ensure that we have equality and social justice that extends to everybody everywhere all the time. Like I said before, the Edmonton Youth Council is voting on it here tonight. It's clear that we need to make sure that we keep in step with reality here in this Legislature and reflect the society that we are responsible to govern.

There are so many examples from around the world that if you create different laws for different people at different times, it only ends in ruin. I will follow very closely, from my own past, the events that took place in southern Africa as a result of trying to create different sets of laws and different sets of how people should behave. We all know that it all ends in the very worst circumstances possible, right? People think that we're exaggerating about this, but you make sure that you keep your smallest laws and your medium-sized laws and your biggest laws all focused on the same philosophical viewpoint, and that is that we create laws that are equal for all. If we make laws that somehow exclude certain gay-straight alliance clubs from having the same capacity to function right across this province if they choose to do so, then we, Mr. Chair, are not doing our jobs.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: I rise, actually, just to ask for unanimous consent of this Chamber, Mr. Chair, that all bells be shortened to a one-minute interval for this evening.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Chair: The Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Unfortunately, I cannot support this amendment to the bill because it's not trying to do what you're saying that it will do in body and spirit. It will create two sets of laws for people. We are here to correct past mistakes. We are here to make laws which treat all Albertans equally. By denying students to have GSAs in schools and giving the power to the minister – I don't know why we are doing it. If we will end up doing it anyway, why not just straightaway give the students the right to ask for GSAs in schools? And schools should be able to do it. I mean, there should be no qualms about that.

Yesterday I was shocked when we voted on the bill in second reading and 42 of my progressive colleagues there were voting yes for this. I came here in 1970, and I have experienced discrimination first-hand myself. I was not physically abused or whatever, but when I started going to my work, my foreman said: oh, you smell of garlic; stay away from me. That was so stressful for me, and I had to find a different job. I was afraid to go to work because all my co-workers were making fun of me. And that was small stuff. Being a member of the LGBTQ community: I can't even imagine what they will be going through. I was talking to somebody, a young man, and he didn't have any friends till he got to high school. Look, all those years he lost enjoyment of life.

What we are trying to do here – we are going backwards. Ontario did it in 2012. Manitoba did it in 2013. Why are we holding back? There was a simple solution with Bill 202. You

know, sure, we can't bring Bill 202 back, but let's fix it with Bill 10. Let's do the right amendments and get it done. I'm seeing history repeating itself like with Bill 19, Bill 36, Bill 50. This government is under new management, a new Premier. Let's move forward. Let's not take a step backwards.

What are we creating here? Let's say that there was a Sikh club supposed to be going up in a school. Will we have the guts to refuse it? If there was a Pakistani club going up in a school, will we have the guts to refuse it? If there was a black club – pardon me – will we refuse it? Why are we separating LGBTQ students from those in a football club, a Sikh club, an East Indian club, you name it? If we can do it, why do they have to go through this red tape in order to have their GSA club in their school? It's like telling them: "No. You can't do anything. You can hold your meeting, but you have to go out of the house." I don't see how this amendment or bill will achieve what the government is trying to achieve.

I cannot support the amendment or the bill, period, because it's not going to do what the government says it will do. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I'll be brief, Mr. Chair, with just a couple of points that I wanted to make. It had looked to me, before we broke, like there was a possibility, a little bright light, that suggested that folks over there might have been coming around to the right conclusion, but it's now, clearly, obviously, not the case. I just want to speak to a couple of points that were made by members opposite.

First of all, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview began in a very positive way by talking about his support for GSAs and about his conversations with his kids and talking about how he wants to see GSAs in every school and then suggested that this amendment will secure GSAs in every school. But, to be clear, the reason we are so vehemently opposed to this amendment is that this will not secure GSAs in every school. It will not secure GSAs in any school. It might. We can cross our fingers and hope that maybe those school boards who are so vehemently opposed to using the words "gay-straight alliance" in describing their after school clubs will somehow relent and allow the Ministry of Education to organize a GSA on their property. But, quite honestly, more likely than not, the case is that that won't happen.

8:00

Recently the Minister of Education tabled the number of clubs across the province. Let us just be very clear. Notwithstanding that we asked for this information, he didn't bother to give us the information about where those clubs were. But we know that there were only about 96 gay-straight alliance clubs, and at least 65 of them are in the EPSB. Then he said that there are another 1,300 other-named clubs across the province. What that essentially says is that about 95 out of 1,400 clubs have been allowed to be called GSAs. That's one-fourteenth, Mr. Chair.

Why in heaven's name would you expect, if you don't tell them that if a child asks for a GSA, they have to be given a GSA, that they will be given a GSA? Clearly, the record is that they will not be given a GSA. This amendment will not change that, not one bit. There'll be a GSA somewhere outside of the school on different property, as I said, maybe in the parking lot at the 7-Eleven across the street but not in that school. They will be treated separately and differently, just like the segregation laws that preceded true equality during the civil rights movement.

Now, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford tried to argue that what we need to do is to respect the rights of school boards. I just need to say – and it's been said before – that this government hasn't respected the rights of school boards when it came to their funding. It hasn't respected the rights of school boards when it's come to their governance. It hasn't respected the rights of school boards when it comes to the delivery of provincial achievement tests, and the list goes on and on and on. The fact of the matter is that if they can take away taxing authority from the school boards and that didn't violate these so-called special rights of these school boards, I find it very hard to imagine that asking them to honour the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms would somehow run awry of their rights.

Moreover, though, I was very troubled by the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, for whom I often have some amount of respect. But I have to say that this notion that if we push the idea of enforcing the obligation to treat these kids equally, that will promote divisiveness: my goodness, Mr. Chair, is the exact argument that was used 40 years ago to justify the separate-but-equal laws, which did not amount to true equality. This idea that we have to very gently and carefully and diplomatically suggest that these institutions within our society, which are legislated creatures of this Legislature, by the way, who receive public funding through this Legislature, by the way, that we have to carefully and diplomatically and politely negotiate with them the obligation to treat these kids the same as kids from other minority groups troubles me greatly.

To be clear, to be very, very clear, this amendment does not achieve any of the objectives that the crocodile-tear-filled statements that have been made since our break suggest it's setting out to achieve. I would love to have the Minister of Education actually get up and engage in this debate.

Mr. Dirks: Are you serious?

Ms Notley: I'm very serious, Mr. Minister.

He's asking if I'm serious about this suggestion. Let me be very clear, Minister, I am very serious. Telling kids that to have a gay-straight alliance club, they have to leave the property of their school . . .

An Hon. Member: Nobody is saying that.

Ms Notley: Yes, you are because you are absolutely refusing to insist that it can be provided on the school property. [interjections]

The Chair: Please. To the chair. To the chair, please. Thank you.

Ms Notley: If you don't make them do it on the school property, then you are allowing them to say that it won't be on the school property. Other speakers have acknowledged that that is what's happening in this. So don't try to say that that's not what's happening in this.

For the Minister of Education to suggest that somehow I'm wrong by saying that maintaining the legislative ability of school boards to tell students that they can have their GSA meeting off the property is somehow unreasonable and somehow doesn't reflect discrimination – well, then clearly this minister needs to take an in-service on what discrimination is. He doesn't get it, and he shouldn't be in that position. I'm not at all convinced that he's capable of fulfilling any of the obligations that this amendment would suggest that he must.

So you guys have made a decision. It looked for a moment like you were on the verge of making the right decision. Clearly you've been whipped back into making the wrong decision, and

it's truly disappointing. I think the vast majority of Albertans are very, very disappointed in that as well and will be.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, what a difference a dinner break makes.

I understand that my colleagues opposite have made a decision, likely not the decision that I was hoping they were going to make. There are three things I want to say to you. One is that what's written on the amendment is not what you're all hoping is going to happen. It's just not written there. It says very clearly, "If, in a decision referred to in subsection (3), the board decides that it will not support a student in establishing the organization described." Those would be the gay-straight alliances. Why are you allowing school boards to make those decisions? You control Alberta education. This is not a part of curriculum. This is an after-class engagement. Why are you allowing different schools to treat the same students differently. If you are a sexual-minority kid over here in a public school, then you get a GSA. If you're a sexual-minority kid over here in another school, you don't. That's one.

I know that many of you really want this to be what you want it to be, but that's not what it says. It has to be written on the paper. You can't, you know, interpret this later. The judges interpret it later, and if we've done a bad job, they will interpret it in a way that – I guarantee you – you will not be happy with because they'll interpret what's written there. What is written here is not what you are fervently hoping it means, and I know that. I can feel it. I can feel how much you want this to work. It's just not there.

Two. I think when we were talking about how the Minister of Education, who is seeming particularly pleased – how nice to see a smile on his face. I think we were beginning to think in my terms, in urban terms, and we've been thinking about: "Well, that's okay. If a kid can't be accommodated here, then we can take him to central office in downtown Edmonton or downtown school board in Calgary. No big deal, right?" Except that we're not remembering the kids that are in Lacombe or Sundre or Claresholm or Fort Macleod or Wandering River or any number of other places in this wonderful province that are not going to be able to easily accommodate a group of kids somewhere else outside of their school building.

I know that you desperately want it to say that in these pages, but it doesn't say that in these pages. What I've heard from the sponsoring member is that it is hoped that the Minister of Education can work with the school board to somehow work something out, except this is the very same school board that said no. They said no using the autonomy you've granted them to say no, and they meant it. I am not sure what magical qualities you are imbued with, and you may well be. You're government. Perhaps you are imbued with magical qualities to go back to a school that you've given the autonomy to to say no and try to now convince them to say that, yes, they would allow a GSA in their school when they just said no. It's not written on the piece of paper.

This is going to be very difficult, to accommodate kids outside of urban areas. We're back into the same conversation where we have people saying: oh, this is so divisive, and it's so hostile. An hour and a half ago it didn't feel so divisive. It felt pretty much in the same place. [interjections] I am getting heckled, which is a lovely thing, Mr. Chair. But it's not going to change what's written on the piece of paper.

It's hard to be brave. It's hard to be brave. It's scary to be brave. But we're not here to be brave on behalf of ourselves; we're here to be brave on behalf of students. And I hope . . .

Ms DeLong: Then vote for it.

8:10

Ms Blakeman: I will be voting, Member for Calgary-Bow, but I won't be voting for this amendment because it's not doing what you believe it's going to do. It's just not written there. When the courts come to interpret it, if they do, they're not going to interpret it the way you're thinking.

I agree with – now, this has got to be a red-letter day – my colleague from Airdrie, that we've done nothing here. [interjections] I know. Look at him. I can't believe it. It's an amazing day. But he's absolutely right. We will end up coming out of this very long, intense, emotional session having accomplished none of the things we set out to do. We will not have mandated gay-straight alliances into schools so that every school provides them. Neither will we have made any specific ways of helping kids that find themselves left on the outside.

So I still ask you to be brave, to step out into a dangerous place and support these kids. This is no black mark against the Member for Calgary-North West. I am not saying anything bad about her. This was a difficult thing for her to do. She brought the amendment forward. You know, I'm glad that you're giving her good support. [interjections] Oh, I've touched a nerve. I can tell.

You need to vote against your colleague's amendment. I wish you would, and I wish you would be brave and step out. I encourage you to be brave and step out, even the member that sponsored it, on behalf of the kids in Alberta that really, really, really need this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Khan: Mr. Chair, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to this very, very important issue. I want to say this loud and clear. I support GSAs. I support GSAs, and I will fight for the rights of gay and lesbian students in my community, and I will fight for the rights of gay and lesbian students across this province. I will resent and I will disagree vehemently with anybody in this building or outside of this building who suggests otherwise. That's why I support Bill 10, and that's why I support this amendment.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the opposition. I want to thank the opposition for pushing this issue. This is a crucial issue, an important issue. Mr. Chair, I'd also like to take this moment to actually acknowledge that I believe this is our parliamentary system working. In my two and a half years I don't know if I've seen the parliamentary system work better than this. I think we see the opposition pushing an issue, government responding to the issue, opposition coming back and pointing out when perhaps we haven't got it quite right, and the government responding. So I want to thank the opposition for helping us deal with this issue about gay and lesbian kids having to sue the school board. That didn't feel right for us, and you did a good job in getting us over that bridge. I want to thank the opposition for that.

But what I want to point out to the opposition is that this is about governance, this is about respecting rights, this about respecting rights for gay and lesbian kids, this is about respecting rights of freedom of religion, and this is about respecting parental rights. At the end of the day, this isn't about politics; this is about governance. This is an issue about governance, and Bill 10 is a bill that speaks to good governance.

Mr. Chair, I want to thank the Member for Calgary-North West. There's been a lot of talk about bravery today on the floor of the

Assembly. I don't think there's a braver member of this Legislature. I want to talk about the difference between governance and politics. Bill 10 is governance. To suggest in any way, shape, or form that this government is trying to promote divisiveness, that this government is trying to promote the spectre of civil rights, the spectre of apartheid, that's crass politics, and that does not help this conversation. That does not help the promotion of GSAs.

Mr. Chair, I support GSAs, and every one of my colleagues in this House supports GSAs. This concept that we're trying to move GSAs outside of the school doesn't reflect the facts. We currently have 94 GSAs within Alberta schools today, and we have over 1,000 clubs that identify themselves as diversity clubs. Our objective is to have GSAs established in schools. Let's be very clear about that. Let's be very clear about that.

Mr. Chair, Bill 10 is a bill that enables; it's an enabling bill. All the time we hear from the opposition about the stick or honey, honey or the stick. This is a bill that encourages and fosters and will help promote GSAs across this province. The subtle difference between enforcement and enabling is that we are now in a position to not have to enforce, which would be divisive, which would create conflict, which would create strife in Alberta, which would create the spectre and possibilities of lawsuits in Alberta. We are enabling, and we are encouraging, and we are promoting GSAs. I promote GSAs.

The Chair: You're speaking to the amendment, amendment A2?

Mr. Khan: I am speaking to the amendment, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Khan: This amendment, Mr. Chair, will help Bill 10 work for my community.

One of the things we're not talking about is how this amendment will put GSAs in the hands of the school boards. The school boards have elected trustees. They represent the will of the people. I know this will work in my community because I've spoken to my school board trustees. I've let the school board trustees know that GSAs will be an election issue come next election time for our school board trustees. I have three high schools in my community. These high schools compete vigorously for students. Those trustees compete vigorously for students. I know and my constituents know and the school board trustees know that if they do not promote GSAs, it will adversely affect their enrolments.

Mr. Chair, I have a 16-year-old son and a 13-year-old daughter. As many folks in here have stated before me, this is a nonissue for that generation. This is an absolute nonissue for that generation. They don't understand why we're talking about this. I've heard many people from the opposition, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain-House-Sundre, say that for people 35 and under this is a nonissue, and they don't understand why we're talking about it. I strongly agree.

Mr. Chair, I absolutely believe that if a school board is not going to support GSAs – let me rephrase that. I have those three high schools. If one of those high schools in my community does not support GSAs, if one of those high schools in my community is painted as an intolerant institution, 15-year-olds, 16-year-olds will not want to go to that school. I believe in the youth of Alberta, and I believe in Albertans. I believe that when it comes to an issue of electing school board trustees and we put the will into the hands of Albertans, they will elect school board trustees that promote GSAs. They will elect the school boards that they deserve.

Mr. Chair, I support GSAs. My colleagues support GSAs. My colleagues believe in Albertans. What I'm hearing from some of the opposition is that they don't believe in Albertans. They don't believe that Albertans will do the right thing and support GSAs. Mr. Chair, I believe in GSAs. Every one of my colleagues in this House believes in GSAs, and that's why I'm calling for the vote on this amendment.

Thank you very much.

8:20

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Chair: Hon. member, just for the benefit of the members of the committee, I heard you call for the vote, but under Standing Order 65(1)(a) members may speak more than once, so I can only call the vote after all that wish to speak have indicated so.

I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll try to keep my comments brief. I do want to mention that I'm not sure what was in the food that my colleagues from the other side ate, but it completely transformed, it seems, my colleagues on the other side.

You know, more seriously, I want to say that for the first time since I've been elected in this Legislature, I had a glimmer of hope from the words spoken by a few of the PC MLAs seeing how wrong this amendment is and their position to vote against it. I had a glimmer of hope that maybe through debate and discussion and through the stories that people told, their personal stories about how they had been discriminated against in one form or another, they couldn't support this bill. You know, words can't express my disappointment coming back after the dinner break to see how quickly those feelings had either subsided or changed or been whipped out of them.

You know, I find it rich when members stand up and say, "I support GSAs," but then their actions are the complete opposite, where you're not supporting students who want to have GSAs by allowing boards to block them at will for whatever reason. To me, this issue that we're debating is about equality of rights, and I don't know what parallel universe I've stepped into that this is a debate. I mean, again, just look at what Albertans are saying. It's a no-brainer. Why is this even being debated? If students want to form an after school club, let them.

I do want to just make a quick comment to the hon. Member for St. Albert. He said that he believes in the youth, and the youth are going to make changes, and he talked about the boards. Last time I checked, hon. member, 15- and 16-year-olds couldn't vote, so I'm not sure how they're going to change the boards in order to elect boards that are going to allow GSAs. That's a whole other issue.

What I do want to mention, Mr. Chair, something that maybe hon. members from this Legislature can learn from a group of young people, is that tonight the Edmonton Youth Council had a rigorous debate about this bill, and the vote was 14 to 1 against the bill. You've got young people in this province discussing this who know what they need and what their friends need in order to support all Alberta students, yet in this Legislature it's mystifying, really, how few members understand the implications of this amendment. I know others have eloquently spoken to it, but it's essentially a discrimination clause.

The fact of the matter is that if people stand up and say that you support GSAs, then actually support all students everywhere having the right to have GSAs, not allowing boards or parents or

others to block them. I have yet to hear a coherent argument of how an after school, extracurricular club infringes on the rights of parents or other kids. I mean, kids' parents don't have to go to that club. The fact of the matter is that if we want to create a truly inclusive society, then everyone should be treated equally, and they're not. The reality is that we were for a moment and we are even right now at a very historic moment in time when we can bring Alberta into the 21st century, and we can truly effect change and ensure that students everywhere have equal rights.

You know, I've got to say, hon. members, that it's disappointing to come back and clearly see that the tone of the Legislature has changed and we seem to have gone backwards about 10 steps.

Dr. Swann: Dad, phone home.

Mr. Bilous: Well, daddy's got a long arm.

I'll urge members of the Assembly to vote against this amendment and against this bill. Let's get rid of it, and let's bring in legislation that truly empowers our youth and young people and treats them with the dignity, the respect, and equality that they deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There's a saying: when you dig a hole, stop digging.

I rise to speak against the amendment to Bill 10 for a number of reasons. We have to examine how we got here in the first place. How we got here in the first place is that every Monday – you know, the government has a lot of bills they can propose. They control the agenda. Every Monday a private member from either the government or the opposition parties can bring forward a bill or an idea that we'd like to debate democratically. In this situation the hon. member for the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre brought forward a bill, an idea, something that would make this a better province and a better society, a more inclusive society. This was a private member's bill that was brought forward.

The governing party did all that it possibly could within its power to ensure that the private member's bill would not be brought before the Legislative Assembly to be debated. We had questions for returns. Gosh, they debated the questions for returns for hours. So we asked you to remove our questions for returns so we could bring the bill forward. They ran out the . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, on the amendment.

Dr. Sherman: I'm speaking to the amendment. I'm speaking on the amendment, Mr. Chair, but I have to give you the context of how we got here.

How we got here was that it was a private member's bill. They didn't want it heard. So we pulled our questions for returns. The bill was going to come up on Monday. The only way for the government to not have the bill heard was to introduce a similar bill and pass it through first and second readings – and you know the rules, Mr. Chair – which means that the hon. member's bill would fall off the Order Paper. That's what this is all about.

I call this weasel politics. Weasel politics is what this was. They're using every legislative tool that they have so a private member cannot bring forward an idea on the legislative floor because it's an opposition member. That's how Bill 10 even came in. In fact, they had to rush, and on the back of a napkin, God knows where in this province, scratch something forward that even they think was a bad thing. So they are amending their own

bill, which was ill-conceived and flawed and made on the back of a napkin. Again, the amendment is something that they made on the back of a napkin. That's premise number one.

Premise number two. I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-North West for attempting to help dig her team out of a hole. That's what she's trying to do. She's trying to help them dig out of a hole. Mr. Chair, the whole point is that these young people who are lesbian, gay, queer, transgendered, or bisexual want to have their own peer support group in the schools because they don't feel like they have peer support groups, whether they're at home or in the churches or in the communities. It's their special club at school. The people who influence children are the parents, their peer group, the teachers, or their elders, other people in their communities.

8:30

The school is a special little place for young people, and we were all there. We have clubs, all sorts of clubs. Mr. Chair, where in this country, if you can't have your club, do you have to go to the board – you know, the stuffy old people that were elected by your parents – many of them who disagree with the practice of these young people and the way they're born? Where else do young people have to go to stuffy old people, democratically elected, to get their permission? Failing that, they have to go to some stuffy old minister on that side to get approval. God knows where.

Young 14-, 15-year-old kids: look, they want to go to school, and they want to study. They want to play. They want to play their sports. They want to hang out. They don't want to go meet board members and politicians to get special permission. All this bill does is put more obstacles in their place. These poor young kids are already struggling with their sexuality. They're already struggling with teenage years, my dear friends. Some of these might even be your kids or your neighbours' kids or your brothers' and sisters' kids or your cousins' kids. Do you seriously want them to go talk to a minister, to have the minister come down and say: hey, you school board, thou shall do this?

It's our duty as provincial legislators. The national legislators of this country brought in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. These are the rules that govern us as a country. It's our duty as provincial legislators to pass an inclusive law that makes it easier for these young people to associate together in a democratic and free country. We should make it easier for our school board trustees, not put them in a situation where suddenly they're stuck between, you know, some religious right-wing conservatives and some progressive people in their community. Suddenly they're caught in the middle. We don't need to have these problems with 62 different school boards and however many different school divisions.

Mr. Chair, I want to remind everybody that the reason we're talking about this is because the government's weasel politics would not allow this hon. member's bill onto the floor. They're digging holes, and this is getting even worse. They're putting barriers in front of our children that desperately need some help. Frankly, these kids are not going to step forward, and I doubt that they're going to come and talk to the school boards in rural Alberta and other parts of Alberta, let alone talk to the legislators. They certainly don't want that scrutiny. It's only going to make their problem worse.

Mr. Chair, I would ask the hon. members from the government side to reconsider. I believe that your intentions are good, but I also believe that you don't have the political courage to do the right thing. You're trying to do it, but I don't believe you have the courage.

Ms Blakeman: Prove him wrong.

Dr. Sherman: Hon. member, I hope they will prove me wrong.

Please prove me wrong and vote against this amendment. This is not an inclusive amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Very briefly, Mr. Chair. This whole debate began, ironically enough, with an act of bullying. It was the bullying that I've seen over and over again since I've come to this place, the bullying by the majority of opposition parties. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre was treated in a most deplorable fashion, not even allowed to speak to her bill, a bill that the Premier a few days ago had said publicly would be a free vote on the part of the Progressive Conservative caucus. He said that there would be a free vote on Bill 202. Well, I suppose he was right in a way, Mr. Chairman, because we were free of a vote on Bill 202 because of the obstructionist tactics of the Progressive Conservative majority in this House.

So we move on to the government bill, Bill 10, which is terribly flawed and has created quite a firestorm in the last few days, which is precisely why the hon. Member for Calgary-North West introduced the amendment today. Now, since the supper break, when we know the Tory caucus was meeting to discuss their response to this amendment and to this bill, it's become clear that people who were passionately speaking not only against the bill but against the amendment as well have now changed their tune. That's par for the course as well, Mr. Chairman. Almost everyone on the other side who has spoken since we've come back started out by saying: I support GSAs. You know, they repeat it over and over again. The Minister of Service Alberta must have said that about six times in his speech.

Mr. Chairman, the point is this: they don't get it. This is not about supporting GSAs. Ultimately, this is about supporting equality, and that includes the right of students who may be gay or have gay friends to form a club like any other kid in their school, which is being denied by the bill, which now gives the ultimate authority over that matter to the school board, no longer appealable to the courts, which was an absurd thing in the first place. So then the minister is supposed to come in and rescue them and save them. That's absurd. It's absolutely ridiculous that we would have to get to the point where students who want to start a club in a junior high or a high school have to appeal to a minister of the Crown in order to be able to do so.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North West, when she was pressed before supper, admitted that they would not be necessarily allowed to have their GSA meeting in their school. That gave rise to the basic criticism of the amendment, which still stands, that it is essentially segregation. It's a separate but equal approach: yes, you can have your club, but you have to go somewhere else to do it. You know, that is not equality. That is not treating LGBTQ students the same as every other student. That is discriminatory. It's separate, maybe not so equal. That, I think, Mr. Chairman, is and remains the fundamental problem with this amendment, as they're trying to fix a bill that was so badly flawed in the first place that it probably cannot be fixed.

I urge members to cut out the nonsense about supporting GSAs and support equality. That's what we expect of our MLAs, and that's what we're not getting with this bill or with this amendment.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Before I recognize the next speaker, may I just remind all members that while the rules of committee allow each member to speak one, two, three, four, five times, I would hope that when you speak – in this case we're dealing with amendment A2. If you would attempt to keep your comments to the amendment, I would really appreciate it.

Thank you.

Mr. Kang: I will be short. I will be brief. Mr. Chair, it's an honour to speak again to the amendment on the bill. We have been hearing from my colleagues from all sides of the House that they all support GSAs. The younger generation: they don't care. People under 35: they don't care. So why are we debating this? Why are we playing all these tactics here? You know, let's give it to the students who want GSAs in schools, and let's move on. Why are we here? Let's give them the right to form the GSAs so we can stop the bullying, we can stop the discrimination, we can stop these suicidal thoughts that the members of the LGBTQ community are having. Those students: let's help them out.

We haven't heard from the Minister of Education, his thoughts on this. It would be helpful if he stood up and shed some light on this, too, where he stands on this. That would be helpful.

8:40

Let's move on. Let's give it to them. Who are we to impose our will on the younger generation? We are saying, on the one hand, that they don't care, and then we are imposing our will on them. Why? Let's move on. Let's vote down this amendment. Let's vote down this bill, and we'll probably bring in Bill 202: simple, straightforward. Let's get it done.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to stand – you know, we got a chance over the supper hour to also take a look at this amendment and discuss it as a caucus. I want to make it very clear why it is difficult for our caucus to support this amendment.

I want to start by saying that, in our view, certainly in my view, there's a lot in Bill 10 that the government got right. I agree very much with adding parental rights into the Bill of Rights. I think that was an excellent, excellent thing for the Premier to do. I agree with the Premier's decision and the government's decision to take the term "sexual orientation" out of the notification clause and replace it with just "religion" and "sexuality." I think that's more inclusive. It gets to the same subject matter anyway when we're talking about sex education and so forth. I think that was the right thing to do. I think that adding "sexual orientation" officially into the Bill of Rights was definitely again the right thing to do in Bill 10. I think that that was correct. All those things I believe the Premier and his government got right. I also really respect the fact that there was an attempt in Bill 10 to make it clear that we do respect the local autonomy of locally elected school boards. I think that is important.

Here's the issue that I have with the amendment and why it's so hard to support it. I think that if you're going to respect local autonomy, if you're going to say: look, we want to permit Catholic schools and other faith-based schools – and it's not just Christian private schools; there are other religious private schools and so forth. If we want to protect their local autonomy and allow them to create a program both with their curriculum and with their extracurricular activities in everything that is consistent with their views and their values and the culture of their faith – if you're

going to do that, we still have to recognize that in some cases in those schools there are kids that are going to be bullied.

Kids can be bullied in any school, not just those schools. There are situations where they will be bullied, and particularly what we're talking about now is that it's LGBTQ students that will be bullied. We all agree with that reality, that it does happen. So we have to say: okay; if we're going to respect local autonomy, which is good, we also have to make sure that we're ensuring the protection of the students involved in the bullying. The problem I have with this amendment is that I just don't see how it accomplishes that. That's the difficulty I have with this part of the bill.

I think that we could sit down and do a much better job of crafting legislation that would actually protect local autonomy, allow our faith-based educators to teach their faith according to the dictates of their conscience and their religion and so forth, all of that, but still pass amendments that would ensure that the child, who in some circumstances is being bullied because they are LGBTQ youth, will have protection and will have a support strategy. That's why we very carefully as a caucus for days – it felt like years at times – constructed a set of amendments that would try to accomplish that.

That's why earlier today we proposed an amendment which specifically said that if a GSA application request is denied by a faith-based school, the school must work collaboratively with the requesting student to provide a bona fide antibullying or alternative support strategy that meets the needs of that student. That would ensure no matter what that if a student says, "You know, I'm being bullied, and I want to start a GSA; I need help," that if that is a problem for whatever reason for that faith-based school, the obligation is still on the school to say: okay; let's sit down and work collaboratively with the student to address the bullying situation head-on, to make sure that there's a support strategy, whatever that looks like. It could be a hundred different types of support strategy and so forth.

I don't think it's enough to just say: you know, the board says no. Then you go to the Education minister, and the Education minister says: "Okay. Well, I'll set up a GSA. If it has the school's approval, it will be on the school site. If it doesn't, it will be off the school site." Or whatever it looks like. I just don't think that's getting to the core problem, which is, really, protecting the kids that are involved in the bullying. That's what I think needs to be addressed.

We also brought a very clear amendment forward that proposed that if the school board was mandated to create this alternative strategy working collaboratively with the student and that if for some reason it still failed in that regard and didn't do a good enough job, then the student wouldn't have to go to a court application process to appeal that – because we all know that's impossible for a student to do – but they would be able to go to the Ministry of Education and appear before a panel, consisting of three people appointed by the minister, to review the decision of the board with respect to their decision not to allow the GSA. Then that board could either confirm the decision of the board or make recommendations back to the school board regarding steps that could be taken to adequately support and protect the students involved.

Those were the amendments that we brought forward because we thought that these amendments would, in our view, make Bill 10 a bill that we could wholeheartedly support. Certainly, the majority of us in our caucus could wholeheartedly support it. What's frustrating is that without these amendments it makes it very, very difficult to support the bill because the protection aspect is not being addressed. You know, at the end of the day if

you strip everything out of this discussion, really, the most important part is the protection of the kids that are experiencing the bullying. If we're not taking care of that part, then it makes it very difficult to support the bill.

Now, I want to make it very clear that I don't believe for a second that not agreeing to the amendments that we proposed earlier or not agreeing with what I'm saying right now in any way is making the government members intolerant of LGBTQ students or youth. I don't buy that. That, to me, is not fair. It's not accurate. I know most of the folks over there just as I know most of the folks on the opposition side with the Libs and New Democrats, and I have yet to meet one that is an intolerant person and is in any way bigoted. I just haven't. That's not the reasoning. There's no doubt in my mind that that's not the reason for rejecting these amendments.

But the government does need to understand that without these amendments being put in, without these protections for LGBTQ students, it's going to make it very difficult for us in the Wildrose caucus, who have put a lot of time and effort into trying to find that balance that everyone is talking about. Then just to have that part rejected out of hand, it's very difficult for us to now go and support – well, certainly this amendment but to support the bill because it's not being addressed.

Again, I invite the government to please – there's no reason why we can't adjourn debate tonight and come together as a group and figure out a set of amendments that will actually accomplish what we're going for here, which is the protection of LGBTQ youth, while still respecting local autonomy. I think we can get there. I think, you know, the intent is there, but I just feel that the delivery mechanism here is not the right one.

8:50

You know, there's no point in being here until 3 in the morning debating clauses on this bill. We could put together an amendment here that works. But just ramming this one through doesn't work, Mr. Chair. We might not get this chance because the problem is that if we pass this amendment – and this also makes it difficult to support – then it takes away our ability to amend sections 2 and 3, which are the main parts of the bill with regard to dealing with the bullying problem around LGBTQ youth. We won't be able to bring any further amendments, so at that point I don't know what we're debating anymore.

Again, I just would ask the government to please reconsider. Let's put this on the table. Let's adjourn debate on it. [interjection] Maybe you don't agree with me, but I would like to adjourn debate on this bill and come together and find a solution that's actually going to protect our LGBTQ youth and students and all those other important issues and rights.

With that, I am going to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Chair: We will continue with debate on amendment A2. No other speakers?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:52 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

For the motion:

Allen	Goudreau	Olesen
Bhardwaj	Horne	Olson
Brown	Jansen	Quadri
Cao	Johnson, J.	Quest
Dallas	Kennedy-Glans	Rodney
DeLong	Khan	Sandhu
Denis	Klimchuk	Starke
Dirks	Kubinec	Towle
Drysdale	Mandel	VanderBurg
Ellis	McDonald	Weadick
Fawcett	McIver	Xiao
Fenske	McQueen	Young
Fritz	Oberle	

Against the motion:

Anderson	Fox	Notley
Anglin	Griffiths	Pedersen
Bilous	Kang	Sherman
Blakeman	Lukaszuk	Swann
Donovan	Mason	Wilson
Eggen	McAllister	

Totals: For – 38 Against – 17

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd like to move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration Bill 10. The committee reports progress on Bill 10. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? That is carried.

9:00 Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 10

12. Mr. Denis moved:
Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, is resumed, not more than two hours shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, this motion is debatable. The standing orders provide for five minutes from the Official Opposition.

The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Anderson: Really quick. Boilerplate opposition, it says. There you go. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Please proceed, hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Anderson: Sorry. They're really distracting me over there right now. I don't know what it is.

You know, I think, obviously, I would have preferred to do an adjournment here tonight so that we could all go home and talk about it. It's 9 o'clock. We could come back tomorrow, and we could debate it further and maybe have a better bill with regard to Bill 10, but I guess we're going to be invoking closure. Closure obviously isn't one of, I think, the best things to do in our parliamentary democracy, especially after just a couple of hours of debate. It is a reality that we have dealt with many, many, many times in opposition. I think that, obviously, we would like to see – again, I really wish we could adjourn debate and get a good bill done here, but the government has invoked closure. They've done it before. I'm sure they'll do it again.

With that, I'll pass it off to someone whose boilerplate arguments . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Nope. That's it. It's just five minutes to yourself, hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Anderson: Oh, I understand that, but what I'm going to do, what I'm proposing – I am just saying that . . . [interjections] You want me to be more angry. I'm just kidding.

Obviously, I don't think we should do closure, Mr. Speaker. That's it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader has moved Government Motion 12.

[Motion carried]

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 12 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:03 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allen	Goudreau	Oberle
Bhardwaj	Horne	Olesen
Brown	Jansen	Olson
Calahasen	Johnson, J.	Pastoor
Cao	Kennedy-Glans	Quadri
Dallas	Khan	Quest
Denis	Klimchuk	Rodney
Dirks	Kubinec	Sandhu
Donovan	Lemke	Starke
Drysdale	Luan	Towle
Ellis	Mandel	VanderBurg
Fawcett	McDonald	Weadick
Fenske	McIver	Xiao
Fritz	McQueen	Young

Against the motion:

Anderson	Eggen	Notley
Anglin	Fox	Pedersen
Bilous	Kang	Sherman
Blakeman	Mason	Swann

Totals: For – 42 Against – 12

[Government Motion 12 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: I would want to bring a motion again for one-minute bells. Would this be the appropriate time to do so, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: One-minute bells for committee. Again, for the annunciation of the House, if we move back into the House, another motion would be necessary at that time to change the time of the bells. So as we move into committee, I'll recognize you, and we'll have that motion immediately.

Mr. Denis: Thank you.

Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

The Chair: I'll call the Committee of the Whole to order, and I'll recognize the Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. At this time I would like to ask for unanimous consent of the House for all bells for the rest of evening in Committee of the Whole to have a one-minute interval.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Bill 10
An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights
to Protect our Children
(continued)

The Chair: With that, we're back to Bill 10, and I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona an amendment to Bill 10. I will send to the table prepared copies for distribution.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be amendment A3, and I have been advised by Parliamentary Counsel that this is in order, so, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you may speak to amendment A3.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I will move that Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, be amended by striking out section 5.

Now, just to speak to that, it is on page 12 of the bill in case anyone is having difficulty because there's another section 5 earlier, on page 6, that we definitely are not moving. This section currently reads:

Coming into force

5 Section 3, except subsections (1), (8)(b) and (12),
comes into force on March 1, 2015.

Mr. Chairman, the amendment deals with the application of this act to private schools. Section 5 allows certain sections of this act with regard to antibullying measures to come into force on the 1st of March, 2015, in private schools. Our amendment will require that private schools implement antibullying measures, including the one regarding GSAs, upon Royal Assent.

9:20

These schools receive government funding. In the 2013 budget funding for private full-day kindergarten was increased by more than the funding for public schools. Public schools receive no funding for kindergarten. Private school full-day kindergarten had their funding increased by 11.6 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, Albertans pay for these schools, and Albertans want to protect students in their schools, which include these private schools. As a result, we feel that these schools should not be exempt from antibullying legislation for any extended period of time. We think that the issue of dealing with bullying is simply too important to wait, so the exemption as it applies to private schools is removed by this amendment. We would respectfully suggest to all members opposite and on this side that as these schools are publicly funded, we have every right to expect that they will comply with antibullying legislation, the same as schools in the public system.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Speaking to the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to stand in support of this amendment. Once again we're dealing with some element of discrimination. I mean, how would we expect to be a Legislature without applying consistently our commitment to human rights, whether it's in a public school, a separate school, a private school? These are all in whole or in part funded by the public purse. They're all required to follow Alberta curriculum. They're all required to follow the basic Charter of Rights, the Constitutional rights that we've all endorsed as legislators. It makes no sense to exempt some aspect of the school system from these important values and principles. There's no place for separating out private schools, which are 70 per cent publicly funded. There's no way that this should not be accepted, and possibly we can find some kind of redemption for this Bill 10.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak in favour of this amendment. You know, I find it interesting that now we're dealing with a different piece of the bill, yet it still seems to be the same conversation: whether we truly believe in equity and applying the same rules across the board.

This amendment really amends the bill to apply to private schools. Now, as the two former speakers have said, private schools receive a considerable amount of public funding. In fact, they receive 70 per cent of what public schools receive even though they are private. This amendment ensures that private schools are also, you know, obligated in regard to antibullying measures. I mean, at the end of the day, Mr. Chair, you know, there are, obviously, LGBTQ students everywhere, in all schools, so we want to ensure that these students are protected and that there is a level of – I mean, I want to take it beyond respect, to ensure that the private schools are not being exempted from antibullying legislation. Again, you know, the spirit of this amendment is to promote equality and to ensure that we don't have different rules or that one school can discriminate over a group of students. Again, students need to be protected, to have safe spaces no matter where they're going.

Many of the arguments that have been given this evening deal with human rights and the fact that protecting our students should

span across all religions, races, genders, ages, and sexual orientations. We want to make sure that this important issue isn't overlooked. Again, the bill the way it's currently written, you could have some private schools wiggling out of their responsibility to ensure that students aren't bullied based on sexual orientation, perceived sexual orientation, or gender identity. So I will encourage all members of the Assembly to support this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Speaking to the amendment, the hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: I've read this over. This is the first time I've seen the amendment, and I'm trying to quickly peruse through. I'm not quite seeing how this exempts private schools from these things. Maybe it's just that I need more time to cross-reference everything and figure it out, but I'm just reading it. I'm not seeing how that would exempt private schools from this bill. I mean, maybe I can get an explanation from the government side on that, but I'm not seeing it. So until I understand it, until our caucus understands it, I don't think that we are comfortable supporting it.

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: We are back to the bill. Are there any other speakers to the bill?

Mr. Mason: I have another amendment, Mr. Chairman, on behalf of my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona, which I will provide to the table, including copies for all members.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be amendment A4, and again this amendment is in order.

This has been moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and you may speak to it, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, I will move on behalf of my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona that Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect Our Children, be amended in section 1(2) by striking out clause (a) and substituting the following:

(a) by striking out "or sex" and substituting " , sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression"; and I'll speak briefly to that.

The amendment seeks to go beyond the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Alberta Bill of Rights to also include gender identity and gender expression. There is a developing understanding of LGBTQ issues beyond traditional, narrow categories: gay, straight, and so on. It's increasingly clear and the research is increasingly showing that there's a whole continuum of individuals with a variety of orientations and identities relative to their gender or how they express their gender, and that is something that we are trying to capture here.

9:30

It's an opportunity, I think, for the government to show real leadership rather than continuing the horrific record of this government with regard to the rights of certain Albertans. It has also been proposed at the federal level. We think that this is an opportunity to show some real leadership to support the rights not

only of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer Albertans but also for transgendered Albertans, Mr. Chairman, whose rights have not yet been recognized but would be should gender identity and gender expression be included.

Mr. Chairman, this is an attempt to be more inclusive, to not leave other people at the side of the road when we are trying to protect people's rights. It needs to go beyond, you know, the traditional definitions and make sure that all Albertans, regardless of their sexual identity, sexual orientation, or how they express their gender, are protected from discrimination. That is, again, what this is about. This is about protecting people from discrimination, which is the objective, of course, of the Alberta Bill of Rights.

We feel that we should be expanding this definition to become more inclusive. I would hope that all members will see the benefit of doing so and will support our amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Speaking to the amendment, the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Yes. I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for suggesting this. My department is currently looking into the issue of adding gender identity as prohibited grounds for discrimination in our Human Rights Act. I do think that this is something we should do, and we'll likely see some legislation in the near future in this respect. I should note that the Human Rights Commission already sees items of gender identity as being under the heading of sexual orientation, so this would just be clarifying the further intent to protect all Albertans from discrimination regardless of any of those enumerated characteristics in the Human Rights Act.

Where I'm not really clear, though, is on gender expression. I would have to do some more research because I have not heard that particular term. I definitely support the intent of the amendment from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, but I would have to do some further research on gender expression.

On gender identity: I think you can look forward to that in the next session.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will thank the Justice minister for engaging in discussion on this.

I will attempt to answer your question. Well, I'll start off by answering your question. I think this amendment is very important. Gender expression is how a person chooses to express themselves vis-à-vis their look, their clothes. It's how they choose to express their gender, which is different, and that's why it's drawn out and why we're pulling it out. Gender expression and gender identity are separate from LGBTQ. When we say the LGBTQ community, to make it truly inclusive, then we need to talk not just about sexual orientation, but it's also talking about gender, gender identity, gender expression.

I appreciate that the minister's department is working on this. I think this is a very significant yet small amendment that will make a difference to many Albertans, so I will encourage the minister to support this.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you. Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, thank you very much for your comments. I definitely agree with where you're going here, and I agree with your sentiment and your spirit. I'm pretty much there with respect to gender identity, but again I just would want to do some further research on the gender

expression issue. You likely will see some amendments to our Human Rights Act, as I mentioned in my previous exchange, dealing with gender identity even though the Human Rights Commission does recognize that as de facto prohibited grounds of discrimination already.

The Chair: Are there other speakers to the amendment?

Back to the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Yes, and I'll thank the minister for his comments. Again, I appreciate that the minister is talking about amending the Human Rights Act to include this, which I do think would be a very positive step forward. I am excited to hear that, and I look forward to it.

I just want to emphasize, you know, that while we're in the middle of discussing this bill, we do have an opportunity, until those amendments come forward in the future, to ensure that all students, all people regardless of how they identify are included. I think that, honestly, this would be a great first step forward. I know that folks from the LGBTQ community, the sexual minority community, would very much appreciate seeing a bold step forward in advance of an amendment to the Human Rights Act. This amendment, I feel, is reasonable but, again, as the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood said, an opportunity for us to show leadership, to take a real step forward, again acknowledging transgendered Albertans and specifically naming that community, whose rights have not yet been recognized.

You know, I think it's important to make this step. I have friends that are transgendered. I have friends that express themselves differently depending on the day, and I know that they have felt very, very silenced. When we look at not just pieces of legislation, but when we look at the Charter and we look at the documents that protect the rights of everyone, they do feel excluded that they are not named or listed in that. I think this is an opportunity to take a step forward.

I appreciate the minister wanting to further explore gender expression, but I think we have a real opportunity here, Mr. Chair, and I hope that the Minister of Justice will take advantage of this opportunity and seek to incorporate this amendment into Bill 10.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I also agree with the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that by striking out "or sex" and substituting "sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression," that will make it broad. It will make it more inclusive. If the Justice minister is thinking about, you know, amending the Human Rights Act, I think this will be a step in the right direction. We won't have to come back to change the Bill of Rights if we do it now. I think we have the opportunity, and let's get it done.

I'll support this amendment because it will make it more broad and more inclusive. I think we have the opportunity. We should accept this amendment and fix this, you know, once and for all.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. This is an interesting amendment because by seeking to amend section 1(2) in Bill 10, which, for anybody following along at home, is amending the Alberta Bill of Rights – that's actually on the Queen's

Printer website. You should go have a look at it. I actually did and downloaded it. Well, you know, sometimes you see things, and you ask yourself: what on earth is that?

9:40

In fact, the Alberta Bill of Rights is – there it is – two pages, four sections. Not much to it. According to the history that I read, it was an attempt by the province to establish its own Charter of Rights, and it was done in 1983, so just after the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was brought into place. It's never actually used and rarely referred to, which is why so many people were saying: "What bill of rights? You mean the Alberta human rights code? What are you talking about, Alberta Bill of Rights?"

Nobody ever refers to it. There's a reason for that. There's nothing in the Alberta Bill of Rights that requires compliance, that says that you have to do this or that has an enforcement mechanism where they chase you down and say, you know, "Not only are you doing it, complying with it, but you must, and we're going to make you" or that has a penalty clause that says that if you don't do it, "Here's what you're going to pay; here's the fine" or whatever. Boy, I feel like I've already said this to you guys, and I apologize if I have. But, seriously, for anyone that doesn't want to comply with the Alberta Bill of Rights, so what? Nothing is going to happen to you. It doesn't matter. Nobody is going to check up on you. Nobody is going to chase you down. You're not going to get a fine or a penalty or anything. It's just a nice saying. It's a nice piece of paper that says some nice things.

I appreciate that my colleague for Edmonton-Strathcona is attempting to clearly define – because who doesn't love clarity, especially in legislation? – what we mean when the government is trying to add "sexual orientation" into this bill of rights. The odd bit of this is that the government is amending this through Bill 10 to add in "sexual orientation" under their first section.

1 It is hereby recognized and declared that in Alberta there exist without discrimination by reason of race, national origin, colour, religion or sex . . .

And, of course, in here they're going to add "sexual orientation."

. . . the following human rights and fundamental freedoms, namely . . .

And then it goes through:

- (a) the right of the individual to liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property, and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law;
- (b) . . . equality before the law and the protection of the law;
- (c) freedom of religion;
- (d) freedom of speech;
- (e) freedom of assembly and association.

That's as far as it goes in the little extra bill I've got.

The government has attempted to put "sexual orientation" into the first section, Recognition and Declaration of Rights and Freedoms, which amendment A3 – yes? – is attempting to clarify by exactly what we mean.

The Chair: Amendment A4, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Oh. Sorry. A4.

See, the odd bit of this is that despite this piece of paper that has no compliance, enforcement, or penalty to it, the government has put "sexual orientation" in the top, under Recognition and Declaration of Rights and Freedoms, but then – this is not derogatory – in the bottom they're putting in at the end of section 1 under that same Recognition and Declaration of Rights and Freedoms "the right of parents to make informed decisions respecting the education of their children."

It's a really odd combo because there's nothing else in there that talks about any other specific function of government. You would think that once they've added in education, if they're going to start that list, then wouldn't there be the right to, you know, timely access to health care, reasonable access to advanced education, support for maintenance of infrastructure so that buildings don't fall down on our heads? There's a whole list of things. If you're going to open this up and start talking about different departments like Education and adding them in, then you could be adding in a whole bunch of stuff. So that one sits really uneasily with me.

It just doesn't make sense, and it looks like it was done to appease two different parties but not very well done. I think that in the end it doesn't really – well, to my mind, it doesn't appease people very well because it doesn't actually give them what they're looking for.

I'm perfectly willing to support what my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona is attempting to do here by adding into that beginning part that I've already read to you: without discrimination by reason of race, national origin, colour, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Very specific list there. Fine by me. You know, it helps people understand exactly what we're talking about. It's just that I wish that this was a more substantial bill of rights, that it actually meant something or did something or stood for something. But it seems to be this kind of dusty, forgotten piece of paper that has been dragged out to try and make it look like the government is including something that, in fact, it's not including.

I'm willing to support this amendment, but I still question the point of adding to the Bill of Rights seeing as it doesn't make any difference to what's actually happening.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's an unexpected pleasure tonight to introduce three guests: first, Councillor Andrew Knack from Edmonton city council, who, as I understand it – I'm kind of, you know, freelancing here – is the adviser to the Edmonton Youth Council. Is that correct? Claire Edwards, who, many of you know, was a page here for a number of years, is the chairman of the Edmonton Youth Council.

Ms Blakeman: Chairwoman.

Mr. Mason: What did I say?

Ms Blakeman: You said "chairman."

Mr. Mason: Did I? Oh, my goodness. I'm terribly sorry. And tonight of all nights.

The Youth Council tonight passed a motion 14 to 1 opposing Bill 10, just so members might know.

Also, I'd like to introduce Richard Feehan, who is the NDP candidate in Edmonton-Rutherford in the next election. I'd invite all members to give them the very warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Bill 10

An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children (continued)

The Chair: Are there other speakers on amendment A4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Yes. Very briefly. I'm glad that this amendment has been brought forward. I think that the Member for Edmonton-Centre rightly identifies that the relevance of amending the Bill of Rights is sometimes questionable given its actual role as a legal document in the province. Nonetheless, that's what the government chose to do, so we thought it was an opportunity, therefore, to ensure that the list of prohibitive grounds for discrimination should be expanded upon to reflect changes that are occurring throughout the country. For instance, we know that the federal government is considering language like this as well. We are proposing, of course, to add gender identity and gender expression.

The two are not the same. Gender identity I think refers to the internal experience of the person in question and how that might ultimately govern their life whereas gender expression doesn't necessarily mean that you have an unexpected gender identity. At least this is my understanding. For instance, you know, we recently had a case not too long ago, I think last week or two weeks ago, where there was a euphemistically termed individual, a drag queen, who was refused service by a cab company. Just a day or two ago I think it was. That, for instance, is an example of gender expression, and one ought not be discriminated against as a result of one's gender expression, which may or may not be related to one's gender identity. That's why the language is framed the way it is, gender identity as well as gender expression.

By making this amendment, it would allow this Assembly to bring the language it uses in the Bill of Rights up to date, and it will allow them, heaven forbid, to get ahead of the curve, interestingly, in relation to this conversation that's going on with respect to human rights codes across the country. That is why we thought we would introduce the notion here today through this amendment, and I urge my colleagues to support us in the proposal.

Thank you.

9:50

The Chair: Are there other speakers to amendment A4?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: We're back to the main bill.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Hi, Mr. Chair. At the table you have an amendment from me, and if I could get that distributed now? I even managed to pass you the one that has the signature on it.

So, happy people, as I often say: some days I walk up that hill to try and do good, and some days I walk up that hill to try and have things go a little less badly. This is one of the little less badly parts. The amendment that I'm proposing to Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect Our Children – gee, that's an interesting title, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: This will be A5, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So my amendment is now A5.

You know, that's interesting. I just noticed on this title that it talks about the Bill of Rights, but that's actually a very small part of what this bill actually does amend.

Any of you that have been following along with me – and I'm sure you hang on every word – will know how important the specificity of language is to me. One of the things that I was warned about as I was preparing for Bill 202 was to be very careful with the word "sexuality," and I'm trying to help the government be very careful with the word "sexuality." So this section to be amended is 2(5), which is the section that starts out under Division 2, Bullying Awareness and Non-discrimination. For anybody following along, if you flip the page over so you're now on page 3, this is the parental opt-out section that's actually in the Education Act which, of course, is coming into effect in September 2015. The existing School Act is what is covering us right now, but I just thought to be clean I would just go straight to the Education Act.

So under section 58.1(1), this is where:

A board shall provide notice to a parent of a student where courses, programs of study or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, include subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality.

That's what's in Bill 10, and that is changing the existing Education Act, which actually has religious and patriotic exercises.

Every time I've mentioned that, people have said: what is patriotic exercise? And I say: "Oh, well, that's when you used to salute the flag at school or sing *O Canada*. That's the patriotic exercise." When I was really young, you used to have to wear white gloves to do it. It was really a big deal. But that actually has been cut out. Anybody that's seriously following this, that section about being able to opt your kids out of patriotic exercises has disappeared in this amending bill brought forward by the Member for Calgary-North West. Any of you that really wanted to opt your kids out of class because of patriotic exercises, you just lost your right, so you might want to contact the Member for Calgary-North West if you somehow want that back in.

But, anyway, what they're dealing with now is an opt-out clause for religion or human sexuality. One of the things that's interesting about that is that there are more people that want their kids to be able to not be exposed to religion, and then there's people on the other side of this – and this is where you get balancing rights – that want their children to be in a faith-based school. It's always really interesting when I hear from people that don't want their kids to be in a class where there's going to be instruction about religion. They want to be able to opt them out.

Adding in "human sexuality" is a problem, and here's why. The government has wisely followed my lead and taken sexual orientation out, so you can no longer specifically opt your kids out of class because of sexual orientation. This always led to a really interesting conversation about: how do you actually teach kids sexual orientation? I've never had an answer to that. I don't think you can. That's a good reason to take it out.

But I had suggested that that section talk about sexual health education because I think that it is very helpful if you've got a professional talking to kids with age-appropriate material about sexual health education. You're talking about things like sexually transmitted diseases, you're talking about abstinence – good idea, folks – the concept of consent. I mean, there are a lot of different things that can be handled under that. Then, of course, they can go home and talk to their parents about the rest of what it means. We've heard a couple of my colleagues here tonight talk about that and how they dealt with it when their kids came home from that class.

What we need to be careful of here is that a number of the courts interpret sexuality as encompassing sexual orientation and gender identity, so after all this work that the government has gone to now to take sexual orientation out, they may have accidentally left it in. I just want to be really clear about this because this is the unforeseen consequences part, and I'm trying to stop you from stepping over that cliff.

The previous amendment was being very clear in spelling out "sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression." You're very clear about what they're talking about, and I'd almost prefer that that kind of thing would be in section 58 because then you would know what you were talking about. That blanket phrase "human sexuality," everybody thinks they know what it is, but everybody's got a different version in their head of what it is. Some people are thinking that it's the birds and the bees. Some people are thinking sexual orientation. Some people are thinking gender identity. Some people are thinking: I just don't want my kid to know this. There are lots of different interpretations of that, and I really think we put ourselves in a difficult position here. All that work to take sexual orientation out, and you may still have it there and not know it. I would like to be very clear that we're not including that, which is why I wanted it to read "sexual health education."

The other thing. A number of people here have already expressed: well, I don't see a difference between sexuality and sexual health education. Okay. Fine. Then let's call it sexual health education because then we do know what it's about. If you want to opt out, that's what you're opting your kid out of. I don't know how you opt your kid out of a class on sexuality. Like, what is that a class on? You're not supposed to be talking about worms and things like that, so what is it that you're opting your kids out of when that phrase is in there? It is unclear and unspecific, and that's the problem with the phrase.

What my amendment A5 is doing is striking out "human sexuality" and substituting "sexual health education." I think that's what we're really trying to get at there. That at least gives us a very specific and very easy to understand declaration or description of what you're talking about. I also take it out later where it's talking about if it's just a little bit of talk, subsection (3) on the next page.

This section does not apply to incidental or indirect references to religion, religious themes or human sexuality in a course, program of study, instruction or exercises or in the use of instructional materials.

So if it's a minor reference, the opt-out is not offered, and you also shouldn't have to be needing to give advance notice, which you do have to do here.

10:00

Oh, Mr. Chair. That's just such a pain. That's just so much extra work for those schools to have to give advanced notice to parents. I know that it's really important to some people, but yowza; it's not as though we gave them any more money in the schools to handle this. To me, it really makes it stick out, particularly when "sexual orientation" was still in it because it was like flashing, you know, those Las Vegas lights that go around. Chase lights, they're called. It was like those chase lights and the flashing lights that go, "Warning, warning; danger, danger; danger here; here be dragons," because this was such a terrible thing to be talking about with sexual orientation.

We have managed to get rid of that. Good. Thank you very much. But I think we need to be very clear what we're talking about when we talk about human sexuality, and I've already heard a number of definitions of what people on the other side think it is.

I do think that's very problematic. So let's be clear about it. Let's pass this amendment, and then we know exactly what we're talking about, sexual health education, and we don't allow it to stray into any other area that could be misinterpreted, particularly by the courts.

I know how fond you all are of judge-made law, so vote with me. Don't let those judges make law from this one. You can cut them off at the pass so easily just by voting for amendment A5.

Thank you very much.

Dr. Swann: I rise in support this amendment. Clarity of language is important, and this is a very difficult area for many of us with new terminology coming up almost every year. What this amendment does, I think, is simplify and provide a more inclusive description of what happens in a classroom around sexual health education, which I think is the intent of the bill, so that parents know exactly what they're saying yes or no to. We're not saying that parents shouldn't have a role in deciding some aspects of sex education and inclusion of their children in that activity. In fact, we think it's important for parents to know and be part of the conversation, as many people in the Legislature have already said over the hours of debates we've had. All this does is make more clear what it is they're saying yes or no to.

"Sexual health education" is an all-inclusive term. It's part of what we expect schools to do, and we want it to be done in a healthy and mature way. That adds a helpful term, I think. I don't know anybody that would not feel that was more clear than "human sexuality," which covers a whole gamut of activities and themes.

With respect to shifting from "religious themes or human sexuality" to just "religious themes," we've already talked about the sexual health aspects of it. We don't need to repeat it in subsection (3). So it's a given that that would be just a more economic use of the language. I won't belabour it. It's more clear language. It's more clear intent. It's more clear for parents, who need to know what it is we're doing.

I hope everyone here can support this friendly – very friendly – amendment.

The Chair: Are there other speakers?

Ms Notley: Well, I rise to speak in favour of this amendment. It is an effort to clarify something that has been the subject of much discussion because, of course, on one hand, we saw the government taking the issue of sexual orientation – I think it was sexual orientation. What did they take out of the notification? Anyway, they took the piece that included discussions of sexual orientation out of the notification language and put in "human sexuality," but as soon as they did that, many people started asking: well, what does human sexuality mean, and can human sexuality include sexual orientation?

Now, I actually think that as much as the Member for Edmonton-Centre wants to help this government avoid litigation on this bill, that the horse is kind of out of that barn already, and there's no putting it back in because I think that this legislation as a whole is going to do nothing but attract litigation because of its numerous discriminatory elements.

You know, as much as the Member for Edmonton-Centre is doing a kindness to the government to try and inject a little bit of clarity to this legislation, the fact of the matter is that the amendment that was just passed by this government in conjunction with the remainder of Bill 10 is going to take up a lot of court time, I'm thinking. A lot of court time. And it's unfortunate because, of course, the people that are going to have to finance that are probably those who are least

able to afford it, but I suspect they still will because the legislation is so deeply flawed.

That being said, in the interest of trying to promote clarity where possible, I do agree with the sentiment that is included in the amendment put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre in the effort to limit the notification piece to education around sexual health education. I think that's reasonable. I think we all agree that parents should be notified of these things because parents want to have some control over when they have these conversations with their kids, and they want to know when it happens. That's entirely reasonable.

But, of course, the concern is, you know, that if you're Joe Average parent who wants to insist upon your rights or who believes you have the right to get notice when the teachers in your school begin talking about issues that might include sexual orientation or discussions about the human rights code or perhaps even a discussion about this legislative debacle that we've just been through – because I'm sure that lots of really thoughtful social studies teachers would love nothing better than to have their classes watch our debate and then discuss amongst each other what a disaster this is. It's certainly a learning experience for how not to govern. Nonetheless, all of that could well trigger one parent's decision to go after the teacher for not giving notification that students would be subjected to such legislative idiocy, and they might use this language in order to assert that right to be notified.

There's no question that by replacing "human sexuality" with the term "sexual health education," we are more inclined to limit parents' objections to those occasions where teachers might decide, for instance, to teach their kids about issues around human rights that include, of course, conversations around sexual orientation because, of course, sexual orientation is also part of human sexuality. As much as I do think that the government was intending to try to narrow the scope of the notification, I don't think they succeeded in doing that with the use of the term "human sexuality."

So I absolutely urge members to support the amendment put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre in this regard. I think it is one that is designed to provide clarity and precision to what I think was already the intent of the government with respect to this legislation. As I say, you know, you're going to be in front of the courts a lot with it anyway. Why not limit the number of things you're in court about? When it comes to this legislation, taxpayers are going to unfortunately be funding the government's defence of this legislation, which is actually also irritating to me from a taxpayer point of view. But, anyway, I digress. Nonetheless, let's limit the degree to which taxpayers have to fund the defence of this travesty of a legislative document.

Ms Blakeman: Unintended consequences of a lack of clarity.

Ms Notley: A lack of clarity that exists within this.

It's unfortunate that other parts were not, perhaps, as unclear as this because then at least it wouldn't be quite so offensive.

Nonetheless, that being said, I urge members to support this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

10:10

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak in favour of this amendment. Again, you know, we're trying to repair an extremely broken bill. I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Centre's efforts and, well, not just the spirit of this amendment, but I appreciate this amendment itself.

First and foremost, as a former teacher I can tell you that teaching about sexual health education is very important, Mr. Chair. I think that what this amendment attempts to do by using language that is much more open and inclusive and that covers the full range of topics and subjects, not just human sexuality, is very important. That's what it's been called for the last hundred years or so, so it's nice to see some language that modernizes it, that is much more inclusive, whether we are talking about homosexuality, heterosexuality, gender identity, sexual orientation, and ensuring that our curriculum relates to all students regardless of who they are or where they come from.

I think that this amendment is positive. I have a few more comments that I am going to save to speak in general to Bill 10. I do think it's worth noting, Mr. Chair, and for the members opposite to note that Bill 10 is actually trending fifth in Canada on Twitter as we speak. I would encourage the members opposite to read some of the comments that not just Albertans but Canadians are making on Bill 10 and how this is a very dark day for people in Alberta. I actually plan to read some of the tweets out to members of the House so they can see exactly how hurtful this bill is.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak in support of the amendment put forward by the hon. member from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. It's been a very divisive, long, emotional debate for many of us. I want to thank the hon. member for wanting to make a little tweak that will make this a better bill. You know, again, I'll say that the government's intent is right, is good. Because of rushing through a bill – I believe we need to change the wording “human sexuality” to “sexual health education” because at the end of the day this is really simple. What we're talking about is the birds and the bees. It's about the birds and bees. Let's be clear, and let's call it what it is.

Mr. Chair, as a physician one of the reasons I think we should make it very clear and distinct is simply from a public health perspective. I've talked to a couple of religious leaders, and they don't really want to talk about the birds and the bees. It's interesting that there are a number of pregnant young women in this certain school. I talked to the religious leaders, and I said that I've talked to these young women. They are my patients. I said, “Are they all doing it?” They said, “Even the guys with the glasses are doing it in the stairwells.”

I think we as a society and as parents do have a role and duty to educate children and care for them and look after them. I just had two young adults who went through the school system, a son and a daughter. They are both in university now. I was thankful that the school system taught them about human sex education, and as a doctor I sort of have supplemented that a little bit as well.

Mr. Chair, these are the facts right now in Alberta based on data from the Health department a few years ago. Low-income young women in Alberta between the ages of 15 and 19 are having babies at 11 times the rate of high-income young women. So, really, we have babies having babies. We have a baby boom here, and we have a lot of young people. Children having children. I saw a 42-year-old great-grandmother in the emergency department one day. The grandmother was 28, and the mother was 14.

It's important not only for families and parents to have an open, honest conversation with their children about, you know, taking responsibility when it comes to the issues of having sex or not having it when you shouldn't be having it, but if you are having it, you should be responsible about it. So let's be more specific in the

legislation. Call it what it is: the birds and the bees, human sexual health education.

I would ask the members of the government – you've won almost every battle against the opposition parties on this issue. I would impress upon you that this is something to help your bill now become just a little bit better and to prevent further unintended consequences. There's no need to leave this so open to interpretation, no need for things and unnecessary issues to get into the court system. Call it what it is.

If you would please support this amendment, we in the Liberal opposition will be very thankful and grateful for having had the opportunity to respectfully debate and convince you to support a minor change in what is now your legislation, that you're tabling.

Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there other speakers to amendment A5?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Chair: We're back to the bill. Speaking on the bill, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll try to keep my comments brief, but I can tell you that there's a flurry of outrage.

Mr. Mason: You always say that.

Mr. Bilous: I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for reminding me that I seem to always begin by saying that I'm going to keep my comments brief. My students used to say the same. They would actually sit down and get very comfortable when I'd say: this isn't going to take long.

Again, you know, you've got to love technology and Twitter because there are Albertans and Canadians that are engaged in a discussion across the country about Bill 10. There are some real Canadians and Albertans very angry, frustrated at what this bill is doing. One tweet:

My son about #bill10, “They're debating what?? I didn't think that was still a thing. Gay marriage is legal but kids can't meet?”

Another one actually was from a prominent CFL football player that was interviewed today, Mr. Jon Cornish, who was quite unhappy with Bill 10 and said:

I want my kids growing up in a world where it doesn't matter who you love.

Another tweet:

I saw a friend cry today watching the debates. I'm so angry at what that pain is. Equality is a right.

Next:

The message #bill10 sends to LGBTQ youth is that they don't matter and don't deserve safety. Fend for yourselves because #ableg doesn't care.

And:

The PCAA position, their comments and the Bill are living proof our kids need unencumbered access to GSA's.

Then:

Have any of the MLA's voting for #bill10 actually spoken to #lgbtq kids, they just might want to before deciding their fate.

Another tweet:

One of the saddest days in Alberta politics. This bill has done nothing to protect our kids!

And:

If the education minister won't speak for #LGBTQ kids now, how can he be trusted to represent them in bill 10?

Obviously, I can't use names in the House, but I think we know whom we're talking about. A few tweets came in.

All those "mayors brunches" seem a complete farce. Didn't stand up when most needed.

Another tweet:

#bill10 A very dark day for Alberta.

They're pouring in much faster than I can keep up.

10:20

So, Mr. Chair, I think that, you know, regardless of the amendments that members have tried to put forward this evening to amend this piece of legislation, the country is talking about a piece of legislation that is very divisive. It is a bill that separates and segregates and discriminates. It's not a bill that supports our youth, our students. It doesn't support GSAs. When I take a step back and think about all the hours that we've spent this evening debating whether or not kids should be allowed to form an extracurricular club at their school, it seems so ridiculous that we're even having this discussion, even more absurd that there's opposition to something that should be an inalienable right. It should not be denied to any youth.

I can tell you, Mr. Chair, about one of my biggest concerns. You know, earlier I heard comments from the service minister talking about how kids could always go to another school, then, and find one that maybe is supportive of GSAs. Well, here's the reality, Mr. Minister. There are – how many? – thousands of kids living in rural Alberta who do not have a choice, if they are denied a GSA in their school, to go to another school. This legislation that we're passing is having and will have an incredible impact on young people in this province. It is a sign that basically says: if you are LGBTQ or a sexual minority, you are not welcome here.

It is shameful, Mr. Chair. I can't express the disappointment that I'm feeling for the direction that we're going. You know, all parties in this House had the opportunity to do the right thing. You look at the frustration and shame last year when Motion 503 was voted down. This was an opportunity for political parties and for all members to get it right. I'm speaking directly about supporting the Member for Edmonton-Centre's private member's bill, Bill 202, which would have addressed this. It would have provided a solution that many young people are looking for.

In my last comment, Mr. Chair, I do want to mention the fact that GSAs are not exclusive, and it floors me that there are people out there that do not understand the purpose of these clubs, which we've tried to explain, and who they're for, which is everyone. That's why they're called a gay-straight alliance. They're not exclusive. They are inclusive. Everyone is welcome in these clubs.

So it is with a very heavy heart that I will take my seat and continue to urge members of this House to throw out this bill. Let's start from scratch and protect the rights of young people everywhere in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Are there other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 10 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. At this point in time I would move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 10. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's been a long day for every member here. In accordance with that, I would like to move that this House stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:27 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Subscriptions
Legislative Assembly Office
1001 Legislature Annex
9718 – 107 St.
EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E4
Telephone: 780.427.1302

Other inquiries:

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



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, December 4, 2014

Issue 12a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, December 4, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. May the joyful spirit that surrounds us today remain within our hearts all year long, and may our actions be guided by the messages of sharing and of giving to those in need. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by Little Bow.

Mr. Amery: Thank you. Today is indeed a very blessed day here at the Alberta Legislature. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the newly appointed bishop of the Lebanese Maronite church of Canada, Bishop Paul-Marwan Tabet, who is located in Montreal. Today he is visiting Edmonton. Also, we have Father Michel Kassas of the Lebanese Maronite church of Calgary. Accompanying them are Mrs. Kassas – I should put it this way; Mrs. Kassas is the mother of the Father – and five very active members of the church: Mrs. Hanan Samia, Mrs. Rola Abi Badra, Mrs. Najwa Machaalani, Mr. Francis Machaalani, and Mr. Tony Shallala. They're seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly my lovely wife, Serena. She's sitting up in your gallery. As we all know, everybody that's in this Assembly, you need your spouse and your loved ones to be part of what you do, and my wife has always been a rock. I thank her for all of her support. If she'd please rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker and Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you. Mr. Speaker and hon. members, I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize a group of individuals in the galleries today who play a key role in the democratic process in the province of Alberta, the staff who work in our constituency offices. They often provide the first point of contact for our constituents and represent our offices and this Assembly. These special individuals are here today participating in the winter constituency employee seminar, which provides an opportunity for them to network with other LAO staff and obtain an overview of numerous programs and services available through the LAO. Each year the service and contributions of these individuals are celebrated with an employee recognition dinner, which the Speaker will be holding later this evening. Today approximately 65 office employees are with us from all corners of the province. They're in both galleries, and I'd ask that they all rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of members of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Are there any school groups to be introduced today?

If not, we have a number of other important guests to introduce. We have 20 more introductions, so please keep your introductions as short as possible so that we can get all 20 in.

Let's start with the hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by the President of Treasury Board.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three of my constituents from Sherwood Park. They are seated in the public gallery. We have today with us Thomas Moore, Regine Moore, and Eric Inch. Mr. Moore visited me in my constituency office to raise awareness of the issues many vulnerable Albertans are facing with life leases. If we could have them rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. President of Treasury Board, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some very special guests. We will be meeting with renowned private-sector economists to discuss Alberta's economic forecast in advance of next year's budget. The perspectives these individuals bring to the table are invaluable to our budget planning process. Sitting in the gallery we have Craig Wright, senior vice-president and chief economist, RBC Financial Group; Rob Kavcic, vice-president and senior economist, BMO Capital Markets; Avery Shenfeld, managing director and chief economist, CIBC World Markets; Stéfane Marion, chief economist and strategist, National Bank Financial Markets; Mary Webb, senior economist, Scotiabank; Leslie Preston, economist, TD Economics; and Marie-Christine Bernard, associate director, provincial forecast, Conference Board of Canada. Along with them are members of my department: Katherine White, assistant deputy minister; Mark Parsons, acting chief economist; and Sarla Sharma, senior economist. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Saturday is the 25th anniversary of an event we call the Montreal massacre. A group of women came together and started to plan a memorial for that event, and I have brought them all together again today. We became lifelong friends and peer support for each other. I'd like you to please welcome to the Assembly Catherine Hedlin, Bonnie Thompson, Sonia Bitar – please rise – Carol Hutchings, Shelley Williams, Michelle Andrews, and Janet Pavlic. Thank you so much for all the help over the years and for being such stalwart warriors for women. Thank you.

I'm also really flattered, Mr. Speaker, to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special young woman who is the official president of my fan club, and that is Ms Imogen Randall. Imogen, would you rise, please. She's done great work. Please welcome her. With Imogen is her mother, Kim Bewick, who works in my office as the caseworker and is a great social activist.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of this august Chamber the Wildrose caucus constituency assistants. They are on the front lines of service and deal with the everyday problems of Albertans while providing them with solutions, and with the exception of those who work for the hon. leader and the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, they have to work very hard to make the rest of us look good. If they would please stand as I say their names and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: Julie, Angela, Keith, Mandy, Melanie, Alex, Lynn, Terri, Brenda, Lana, Barbara, and Laura. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition, followed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my guests Lori Sigurdson, David Von Haller, and Joey Shaughnessy. Lori is the senior manager at the Alberta College of Social Workers, vice-president of Public Interest Alberta, and the NDP candidate for Edmonton-Riverview in the next provincial election. David Von Haller and Joey Shaughnessy are both fourth-year bachelor of social work students at the University of Calgary. They are doing their field placements at the Alberta College of Social Workers, and Lori is their field supervisor. I would like to ask my guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, followed by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly two outstanding young men, Colin Aitken and Scott Thomson. Colin I've had the pleasure for knowing for a few years. He's an outstanding young man from Devon and door-knocked with me in my last campaign. Colin will be attending Grant MacEwan University in January, studying history and political science. Scott has travelled from Scotland, where he is currently studying electrical and mechanical engineering at the University of the Highlands and Islands. Welcome, Scott, to Alberta. We'd love to bring you here as a temporary worker in Alberta. I ask both of you to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, followed by the leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent of mine by the name of Joan Bishop. She's from the centre of my constituency, near Gwynne, and lives on a lovely acreage. She's been a home-schooler for many years, and she came by today to just watch the proceedings. She and her husband, Barry, have five kids and three grandkids. I've known Joan for a long time, and I know her to be a very committed parent and community volunteer. I believe she's in the public gallery. If she could rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by the minister of environment.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. Firstly, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Brian Gregg, Joanne David, and Mac Walker from the organization called Poor Vote Turnout. Poor Vote Turnout is on a quest in Edmonton to increase voter turnout by encouraging and assisting the poor population to vote in elections. I'd like to thank Brian, Joanne, and Mac for the work that they do and ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Leah Koska. Leah is a student at the University of Alberta, graduating this year from the department of human ecology. Leah is passionate about policy development; specifically, providing healthy and affordable nutrition to all Albertans. In fact, Leah's solutions will fix the health system, and I think she'd be a great MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark in the future as she is my constituent. I'd like to ask Leah to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment, followed by Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a good friend of mine, someone that I've gotten to know over a number of years and a constituent of Calgary-Klein, Mr. DJ Kelly. DJ is the community president of the Winston Heights-Mountview Community Association in my riding. He's a tireless volunteer in the community, takes a very keen interest in all of the affairs going on in the community, in our city, and in our province, and is very well known on Twitter. I know he's here in the public gallery. I'd like to have him rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a journalist from Newcap News in my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake, Frazer Snowdon, his first time at the Alberta Legislature. It's a testament to our great province that we have such a vocal and proud media. Mr. Snowdon is a valuable contributor to our community and a valuable voice of the people of Bonnyville-Cold Lake. He's seated in the visitors' gallery. I'd ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the Associate Minister of Persons with Disabilities.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions as well. It is my pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a special visitor. Seated in the members' gallery, from Beaverlodge, is Rochelle Martian. I met Rochelle this summer as we worked together on the Premier's leadership campaign. Her energy and calmness were an asset to our group. I would like her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is on behalf of my colleague the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster and myself. We'd like to introduce Linda Cerra. Linda is our legislative assistant, and I would observe that Linda keeps us going. She keeps her sense of humour as she works. They all work hard, but I

bet Linda is one of the hardest working in the Assembly. Thank you, Linda, and thank you for having our back.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Persons with Disabilities, followed by Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you on behalf of my colleague the Minister of Human Services and myself three new government of Alberta employees. They're here today to represent some of the actions our government is taking under Alberta's employment-first strategy. This strategy was put in place to improve employment for persons with disabilities, to help address current labour shortages, and to create more inclusive workplaces and communities. I'm proud to say that our government is leading by example, creating 20 paid internship positions for persons with disabilities. The members are here today. Please rise as I call out your names. Vivek Agnihotri will be working in human resources recruitment, Christina Amador is a research intern in disability services, and Kate Walker will be working as a case aid with AISH. Joining them also today is Gisela Kwok, director in charge of the employment-first internship program. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by Calgary-McCall.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Ms Segen Tesfamichael, an outstanding constituent from Edmonton-Decore who is here this afternoon to observe democracy in action. Segen is in her final year of the human ecology program at the University of Alberta, Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences. She's a born and raised Albertan who is a dedicated, ambitious, and highly motivated individual. Best wishes, Segen, in all of your future endeavours. I would now ask Segen to please rise and remain standing for the Assembly would like to provide to you this afternoon a traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my right-hand man, jack of all trades, and, most importantly, my constituency manager. Mr. Robb Aishford has been working for the constituency of Calgary-McCall since May 2012, when I was able to steal him from our caucus, where he was formerly doing communications. Mr. Aishford is a proud University of Alberta political science graduate and, like most in this Chamber, an intense political news junkie, who day in and day out helps keep me on track and organized. Most importantly, he takes great care of my constituents in Calgary-McCall. I will now ask Mr. Robb Aishford to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a woman with absolutely no interest in politics whatsoever. It truly is an honour to have her here today. She's

actually stood by me through 17 years of political life, but she's also stood by me through 42 years of marriage. I'd ask my wife, Pennie, to rise and please accept . . . [applause]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the legislative assistants that support our government members each and every day. We're all dependent on our legislative assistants to help us navigate our way through sessions such as this one. I know that I speak for all my caucus colleagues when I say thank you for all the hard work you've done and continue to do. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have three left. Bear with me as we complete these. The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education and by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I have two introductions. It is an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly an individual whom I had the pleasure of welcoming as a new staff member in 1998, when I was a minister without portfolio responsible for children's services. Throughout the years as I moved offices, she moved with me. This is rare. In all the years that she has been with me, I have not had the ability to introduce her because she's always been too darn busy. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you Ms Rhonda Checknita. I call her the historian of all legislative assistants, and I thank her for all the work and the honour of having her work for me. I'd ask that Rhonda rise and receive a big thanks from me and a traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:50

The other, Mr. Speaker, an individual I never get to introduce as well, is number three of six sisters. That's my sister Louise. She comes from Red Deer, and I know she's here to do a number of things. I'd ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome as one of my little sisters.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you somebody who suffered with me for many, many years not only as my constituency assistant; she used to assist me in my law firm. That is Diane Edison. Please rise, Diane Edison, and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I inadvertently missed the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly the two hardest working assistants because they have to make the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat look good, and that's nearly impossible: Kendra and Shelley, please.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're going to start Oral Question Period. Thank you for allowing me to delay it a bit to get all those introductions done.

Thirty-five seconds maximum for the question, 35 seconds maximum for the answer. Let us begin. The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Hospital Infrastructure Maintenance

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are shaking their heads at all of the examples of how this government has mismanaged our health system. They've allowed our hospitals to crumble because of lack of maintenance. The condition of many hospitals is abysmal, and many of the ones in good condition aren't being properly utilized. We all know that the system for allocating infrastructure maintenance dollars is politicized and rife with manipulation. Will the Premier commit to fixing his government's record of neglect on this file?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we allocate money on the maintenance of hospitals. The decision is made by Alberta Health Services of allocating \$70 million a year. That's done based upon their evaluation of what's needed. We don't interfere in that process at all.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the facts say otherwise. The files speak to chronic neglect of many of our hospitals. Problems with sewers, heating and ventilation systems, fire alarms, electrical systems, and water infiltration are common. But there are also problems that are shocking in that they didn't cause anyone's attention to perk up. The Lloydminster hospital may have a problem with radioactive contamination. Sundre has ant infestations. The Rockyview has issues with mould and moist drywall. These are issues that directly compromise patient safety. To the Health minister: how could it have gotten this bad?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear. Health safety is the number one issue for this government, Alberta Health Services, and Alberta Health. Our standards are some of the best in this country. Even though we have some challenges in some of our facilities, we do maintain some of the highest levels of cleanliness within any hospital in this country.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, hospitals are where you go to hopefully get better, but the information in the maintenance file suggests that this government has actually made many of our hospitals unsafe and unhealthy for both patients and front-line workers. All of this happened during a period when AHS paid for executives' country club memberships, authorized exorbitant expenses, and funded executive coaches and art consultants. Doesn't anyone over there know how to set priorities and look after the interests of Alberta patients?

Mr. Mandel: You know, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the leader's zeal, but the fact of the matter is that we make sure that Albertans are properly taken care of in the hospitals. We have very good care. Alberta Health Services has decreased the number of people in their upper management by a substantial number. They will continue to do that. They're committed to making sure that our system is the best, and we'll make sure that happens.

Ms Smith: They changed the names on the business cards, and the minister knows that.

Hospital Infrastructure Priorities

Ms Smith: The politicization of the funding of critical health infrastructure is disappointing, but it's not new. Almost two years ago we raised in question period the issue of the sewer system at

the Wainwright hospital. We pointed out that all acute and long-term care spaces were at risk if sewers failed. Our documents make it crystal clear that this hospital was a top priority for AHS, but when the decision got to cabinet, the hospital was ignored. To the Infrastructure minister: why does this government insist on ignoring these top-level priorities from AHS?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've said this point before. Our capital plan is \$19.2 billion, nearly \$7 billion in capital spending in a capital year. The opposition, I'm glad, is now starting to get very interested in infrastructure spending because they are a party that has year after year after year asked us to reduce our infrastructure spending. On this side of the House we believe that the people's priority is to build and refurbish their infrastructure, and that's exactly what we're doing.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we'd get better value for money if we'd spend it on priorities and not pet projects.

This isn't just a Wainwright issue. It affects patients across Alberta, who expect hospitals to be there for them when they need them. Stories of wheelchairs not fitting into bathrooms, leaky roofs and windows, failing water valves: these are the direct result of this government putting politics above priorities. Priority lists are ignored. There is no accountability for how money is spent, and the result is that projects with the greatest need languish in this broken system. Why won't the minister release an objective, public, prioritized infrastructure list and . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, speaking of prioritized infrastructure lists, the members opposite came out with a proposal to build a certain number of schools, yet not one single municipality was singled out to receive a school. [interjections] How would they make those decisions? I find it to be quite amusing. In addition, yesterday they spoke about facility condition index reports. [interjections]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Let's have the final supplemental, with no interruptions if possible, please.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we all know that releasing a prioritized, public infrastructure list means that politicians won't be able to go back home to their ridings and make big promises. Albertans care about fairness and objectivity. They want projects with the highest need to be taken care of first. The only way we will ever start to clean up the crisis facing our hospitals is to have predictable funding and a transparent priority list. Minister, I will ask again: why won't this government do the right thing and finally release a prioritized . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the members opposite how and what projects they would cut to achieve a \$1.7 billion cut in infrastructure funding. A \$1.7 billion cut. On this side of the House we believe that infrastructure spending is incredibly important. We will invest where our communities are growing and where the greatest need is to make sure that Albertans are well served and looked after.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. Third and final main set of questions.

Child Protective Services

Ms Smith: Two weeks ago the independent Child and Youth Advocate released his annual report and slammed this government for its failure to respond to many of his recommendations. Yesterday we learned that Dr. Lionel Dibden resigned as chair of the council for quality assurance. This body of experts is tasked with working with the ministry and making recommendations to improve and strengthen the child intervention system. Dr. Dibden resigned after ministry officials rejected the council's recommendations. To the minister: why is her department dismissing all efforts at independent, objective scrutiny?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated yesterday, I thanked Dr. Dibden for his services. I have had the opportunity to meet with the council twice as well, and he was not able to be at those meetings. I guess, at the end of the day, for this ministry it's about accountability. Accountability is expected from government, and I expect accountability from the quality council as well. I'm looking forward to them filing their report, which has not been filed for two and a half years.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, Dr. Dibden is very well respected and was doing his best to fulfill the mandate this government gave to the council for quality assurance. The Human Services ministry seems to be at odds with the council's mandate. They also seem to be at odds with the Child and Youth Advocate. This minister has rejected the recommendations of the council. Apparently, she has set out new expectations for the council. To the minister: what are the new expectations, and what was wrong with the old expectations?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I did file yesterday the two letters outlining the new expectations and direction. At the end of the day, with respect to the work that the Child and Youth Advocate does and the recommendations that have come forward, of the 96 recommendations they have brought forward, 55 are completed, 12 are ongoing, 25 are in progress. We've only not accepted four of those 96 recommendations. I think that says it all there.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not what Dr. Dibden is saying.

This government has a very poor record when it comes to learning from the deaths of children in care. The fatal care series shocked Albertans. The government said that it would do better. They asked thoughtful outside experts to come in and help them fix a broken system. Now it appears the ministry doesn't want to follow outside recommendations. We all want to do right by these children. Will the minister release the reasons why she is not acting on the recommendations of the council for quality assurance and the Child and Youth Advocate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The safety and well-being of children remains a huge priority for this government and this ministry. I want to make it clear that we review every incident and every fatality in the child intervention system. We also have numerous bodies assisting with that, including the medical examiner, the Child and Youth Advocate, and the Fatality Review Board, in addition to our own internal reviews as well.

Again, from my perspective, how many people do we need to review the reviewers? It's time to get past reviewing again and get on with the job at hand.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Hospital Infrastructure Priorities (continued)

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health care has been in crisis for over a decade while this PC government has been playing politics with hospital funding, plain and simple. The *Edmonton Journal* found that hospital condition ratings were lowered in constituencies with PC MLAs in order to justify queue-jumping them onto the funding list while the majority of projects that AHS identified as priorities were not funded. The government can try and deny it, but the areas represented by the hon. members for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, West Yellowhead, and Whitecourt-Ste. Anne all got more money while others got less. Will the Minister of Health release the PC cabinet's health infrastructure priority list so that we can compare it to that from AHS . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we've built projects in Medicine Hat and across the province to make sure that all Albertans get the opportunity to have the kind of health care they desire. We evaluate through Alberta Health Services various projects. We make decisions. There is not an unlimited amount of money. We try to allocate that money in a way that we get the best value for it. There are projects that are being done. For example, in Calgary the south campus hospital is a phenomenal facility. We're looking at building a new cancer clinic in Calgary. You know, there is only so much money that we have. We try to allocate it effectively.

Dr. Sherman: There's only so much money to be had, and it's spent on pork-barrel politics.

So far this government has gotten a failing grade on their report card for openness, transparency, and accountability, not to mention their handling of Alberta's finances. The PC government is wasting money by prioritizing facilities with less need in PC ridings and letting others with higher need, like the Misericordia and Royal Alex in the city of Edmonton, that the former mayor was in charge of, fall into disrepair. To the Health minister: why is the government still ignoring AHS and its own department's recommendations for what can only be seen as partisan purposes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. I've had an opportunity to visit both the Misericordia and Royal Alexandra hospitals. They both need work. There is a need for us to evaluate what we can do in those two hospitals to bring them up to a standard that would be commensurate with what we want to see in the province of Alberta. But, you know, there is not an unlimited amount of money. We're putting through some ideas on how we can help rebuild both facilities so that Edmonton can have the kind of facilities they need like we're doing across the province with every region all over this wonderful, phenomenal province.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the Royal Alexandra and the Misericordia serve not only the city of Edmonton but all of northern Alberta and central Alberta and surrounding regions of

the whole province. I know this government doesn't appreciate the fine work done by the media and the opposition to uncover their misdeeds, but that doesn't explain why it didn't listen to Alberta's Auditor General, who recommended that this PC government clean up its act when it comes to how it maintains, evaluates, and funds infrastructure projects. To the Minister of Health again. Your government doesn't listen to your department. It doesn't listen to AHS. It ignores the Auditor General. So who really is calling the shots?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, to do with the Royal Alexandra hospital and the Misericordia hospital, we've said time and time again that we've invested almost \$40 million in the Misericordia and about the same amount in the Royal Alexandra. We're doing everything we can to make sure hospitals are maintained in an effective way; \$70 million a year is being spent. Large capital projects: over \$2 billion. We're committed to making sure our province has the best health care. Walk into in any hospital in this province sometime; you'll see the best health care that exists anywhere in this country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This PC government has never shied away from trampling on the autonomy of school boards. They took away their power to tax. They took away their power to appoint their own superintendents. They've even fired entire school boards when it's suited them. Now the only school board power this government is prepared to defend is the power to discriminate against gay students. To the Education minister, please. We'd really like to hear from you on this. Why is it government policy to protect school boards' ability to discriminate against LGBTQ students? Why?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, as a former school board chair I can tell you that I have no intention, no desire to discriminate against anybody. Nobody on this side of the House wants to do that. We are committed to ensuring that all students in all Alberta schools have a safe, caring, respectful environment for LGBTQ students, for students of other faiths, for any student who comes to an Alberta school. They are going to be assured that they have a quality, safe learning environment.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is very difficult to accept the minister's statement that they don't want to discriminate against LGBTQ students when he has just tabled legislation that legalizes that very thing for school boards. Why, Mr. Minister, have you tabled legislation that allows school boards to discriminate if you are so committed to protecting people against discrimination?

The Speaker: Let's not get into debating the bill here, please. Keep it to government policy, government services, government programs.
Your answer, please.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very encouraged that our school boards are deeply concerned about providing an environment where bullying is not tolerated, where all students have an opportunity to be respected and cared for. This side of the

House: we declare that we support GSAs. We support any activity of a school board that is going to do anything it can to provide safe, caring, respectful environments for their students.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this government has made the province of Alberta a laughingstock across Canada because of its knuckle-dragging policies and its refusal to embrace equality across the board. The Premier said that no rights are unqualified. Well, it's pretty clear that this government believes that the rights of gay students are certainly not unqualified because they are legalizing discrimination against them. Why are you doing that, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that this government listens to Albertans and responds to their priorities, and what Albertans want is to ensure that we have schools that are safe, caring, and respectful. There is no room for bullying. There is no room for intolerance. That's what we're committed to, and we'll sustain that every day our schools are open.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

High Prairie Health Services

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Doctors in High Prairie are speaking out after this government decided that their highly successful medical practice would not be welcome in the new High Prairie health complex, currently under construction and set to open in 2016. Instead, AHS will spend millions to open a competing government-run clinic in this new facility. To the minister: why won't you allow the existing, highly successful High Prairie medical clinic to lease space in the High Prairie hospital when it opens?

2:10

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we've invited everybody who wants to participate in the new hospital to participate. We've encouraged people to come together. Sometimes politics in communities is just as difficult as politics within this building.

Mrs. Forsyth: There's no politics in this one, Minister.

Given that the minister has said that the future of primary health care in Alberta was dependent on expanding primary health care networks and given that these were in the process of forming a PCN specifically to expand chronic disease and mental health services, a process that's now in question: Minister, what are you doing?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we're increasing primary care networks. We're encouraging in any community for doctors to come together to offer the services that will help their communities. We believe that that's the foundation of our system, the doctors delivering service. We'll continue to do that, whether it's in High Prairie or in High Level or in Calgary.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. That is exactly what they're doing.

Given that these physicians running this existing clinic in High Prairie have over 70 years of combined experience serving this community and given that this existing clinic offers physicians, pharmacy, and dental care under one roof: Minister, will you please let them rent space?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we're not excluding anybody from doing anything in High Prairie. We are encouraging people to work together. Our zone people are working together to bring more doctors into High Prairie because we had a shortage of doctors and there is a competitive concern, but the fact of the matter is that we'll try to work to solve the problems. The reality is that High Prairie is a very, very significant community that supplies health services to a tremendous number of people, not just that community but a lot of First Nations' communities, and we need to make sure they get the kind of service they need and not through politics but through medicine.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Livingstone-Macleod.

Highway 19 Twinning

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The twinning of highway 19 has been an issue of grave concern in my constituency for far too long. This project has been on and off the province's capital plans, and this is the second time that I've asked the minister for a definitive answer on this important project. To the Minister of Transportation: can the minister provide an update on his ministry's plans to finally twin highway 19?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. He always works hard for his constituents. I understand how important this is to local residents along highway 19 and to the future development of that area. My department has been working with local municipalities, residents, and the Edmonton International Airport to develop a plan to twin highway 19 that works for everyone. Discussion at this point is ongoing.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Mr. Minister, you have mentioned working with the International Airport. What I'm wondering is if the plans that your department is working on will take into account the important third runway that the airport is planning.

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, my department is committed to coming up with a design that accommodates the planned runway while minimizing the impact on the surrounding area. We continue to work closely with the airport and other stakeholders to achieve this goal, and we're making good progress.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: can you give any assurances that my constituents will see some tangible signs of progress any time soon?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, again, I understand how important this project is not only to this member but to other members in this Assembly as well. My department is currently engaged in the capital planning and budget process for 2015 as are the rest of my cabinet colleagues. So we'll wait for the budget. But I can assure this member and his constituents that there is a lot of work going on today with the Edmonton International Airport in the purchase of land and design work by my department to move this project forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Lethbridge-East.

Infrastructure Project Prioritization

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've seen queue-jumping in health care. We've seen queue-jumping in education. Now we're learning about queue-jumping in infrastructure thanks to the *Edmonton Journal's* ongoing report into this government's political manipulation. According to the report this government manipulates the facility condition index so they can ignore funding recommendations and promote political projects. To the Infrastructure minister. We've seen the negative effects of queue-jumping before. Why are you letting this happen again?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This member alleges that facility condition index reports are manipulated. I have in my hands the reasons why reports and results have been changed. For example, in 2013 – and I'll table this later this afternoon – a flood occurred due to a sprinkler failure, which damaged a significant portion of a building. As a result, the condition of the building had to change.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this report that I mentioned outlines multiple cases where facilities with a dire FCI, or facility condition index, rating are not granted funding and given that 23 projects, mostly in PC ridings, had their FCI ratings altered by this minister's department without explanation in order to receive funding, will the minister just admit queue-jumping, or facility roulette, is happening?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, I have in my hands the reason why the facility index reports were changed, and every single one of them – 34 reasons why the reports were changed. If these members are alleging that somehow in 2010 Alberta Health Services could predict what the outcome of the 2012 election was going to be, man, I'm going to give Alberta Health Services a lot of money to buy lottery tickets for me.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister promised to do things differently, but so far all we've seen is photo ops, queue-jumping, spending promises he cannot deliver on, appalling reports like today, and sod-turning on projects that haven't even been put out to tender. Given that the minister specializes in making political announcements, how does he really think he's going to end this culture of political manipulation in infrastructure?

Mr. Bhullar: I'll tell you what. I've been to places like Airdrie, where seven new schools are either completed or under way, where contracts have been tendered. If they don't want them, let me know. We've been to Brooks. New schools are open. Medicine Hat: new schools are open. I would like to know from that party opposite where they are going to cut projects to reduce \$1.7 billion. That's \$1.7 billion, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Long-term Care Facility Staffing

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans have become optimistic now that new long-term care beds are promised. However, I know from my 16 years as a geriatric specialist RN front-line worker that beds are only a part of the equation. Beds are just beds without the qualified staff to meet the existing and projected numbers of residents. To the Minister of Health: how do you plan to tackle the challenge of the increased number of properly qualified staff required for our existing long-term care facilities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. You know, Alberta Health Services realizes that it's an ever-growing industry, and we're planning in the future to look at what we can do, working with the minister of advanced education. Last year, the first half of 2014 – I should say this year – 145 new front-line care workers were provided for the continuing care staff. Ongoing recruitment measures are in place to staff facilities and home-care programs. You know something? AHS has offered education support to our staff. We're working as hard as we can. We realize that with the new 464 beds opening up and the new beds put forward by our minister, we're going to need more people.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that current regulations state that each long-term care patient is to receive a minimum of 1.9 hours of care per day as a staffing standard, is this enough, and does it truly represent the unique personal needs of each resident that enable them to retain their dignity?

2:20

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member said it quite clearly: dignity. Dignity is the most important issue in dealing with continuing care individuals and those who are in our long-term care facilities. Currently there's a minimum standard of 1.9 hours, which is legislated, but the fact of the matter is that we mandate 3.6 hours. We also on top of that encourage providing rehabilitation, recreation therapists, bringing the minimum average to almost 4 paid hours per person. We are above the standard, and we'll continue to do that because the dignity of our people . . .

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Again to that same minister: how do we ensure that long-term care facilities are adequately staffed when staff call in sick and they are not replaced, which is known as working short, in a way that will not compromise the quality of care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very important that Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services have an oversight of care provided in long-term care facilities in Alberta. You know, ensuring both the right level of care and the right number of staff working each shift is vitally important. My ministry is working with AHS to improve audits of long-term care operators to verify that residents receive the right type of care. I know that the

Minister of Infrastructure – there are new programs coming from the federal government, which is encouraging.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona. [interjections] Edmonton-Centre. [interjections] The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, third time.

Energy Development Hearing Participation

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this year I stated that the Responsible Energy Development Act severely curtails who gets to intervene for energy development hearings, where only those directly and adversely affected get to do so, which, for all intents and purposes, means that no coalition, no First Nations, no NGO will ever be able to present to a hearing on anything to do with cumulative effects on the environment. To the minister of the environment: how is it democratic, fair, or ethical for a government to keep concerns about cumulative effects out of approval hearings?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Energy Regulator is responsible for doing the hearings for approvals of energy projects, and it's important to remember that just because someone has an interest in a hearing doesn't mean that they're directly and adversely impacted by the project. It's up to the Alberta Energy Regulator to make that determination as to whether they have standing at the hearings. It's important that that independent, arm's-length body has the ability to do that.

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Minister, you need to practise your listening skills.

Let me try this again. Over the summer an environmental group got excluded from an energy regulator hearing on CNRL's resteaming application at the Cold Lake air weapons range, where bitumen continues to ooze, by the way, because of the directly and adversely affected rule. To the same minister: can he name a single environmental organization or First Nations band granted standing by the energy regulator?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, again, we have the Alberta Energy Regulator that is in place that makes that determination. It's very clear in the legislation that those that are granted status in these hearings have to be directly and adversely affected. It's an independent, third-party body, through the Alberta Energy Regulator, that makes that determination, not me as the minister.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government changed the regulations, the rules, the legislation that the energy regulator is operating under to narrow it to only those people that are directly and adversely affected – and, as a result, no First Nations group, no NGO, and no one except for those that live across the road are able to ask to appear at these hearings – no cumulative effects have been able to be discussed as part of these hearings. Why are you allowing that?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the information that the hon. member provided, while heartfelt, I'm sure, is factually incorrect. First Nations are directly consulted through the aboriginal consultation office, and they are able to file statements of concern before the Alberta Energy Regulator's process. First Nations are completely and fully and meaningfully consulted in this province, and I wouldn't want Albertans to think that anything other was the case.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Child Protective Services (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since this spring this government has resisted all of the NDP caucus efforts to have the children's advocate fully and transparently and independently investigate every child fatality. Now they're refusing internal comprehensive investigations, and they've lost a respected public official as a result. I'm asking the minister to ignore her rather insipid talking points and actually answer the question: what is your government afraid of?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the good work that the office of the Child and Youth Advocate does as well as the oversight committee and the quality assurance council: it's important to note all the resources we have at base to support children and families and to make those investigations. I am more than happy to repeat that.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the advocate has identified that the government's so-called accepted recommendations have actually been frequently and regularly ignored by this government, my question to the minister is simply this: when will you actually start implementing the recommendations of the children's advocate that he says you are habitually and repeatedly ignoring?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to give one really good example of a recommendation that was made that we are implementing, the child intervention practice framework, that all social workers and individuals on the front line do, working with continuous improvement, strength-based connections, family preservation, collaboration, critical thinking, and case analysis skills. That's an example of a recommendation that is ongoing and that we have certainly accepted.

Ms Notley: Well, given that the minister can only refer to one accepted recommendation out of the dozens and dozens and dozens that the children's advocate is concerned about and given that the advocate only investigates about a third of deaths at this point – that means that the majority of the 18 deaths which have occurred so far this year will go unexplained – to the minister: how can Albertans ever believe that your government cares about protecting kids over protecting itself?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, the safety and well-being of children remains a priority for this government and especially children who pass away under tragic circumstances. I know of the meetings that I've had with all of the individuals. We review every incident. We have an internal process that we put in place. Again, of the 96 recommendations that we have accepted, 55 are completed, 12 are ongoing, 25 are in progress. We have only not accepted four. I encourage the hon. member to take a look at the website for Human Services.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Stony Plain.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Directive 074 is one example of how this government has failed to protect our industry by writing policy without consultation. The directive issued by the ERCB in 2009 set unrealistic targets for the reduction and reclamation of tailings ponds. As most everyone knows, the oil sands producers have failed to meet directive 074's overly ambitious targets. Despite this fact the government has allowed this failed directive to remain on the books. To the minister: what will this government do about tailings ponds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much. The member asks a really good question. We're working right now, actually, with industry on a new directive that should be made public in the new year. What is very, very important is that we understand that having tailings ponds on our landscape does present significant environmental and financial risks to taxpayers, and we want to deal with it. Industry wants to deal with it. Directive 074 wasn't a complete failure. It has incited a number of investments in technology, which will be the answer to solving this problem, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, given that industry has stated that directive 074 is an example of setting a misguided, unachievable policy that sets everyone up for failure, industry and regulator, and given that there was supposed to be a report and revamped policy scheduled to be released this past summer, to the minister: where is it, what's in it, and why is it being delayed?

Mr. Fawcett: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government is under new management, and as a result there's been a whole lot of review of the new things that we're bringing forward. We wanted to sit down and make sure that we do have it right. Again, I want to say that directive 074 has incited a lot of the companies operating in the oil sands to do the right thing. In fact, I was just up at the Syncrude site, where I toured a \$2 billion investment that Syncrude is about to commission that will start to reduce their tailings ponds being released out onto the landscape.

2:30

Mr. Hale: While we're on the energy policy, Mr. Speaker, given that the former environment minister was considering implementing a Liberalesque Bill 44 type carbon tax placed on industry, will the new minister clear the air and tell this House what plans he has to increase the carbon levy on industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Right now, again, one of the things that we're doing under the new management and the leadership of our Premier is reviewing a promise to bring out a renewed climate change strategy. The member is right. At the end of this month, actually, the current regulation, the specified gas emitters regulation, expires, and we're going to have to make a decision on that. We haven't made any final decisions at this point in time, but we're having those conversations, that will be part of a larger package in order to meet our greenhouse gas emission targets.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Drinking Water in Parkland County

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've learned that arsenic and manganese have been found in groundwater in Parkland county. This is a very disturbing discovery. There are many residents who use private wells for drinking water. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Health. Do people in Parkland county have safe drinking water?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can confirm that there have been private water wells tested in Parkland county with higher than recommended levels of arsenic and manganese. I can also confirm that these elements are naturally occurring and levels are not an immediate danger to health. Health risks associated with arsenic and manganese are long term, meaning many years, even decades, of exposure is needed for any health impact. The fact is that we do not know if all the private well owners in Parkland county have safe water, so today Alberta Health Services is beginning a campaign to inform well owners that they need to be inspected.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Excellent answer, Mr. Minister.

If water from these private wells is not safe, what are you going to do about it?

Mr. Mandel: Excellent. Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health Services will be holding open houses in the new year so that environmental public health officials can meet face to face with the private well owners to discuss test results and take any recommended action. This is why it is so important for private well owners to bring in samples for the testing, and it's free testing, as a matter of fact. As these wells are on private property, health officials cannot test without permission, and officials need to understand that we need to work with them. There are over 6,000 wells in the targeted area.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Lemke: Wow. Absolutely excellent answer again.

If there are 6,000 wells in this area, why are we only discovering this contamination now?

Mr. Mandel: Excellent question. This issue emerged with high results from a cluster of properties in northeast Parkland county. This alerted officials to the need for nearby testing and collaboration with hydrologists in finding the source. Now, we know the source is natural, but we don't know how the distribution of these elements happened. This is why we're casting a wider net, further in Parkland county and surrounding portions of Sturgeon and Leduc counties. When it comes to potential health impacts, it's better to know more than less.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Victims of Crime

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Justice minister and I have something in common. We both got married over the summer. Unfortunately, that is where the similarities end. He believes in putting the comfort of criminals before the rights of victims, so much so that we didn't even see a single mention of

justice for the victims of crime in the throne speech. Not once. Did the Justice minister's soft-on-crime, hug-a-thug policies rub off on the Premier?

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, I got married October 11, which is actually in the fall, so there we go.

We continue to put victims first in Alberta Justice. That includes adding more police officers, but that also includes passing new legislation like amendments to the Victims of Crime Act, that we passed last year, that this member gave some good input on.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that staff in correctional services recently posted a blog about an art show, not just any art show but an art show created by convicted criminals, on public display using taxpayer dollars, when is this Minister of Justice going to realize that it's his job to put criminals behind bars and not paint pretty pictures with them?

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, my job is also to put victims first today, tomorrow, and every day, and that's what we'll continue to do.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this minister denied funding to the Be Brave Ranch, that helps child victims of sexual abuse, and that now he is unwilling to put the rights of victims before art classes for criminals, how on earth can Albertans trust this former Liberal staffer to keep our communities safe?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, this member continues to work as a criminal defence lawyer, and he talks about victims. Really? [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Drumheller-Stettler. [interjections] All right. All right. Enough.

Let's go. The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Home Care Services

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors in this province want to age in their homes with safe and secure resources. They want to remain with their communities, their families, and their loved ones. The current hospital-centric model is not working. Seniors housed in acute-care beds are affecting all levels of emergency care and causing the burnout of our front-line professionals. To the Health minister: will this government rethink its current model and make home care a priority for Albertans?

Mr. Mandel: Thank you for that wonderful question. We agree that seniors want to age in their homes and communities and really close to their families and friends. That's why we're working hard to ensure Albertans have access to effective, quality health care when they need it, including home care. You know, Mr. Speaker, in the last three years we've increased home care by 26 per cent, to over half a billion dollars. The number of Albertans accessing home care has also increased to more than 112,000 Albertans. That's a substantial number, up 12 per cent over the previous year. We understand the critical role home care plays in supporting Albertans, and we really thank the member for the question.

Mrs. Towle: Given that studies show that keeping seniors in their homes, in their communities, and with their loved ones improves their quality of life and given that other countries like Germany have already seen a 40 per cent reduction in acute-care costs, will the Minister of Health commit to ensuring that Albertans have access to home care as their first option, not their last option?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I can commit to working to make sure that Albertans have access to the right care in the right place at the right time, including home care, and we will commit to working with the member to ensure that home care is an incredibly important part of our health care delivery system.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I appreciate that, but given that our seniors population will continue to grow, what can this government do today to ensure that the quality of the home care that seniors are receiving is the appropriate quality?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the hon. member that I strongly support seniors remaining in their homes as long as possible if it's safe for them to be there and their care needs are being met. The primary consideration is the seniors' well-being and helping to provide the best, most appropriate accommodation and care on an individual basis. If it can be in their homes, that's where the priority should be. I am also a strong supporter of aging in communities. My ministry and this government are making significant investments in seniors' housing. This includes, as I said earlier, more than \$500 million in home care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Calgary-North West.

Medevac Services

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the coming years we will see just how badly the province mishandled changes to the fixed-wing medevac system. Forcing an aircraft to land at the International Airport can mean the difference between life and death in that golden hour. I know the Health minister is very familiar with this file. Surely he must recognize concerns that all Albertans have about the delivery of timely emergency health care. Knowing the damage this has caused, can he tell Albertans what he will do to cut down on ballooning transfer times for fixed-wing medevac services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta has set up an excellent system at the International Airport to ensure that patients can move in and out in an expeditious way and get the kind of health care that they need. For those members who haven't been out, they should go take a look at what an outstanding facility it is and how it's improved the operations and care for Albertans.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. The people in my riding in the Consort and Oyen regions have a right to know why they now have to wait 30-plus minutes extra for fixed-wing transit after serious accidents. Given that there are still Health Quality Council recommendations that have not been implemented for

these fixed-wing medevac emergencies, does the Health minister have a plan to implement them, and why?

2:40

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, the safety and the expeditious way in which any Albertan can be moved from an accident to a place of safety is a priority with this government. If there are issues, we'd gladly look into it and report back to the hon. member.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. Given that I've heard numerous stories from families in my riding about how this poor medevac system has negatively impacted their lives, my constituents want to know: when can they expect positive changes to this critically dangerous situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta makes every effort to ensure that every Albertan who has a challenge and needs to be moved by medevac has that opportunity. Not always can we have a plane at everybody's service. We do make every effort to ensure that access is available to people when it's needed. I can assure the member that we'll do all we can to ensure that people in his riding and every other riding have proper access to proper transportation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to voice the concerns of our postsecondary students, parents, and supporters of postsecondary education. They're concerned that the cost of this important level of education continues to increase. Now our government is considering allowing special tuition increases under a plan called market modification, that could drive the rates up by double-digit percentages in certain areas. My question is for the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. If we value postsecondary and understand its importance, why are we going around the tuition cap and considering these market modifier increases?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much. I'd like to commend the member for her efforts to support Albertans. Market modifiers are one tool that programs have to remain competitive throughout Alberta and with other jurisdictions. I'm considering 26 different applications that have been made from 10 different institutions. Consider this, Mr. Speaker: a University of Toronto law student pays \$60,000 more for a law degree than a University of Alberta law student. That's exactly the kind of anomaly that makes it necessary for us to review these kinds of market modifiers. Our goal isn't to be the cheapest education; our goal is to deliver the best education.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, my next question is to the same minister. Like any parent, I'm worried about accessibility when tuition goes up. At the end of the day isn't that what market modifiers do, reduce accessibility?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, access is a priority for this government. I'm very proud of our record on access. We invest \$234 million in

student aid. That includes scholarships, bursaries, and grants. We also make available \$408 million in student loans. Our students are extremely successful, and they have a very successful rate of paying back their student loans. Of the loans that were given this year, we can expect that 90 per cent will be paid back.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education: will government properly fund postsecondary education so that our students aren't stuck paying tuitions that price them out of the market to even attend colleges and universities in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. As every member in this House knows, no final decisions on the budget have been made yet. But let me put some facts on the table with respect to tuition in Alberta. Despite a variety of cost pressures tuition in Alberta in 2014-2015 rose by a mere 1 per cent. That's the second-lowest increase in all of Canada. Alberta's average undergraduate tuition is below the national average. Furthermore, an undergraduate student pays approximately 25 per cent of the actual cost of their education. The majority of the costs are picked up by taxpayers. We support our students, and we support them toward success.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the time for question period has expired. In 30 seconds we will move on with the next important item of business.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Life Leases

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to express my concern with regard to life leases. Life leases are a housing agreement typically utilized by seniors. They purchase the exclusive right to occupy a unit in a development for life or for a fixed term. The owner benefits from having a guaranteed tenant for an extended period of time instead of the year-to-year nature of true rental units. The lessee benefits as life lease agreements are generally more affordable than both renting and owning a home. In theory these agreements seem to be beneficial to both the owner and the lessee.

However, life leases are a relatively new phenomenon in Alberta, and the rules surrounding them are vague or nonexistent. For example, life leases are not considered rental properties in Alberta, so the Residential Tenancies Act does not apply to them. Additionally, the Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta produced an extremely helpful booklet of information on life leases. However, within the booklet they note that a disadvantage of entering into a life lease agreement is that "life lease agreements are not typically well understood by lawyers because this type of leasing . . . is relatively new and . . . there is not a lot of legislation relating to this type of lease."

Furthermore, one of my constituents, Mr. Thomas Moore, whom I introduced earlier, has outlined his very unfortunate experience with this type of agreement. His experience included hidden fees; additional costs, which are not fully explained; and transferring of capital upgrades and enhancement costs onto lessees, which really doesn't make sense as life lessees do not own the property they reside in.

Bill 9 has gone a long way to helping condo owners, and I

would encourage our government to take a long look at life leases to ensure that our seniors are not being taken advantage of.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Lethbridge-East.

Anniversary of l'École Polytechnique Shootings

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. Mr. Speaker, 25 years ago this Saturday, December 6, 1989, a man who hated women walked into the classrooms at l'École Polytechnique in Montreal, separated the men from the women on different sides of the room, and started shooting. He killed 14 women that day. He killed 14 women because he had not been accepted into the engineering school and believed it was the fault of feminists.

I am a feminist. I was 31 at the time and working for the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues. This event shaped my life and the lives of many of my peers, especially women working in sectors assisting women. For the first time it was made clear to us that being a feminist, working in the areas of women's issues, or even being a student in a nontraditional school program was enough to get you killed. It terrified our parents, lovers, and friends. Stevie Cameron wrote a stunning piece in the *Globe and Mail* entitled *Our Daughters, Ourselves*. I recommend it.

Because none of these students or staff were activists, it makes me take my work even more seriously. This is why I am so fierce, why I get up after being knocked down over and over and over again and after I've been heckled and denied. It's because of the Montreal massacre. If I was going to get yelled at, injured, or shot, it would happen while I and my colleagues were building a Canada less likely to produce another man killing women – to make Canada stronger, more inclusive, tolerant, with women more secure in their capacity to earn money, have better access to advanced education and quality child care for their kids, to become the boss, to reduce the barriers that were systematic in the legal and justice systems, to eliminate abuse, poverty, inequality, or discrimination of any kind.

A year later I convened a committee of terrific women, who would produce for many years the annual event to commemorate the Montreal massacre, later made National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women. These same women joined me today to mark this life-changing event.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Homelessness in Lethbridge

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada's communities wrestle with homeless problems and have seen various levels of success in eliminating homelessness. However, Lethbridge has achieved a jaw-dropping 85 per cent reduction in street homelessness and a 74 per cent reduction in overall homelessness since 2008, according to the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness.

Lethbridge faces challenges: population growth, significant lack of affordable housing, and rising rental costs. Lethbridge's accomplishments reflect a committed community leadership, stakeholder collaboration, and support from all levels of government, specifically the province's 10-year plan to end homelessness and the associated resources.

2:50

The recent point-in-time count preliminary results show that

Lethbridge had a decrease in homelessness in one year of 37 per cent. These are the biggest reductions in homelessness anywhere in Canada, again according to the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. Individuals counted this year as absolute or street homeless were only 11 people, which is an 85 per cent decrease from 2008.

In 2013-14 100 chronically homeless individuals were housed; 24 housing first clients reached graduation, which means that they participated in the housing first program for one year or more and achieved six consecutive months of being housed without eviction and reduced the complexity level of their care, a 90 per cent housing retention rate and only 10 per cent recidivism.

Lethbridge has developed creative, effective, unique partnerships with mainstream systems like child and family services, which support youth transitioning from care to adulthood.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Persons with Disabilities' Workforce Participation

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year about 100,000 people move to Alberta to find work opportunities because we are leading the country in job creation and economic prosperity. Despite this strong economic growth, we will be facing a labour shortage by 2023. Alberta continues to need access to skilled labour to meet the needs of our economic conditions. The Premier recently noted that Alberta is working on labour force strategies that respond to market demands and ensure that we have the workers we need.

Albertans with disabilities are underrepresented in the workforce and need the opportunity to show their skills. There are many who are willing to work but for various reasons face barriers that keep them out of the workforce. Helping them to find jobs aligns with our government's goals to make communities inclusive and welcoming to all Albertans. That's why I'm proud that Alberta's employment first strategy is creating opportunities for people with disabilities to find meaningful work and develop their skills. This also helps employers to gain access to a new pool of skilled workers who make valuable contributions.

I am proud that under this strategy our government is leading by example in hiring 20 new interns with disabilities. Some of these people are here today, introduced by the associate minister, and we welcome them all. I know they will be a valuable addition to our team here in government. They will be taking on various roles and professional positions across our government, and we are very thankful to have them.

The employment first innovation fund was also launched earlier this year to find new ideas and approaches to welcome more Albertans with disabilities into our workforce. Everyone benefits when we live in an inclusive society that embraces different skills and abilities. So, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I regret having to interrupt you, but the two minutes are up, and we must move on to the next speaker.

Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Ponoka School Playground

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to read portions of a letter sent to the Education minister by the mayor of Ponoka. He writes:

With the school upgrade project, an unfortunate consequence has arisen. A new playground for the younger

children will need to be constructed and updated to meet today's standards and will need to be moved closer to one of the renovated schools . . .

Parents, rightfully, want their children to experience quality play time during the school day. Playtime encourages children to be more active, interact with each other and overall makes children healthier . . . We commend the parent group in our community for planning and attempting to raise the funds to provide for the new playground, but we question whose responsibility this really is. Rate payers in the Town of Ponoka already pay an education tax on their property which is collected by the municipality on behalf of the province. If our municipality were to become involved in funding the school playground project it would mean that property taxes would have to increase, and in fact, our property owners would in essence be paying a second education . . . tax through their property taxes.

I respectfully request answers to the following:

- What are the plans for the third school in the Town of Ponoka?
- How many more students can be accommodated by the two renovated schools?
- What are the Ministry's plans when the two schools are at capacity . . .
- What information and options are available related to funding school playground projects for school boards and/or parent groups . . .

Municipal governments are faced with replacing aging infrastructure and with providing services with increasingly limited revenues . . .

I would be glad to discuss these or any [other] issues with you at your convenience.

[Signed],

Rick Bonnett, Mayor

Mr. Speaker, all week we've heard about the politicization of hospitals and school infrastructure, and now we see the politicizing of the CFEP funding. It's disappointing. Albertans want this government to make fair and transparent funding decisions. They want the government to publish public-project priority lists. They don't want special treatment; they just want fair treatment. This government would do well to listen to Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, did you catch my eye on 7(7)?

Mr. Denis: Yes, I did. I'd like to ask for unanimous consent to continue the Routine past 3 p.m., notwithstanding rule 7(7).

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Let's go on to Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Entrepreneurship and Small Business

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to call attention to Global Entrepreneurship Week, celebrated from November 17 to 24 in over 140 countries. It's a world-wide movement inspiring millions of young people to embrace innovation, imagination, and creativity through entrepreneurship.

Earlier this year the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Alberta report confirmed that Alberta is one of the best places on Earth to be an entrepreneur. Entrepreneurs head the small businesses that are the lifeblood of Alberta's economy. Small businesses contribute over 25 per cent of Alberta's gross domestic product and make up 95 per cent of all the businesses in the province.

This government is not sitting still. This fall we released a new

small-business strategy as well as streamlined the refreshed smallbusiness.alberta.ca. For government services information our new business advisers at the Business Link offer a one-stop shop for small businesses. This fresh approach offers easier access to information, help with regulatory matters, a stronger voice on policy issues, and support and guidance for Alberta's entrepreneurs.

I'm pleased to have led the engagement sessions with small-business owners and entrepreneurs in communities across the province last fall. What we heard first-hand as well as online helped shape Alberta's new strategy for small-business success. Successful entrepreneurs are the foundation for innovation, job creation, and economic diversification. Building a competitive province where our entrepreneurs and small businesses can thrive is a top priority.

This government is committed to working with all entrepreneurs, businesses, industry, and stakeholders to continue to reduce the regulatory burden for small businesses and make Alberta one of the most successful business climates in North America.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 204

Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014.

Bill 204 amends the Traffic Safety Act by making distracted driving punishable by a fine of \$250 and three demerit points. Distracted driving is a dangerous and potentially deadly driving behaviour. Fines alone have not deterred distracted driving. Introducing demerits would provide much stronger punishment and be a greater deterrent to potential offenders. This would reduce road casualties by reducing instances of distracted driving. Bill 204 works to make roads safer for all Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, sir.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder or someone on behalf of? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence, I have the three from the Member for Edmonton-Calder and one myself, so I'll do all four.

The first tabling I have, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a motion passed last night by the Edmonton Youth Council in a vote of 14 to 1. The vote clearly affirms the council's opposition to Bill 10 in its current form and calls on "the provincial government to engage in meaningful consultation with LGBTQ and allied youth when it comes to matters relating to [GSAs] in Alberta's schools."

3:00

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of a blog post written by a mother in Fort McMurray whose

daughter helped start a GSA in her school. In her blog she articulates why Bill 10 essentially means that kids who "meet opposition to founding a GSA will simply not be able to overcome the challenges and the idea will slowly wither and die."

My third tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of a letter written by Don Boras to the Premier on the topic of Bill 10. Don writes: "This bill does nothing for the needs of the students who need it the most, those in strictly controlled religious schools. It is not a compromise bill – it is an abrogation of their rights."

My fourth and final tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of a definition of terms from the American Psychological Association, which serves to clear up any confusion for any member on gender identity and gender expression. Just to throw in here, gender expression: "way in which a person acts to communicate gender within a given culture." All the definitions are here.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Infrastructure, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling some documents. There are times when additional information is identified that could in fact impact the facility condition index on health facilities. I'm pleased to provide copies of the changes made in 2012 and 2013 and how it impacted the FCIs for these specific facilities. Further updates will be available on the Infrastructure website. This is something I endeavoured to do yesterday in question period and today in question period, and here it is.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just going to capitalize on one of the tablings that my colleague from Edmonton-Calder has just done, in which he tabled the actual resolution. I have some news coverage here from that youth council. The City of Edmonton Youth Council met at the same time we were, in fact, on the same bill and came to a diametrically opposed conclusion, but it was a pretty exciting process for those kids to go through. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies describing what happened at the City of Edmonton Youth Council, where they voted strongly against the government's Bill 10.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to provide the requisite copies of a press release, dated October 27 of this year, which is entitled Exhibition of Inmates' Art Reveals "the Artist Inside" and where the ADM states very proudly, "Most importantly . . . it is the inmates that we need to thank."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. McIver, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and

Labour, pursuant to the Government Organization Act the Alberta Association for Safety Partnerships radiation health authorized radiation health administrative organization annual report, September 3, 2013, to August 31, 2014, with attached financial statements for the year ended August 31, 2014; the Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors radiation health administrative organization annual report, year-end June 30, 2014, with attached financial statements dated June 30, 2014; Alberta Dental Association and College 2013 radiation health and safety program annual report, January 1, 2013, to December 31, 2013, with attached financial statements dated December 31, 2013; the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association radiation protection program 2013 annual report, November 1, 2012, to October 31, 2013, with attached independent auditor's report dated December 5, 2013; the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta radiation health administrative organization annual report for the period January 1, 2013, to December 31, 2013; the University of Alberta authorized radiation health administrative organization annual report, 2013-2014; the University of Calgary radiation health administration organization annual report for the period April 1, 2013, to March 31, 2014, with attached financial statements for the year ended March 31, 2014.

The Speaker: Thank you.

There are no points of order, so we can move on.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

The Speaker: Are there any other speakers to the throne speech?

If not, then I would ask the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville to close debate.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. I'd just close debate.

[Motion carried]

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

14. Mr. Denis moved on behalf of Mr. Prentice:
Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I want to say that that was a great speech, Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

Seeing none, hon. Government House Leader, on behalf of the hon. Premier would you like to close debate?

Mr. Denis: I would like to close debate on behalf of the Premier.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Government Motion 14 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's about 3:07. I would like to move that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:07 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 28th Legislature - 3rd Session (2014)

Activity to December 04, 2014

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 199 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1 Respecting Property Rights Act (Prentice)

First Reading -- 6 (Nov. 17, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 30-31 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft.), 142-146 (Nov. 24, 2014 eve, passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 169-173 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 206-211 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft.), 277-279 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

3 Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014 (Quadri)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 89 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 165 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 173 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 259-275 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

4 Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 89 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 165-167 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 174-175 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft.), 177-179 (Nov. 25, 2014 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 279-281 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

5 Securities Amendment Act, 2014 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 89-90 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 167-168 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 173 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 281-283 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

6 Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2) (Olson)

First Reading -- 22-23 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 90-92 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 175 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 193-206 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft.), 283 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 321 (Dec. 2, 2014 eve., passed)

7 Chartered Professional Accountants Act (McIver)

First Reading -- 159 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 275-276 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve.), 319 (Dec. 2, 2014 eve., passed)

8 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (Kennedy-Glans)

First Reading -- 159 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 276-277 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve.), 319-321 (Dec. 2, 2014 eve., passed)

9 Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014 (Olesen)

First Reading -- 237 (Dec. 1, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 336-338 (Dec. 3, 2014 aft., adjourned)

- 10* An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children (Jansen)**
First Reading -- 238 (Dec. 1, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 300-318 (Dec. 2, 2014 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 338-355 (Dec. 3, 2014 aft.), 357-366 (Dec. 3, 2014 eve.), 367-374 (Dec. 3, 2014 eve., passed with amendments)
- 11 Savings Management Repeal Act (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 334 (Dec. 3, 2014 aft., passed)
- 201 Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014 (Anglin)**
First Reading -- 86 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 125-128 (Nov. 24, 2014 aft.), 238-252 (Dec. 1, 2014 aft., passed on division)
- 202 Safe and Inclusive Schools Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (Blakeman)**
First Reading -- 86 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., passed), (Dec. 3, 2014 aft., withdrawn)
- 203 Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 192 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft., passed)
- 204 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014 (Amery)**
First Reading -- (Dec. 4, 2014 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, December 8, 2014

Issue 13

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, December 8, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week of important work in and for our province we ask for renewed strength to help guide us in our duties as members of this Legislature. We ask for the continued protection of this Assembly and also of those whom we serve. Amen.

Today being Monday, let us join with Robert Clark as he leads us in the singing of our national anthem.

Thank you.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you, everyone. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured today to rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the ambassador of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency Luo Zhaohui, who is seated in the Speaker's gallery. Accompanying the ambassador today are Mrs. Jiang Yili, the spouse of His Excellency, who is also a counsellor at the embassy in Ottawa; also, Mr. Yu Benlin, Mr. Zhao Wenfei, and Mr. Yang Tianwen, all from the embassy in Ottawa. Mr. Wang Xinping, consul general of the People's Republic of China in Calgary, is also in the gallery as is Ms Wang Lei and Mr. Wang Xuhong, also from the consulate general. This is the ambassador's first official visit to Alberta, and it is truly an honour for us in this Legislative Assembly to have him here today.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a long and important relationship with China. China is, in fact, Alberta's second-largest export market, and our trading relationship with the People's Republic of China is valued at more than \$3 billion. Looking to the future, I believe there is tremendous potential for greater collaboration between Alberta and China. I would now kindly ask Ambassador Luo and his delegation to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome to our visitors.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: We have some additional guests in the Speaker's gallery. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you very special guests from the Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan Committee. All of my guests are seated in

your gallery. They are Mr. Mehar Singh Gill, Mr. Gurcharan Singh Sangha, Mr. Avtar Singh Birk from Gurdwara Siri Guru Singh Sabha, Pal Singh Purewal and Dr. Bikkar Singh from Siri Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara. Mr. Zora Singh Grewal from Gurdwara Nanaksar and Mr. Surinder Singh Hoonjan from Gurdwara Millwoods were unable to attend today. With their great efforts the Sikh community was able to donate to Edmonton's Food Bank this holiday season. I will highlight their efforts during my member's statement. I would ask my guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you and welcome.

Let us proceed with other important guests. We have some school groups. Let's start with Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of students from the Rosedale Christian school in my constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky. They are in the members' gallery this afternoon with their teacher, Stephanie Dueck. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the member from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of students that will be in the Legislature later during question period. They're from Right Track senior high school in the constituency of Edmonton-Centre, and they'll be accompanied by their teachers, Brian Gizzie and Ted Welsby. I would ask members to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations, followed by the Minister of Health.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the second consecutive week I get to introduce students and teachers from Forest Heights elementary school, one of my wife's alma maters. We have 23 visitors in the members' gallery, including two teachers, Mr. Waylon Chinski and Miss Alison Dahmer. I had a short visit with these students. They're in for the week, so I'll be visiting with them more on Wednesday. If the students could please stand and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 19 grade 6 students from Monsignor William Irwin Catholic elementary school in the amazing constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud who are seated in the public gallery. These students are here to view question period following their participation in the legislative school program earlier this year. Accompanying these students is their teacher, Mme Carol Dyck. I'd like them to please rise and accept the customary welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups? None.

Let's move on to other important guests, starting with Edmonton-Decore, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly two guests from the Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council, a highly esteemed organization celebrating 40 years of establishment in our great province. Through their tireless leadership and steadfast commitment this organization has established a rich and unique identity and contributions within the Ukrainian community and well beyond the borders of Alberta. I extend my sincere admiration and appreciation to all of those community leaders and volunteers from the past, present, and future, whose contributions will serve as a subtle reminder of the progress and success achieved throughout the intervening years.

My guests are seated in the members' gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would kindly ask that they please rise and remain standing as I mention their names: Ms Olesia Luciwi-Andryjowycz, president, Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council; Ms Daria Luciwi, past president, Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council; and, with regret, Mrs. Slavka Shulakewych, provincial co-ordinator, Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council, who was unable to attend. Please join me in providing a very special traditional welcome. Congratulations.

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

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests seated in the members' gallery. These two ladies met with me this morning to introduce me to Generations of Hope, which is an Alberta charity that raises funds to assist couples in accessing assisted reproductive technologies to build their families. The goal of this charity is to put the hope of having children within reach of those struggling with infertility. Terri Abraham conceived both of her children through assisted reproductive technologies, and since the birth of her first son she's volunteered at Generations of Hope by running the very successful annual Images of Hope gala. Terri sat on the board for two years before becoming president in 2013. With Terri is Nicole Williams, who is no stranger to this building and a friend to many of us. They are meeting with MLAs this week to discuss funding for in vitro fertilization. I would now ask them both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three sets of introductions today of guests who contribute not only to my constituency but to the province as a whole. My first guest, who I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, is Carla Costuros. Carla is an Edmonton artist whose artwork, called *Mary's Daughter*, is currently displayed in the rotunda to mark the anniversary of the massacre at l'école Polytechnique. *Mary's Daughter* attempts to document the Montreal massacre with a history of women striving to achieve their potential. The Marys referred to are Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft, two women's rights pioneers from the 17th and 18th centuries whose writing, sadly, 300 years later still retains currency as we mourn the loss of 14 bright young women who dared to enter a masculine profession. I'd ask Carla to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Your second introduction.

Ms Notley: Thank you. My second introduction. I'm pleased to introduce through you to all members of the Assembly my guests from the Strathcona Place Senior Centre. Jeff Allen is the former executive director of the Strathcona Place society, and I would like to thank him for 41 years of continuous service, leadership, and inspiration to community, the board, the members, and the membership of the seniors' centre. I'd also like to introduce to you and to the Assembly the incoming executive director of the Strathcona Place Senior Centre, Ms Linda Ensley. I would ask them now to both stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Your third and final introduction.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three hard-working representatives of the 12th annual Ice on Whyte festival, being held in my constituency January 23 to February 1, 2015. Rob McDonald is the board president, Karen Tabor is the secretary-treasurer, and Wanda Bornn is the festival producer. I'm proud of the hard work the volunteers, board, and members and staff contribute to this exciting festival. I look forward to working with them to ensure that Ice on Whyte receives full support for this wonderful event. I would now like my guests to stand and receive, once again, the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a good friend of mine and an absolutely crucial, vital member of the community of Chestermere. I'll ask him to rise while I tell you about him briefly. His name is Preston Pouteaux. He is a pastor at Lake Ridge community church. At Lake Ridge, like many other churches, their work does not begin and end on Sunday. They are all about community, and Preston backs this wholeheartedly. He is as involved as anybody in our wonderful town. He was actually raised in Saskatchewan, and when he was a young man, his father would take him to the Assembly there to watch politics. He's involved because, like the rest of us, he wants to make this wonderful province even better. If you ever need a partner in November, I suggest he'd be a good candidate. Colleagues, would you join me in welcoming Pastor Preston today.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Helga Mathison and Andy Nicoli. In the late '70s Helga convinced the provincial government to fund home care for all Albertans in need of it, not just for those over 65. Today she's advising us to deliver more world-class, nonprofit, community-based home care as one solution for fixing health care. She's accompanied by her home-care worker, Andy Nicoli. Andy was born in Padova, Italy, and immigrated to Canada in 1952. He's 86 years old and Alberta's oldest home-care worker. I'd ask Helga and Andy to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I also rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Nalina Kumar. Nalina

is a meditation teacher who is passionate about preventative health and wellness for all Albertans. She volunteers her time to teach meditation at schools and in the community. In fact, she has even volunteered her time to teach Alberta's MLAs meditation so that we can have a calmer atmosphere in the Legislature. I would ask Nalina to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Violence against Women and Girls

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to remember the 14 young women whose lives ended in an act of violence 25 years ago at l'école Polytechnique de Montréal. These innocent women were gunned down for no reason other than their gender and the fact that they were pursuing an education and following their dreams. Extreme violence against women might seem like a problem from another place. It might seem like something that happens in less developed countries, or perhaps it seems like a problem of the past, something that happened long ago. But it remains a global problem that affects women where they live, work, learn, and even where they go on the Internet.

Violence against women and girls takes many different forms. It is not limited to any culture, country, or specific group of women. Aboriginal women are a particularly vulnerable population, and aboriginal women are at a significantly higher risk of violence and face violence at much higher rates than nonaboriginal women in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, we all know this violence must stop. Violence against women and girls has significant consequences. Children who witness violence against their mothers experience such a high level of stress that their brain development is delayed, and their future success is put in jeopardy.

We all have a role in helping to end violence in this province by supporting and building strong families and communities. The Alberta government supports violence prevention programs that focus on teaching people how to build healthy relationships throughout their lives. For example, through the family violence information line callers can access individuals who speak 170 languages, and we support women's emergency shelters and counselling services across the province to assist women facing violence and who need immediate assistance. These are important initiatives, but government alone cannot stop violence against women.

Violence and discrimination against women is a serious human rights issue as well. Everyone, not just the people in this Assembly, must recognize this issue as very real, still rampant despite the passing of 25 years. All Albertans, men and women, need to stand up and speak up in all forums to end violence against women. We must never ever forget.

The Speaker: The hon. deputy House leader for the Official Opposition.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to commemorate the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women, which happened last Saturday. Established by the Parliament of Canada, this day marks the anniversaries of the murders of 14 young women at l'école Polytechnique de Montréal. Their deaths 25 years ago shocked a nation.

Since 1991 Canadians have worn white ribbons on that day to reflect upon the violence that women and girls face daily in this country. The white ribbon is a symbol of a commitment to action against misogyny and as a commitment to build a society that does not tolerate gender-based violence. Twenty-five years later and we still have much work to do.

Mr. Speaker, this is one of the most important issues of our time. Even today Canadian airmen are in harm's way fighting an enemy whose principal point of difference with us is how women and girls are treated. Here at home we've heard calls for a public inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women. Every year in Alberta thousands of women flee violence and seek the safety and support of our emergency shelter network.

The minister is correct when she suggests that government alone cannot be the solution and that all men and women, particularly men, have a greater role to play. I stand here today, Mr. Speaker, imploring the men across this province and this country who resort to violence against the women in their lives, whether that be their girlfriend, their wife, their sister, their mother, their daughter, to seek help and to stop. There is so much to be done to create a world where every girl can grow up and reach her full potential and can live a life free of violence.

In 1989 14 young women were killed simply because they were women. We must never forget that, and we must constantly strive for a society, a Canada, and a world where that can never happen again.

Thank you.

1:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, unanimous consent has been requested for the third party, the fourth party, and the independent member to participate briefly in this important exchange.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Let us begin with the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful for the indulgence of the House to be able to add a few words of remembrance for the victims of l'école Polytechnique and its shootings. These 14 women were targeted because they were women. These murders shook us, but they also strengthened our resolve to work towards a more equal and just society in memory of those women and all women who are victims of active, direct violence.

But violence has another side: passive, indirect violence; sexual harassment in the workplace; the violence of poverty, which contributes to degrade women, especially single mothers, and force women into unsafe relationships and prostitution; and homelessness, creating high-risk situations for them and for their children.

Last year 17,000 women fleeing violence in Alberta, some with children, were turned away from shelters due to lack of space. It reflects a growing disconnect in a government that chooses to not bring in enough revenue to get ahead of Alberta's growing health and social problems by investing in prevention and early intervention.

What of the thousands of missing and murdered aboriginal women? We as the Legislature can do more to prevent these tragedies, but it will take significant new investment to reduce the vulnerability of aboriginal mothers, sisters, and daughters, improve access to culturally appropriate education, access to quality health services, to early childhood supports, and surely it's time, Mr.

Speaker, for a cold, hard look at how racism continues to haunt our society.

If this government is serious about learning from our tragic fatalities, we must establish independence of the Chief Medical Examiner's office from the Justice department. Ministerial denials of interference in the Chief Medical Examiner's office don't cut it, Mr. Speaker. The courageous challenge of Dr. Anny Sauvageau, resulting in her loss of a job, is yet another example of a failure of accountability in this government for full and transparent review of unnatural deaths.

Make no mistake, hon. members; there's much work to be done. Violence against women, both active violence and passive withholding of essential human needs, remains. It must be brought to light. It must be prevented and eliminated. It's our responsibility as legislators, men and women, to achieve this goal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, question period will follow after the next two comments. Let us begin with the leader of the ND opposition.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Saturday marked the 25th anniversary of the Polytechnique massacre. It's a day that is, sadly, etched in the memory of our nation, a day when 14 bright engineering students were killed because they were women.

Today, along with the NDP caucus, I remember those 14 women and the tragedy of their violent deaths. However, Mr. Speaker, today we also take the opportunity to commit once again to taking real action to end violence against women in this province.

The White Ribbon campaign, designed to remind all of the obligation to end violence against women and designed in particular to remind men of their obligation to end violence against women, is an important campaign. The late Jack Layton, former leader of Canada's NDP, was one of the cofounders of this campaign, and I am proud of that. But women in this province continue to face physical and sexual violence. In fact, as has been mentioned, the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters says that more than 17,000 women were turned away from shelters this year.

Today we also acknowledge the systemic violence towards indigenous women, 1,200 of whom have been killed or have gone missing over the past 30 years. The Alberta NDP believes that a full public inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women is required to get to the bottom of this systemic violence that women from indigenous communities continue to face. I have called upon the Premier to join us in this call.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Assembly for taking the time to reflect on the anniversary of the Polytechnique massacre, and I'd like to call on all members of the Assembly to take today as an opportunity to commit, once again, to ending all violence against women.

Finally, I'd also like to encourage all members of the Assembly to take the opportunity to reflect on the occasion by viewing the work of Edmonton artist Carla Costuros. Her piece entitled *Mary's Daughter* is currently displayed in the rotunda to mark the anniversary of the massacre at l'école Polytechnique.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we've just heard from the hon. minister, today we remember the 14 young women viciously attacked and murdered on December 6, 1989.

Mr. Speaker, these women had a fundamental right to pursue their studies in a traditionally male-dominated field, and they were targeted for it. Because of this heinous act of violence, we will never know the brilliance they would have contributed to the field of engineering throughout their careers, nor could we expect their families to ever truly feel complete.

It is our human duty to never forget this act of violence towards women nor forget any other as this would mean that their passing was in vain. We still see far too many instances of this sort of violence today, not only abroad but here in Canada and Alberta. It is imperative that we take responsibility, that we speak up when we witness violence, that we make it clear beyond all doubt that these acts will not be tolerated on any scale so that one day we might end them for good.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, you're reminded: 35 seconds maximum for each question, 35 seconds maximum for each answer.

Let us begin with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Oil Price Forecasting

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, oil prices continue to fall, and it appears that not everyone is on the same page about what that means for Alberta. An example of that is the discrepancy between the Finance minister and the Premier about what oil projections are and what the Premier has said that they're going to be. The Finance minister has stuck to his guns, saying that oil would average \$75 for the rest of the year. The Premier has said otherwise. Did the Premier misspeak when he told the Calgary Chamber of Commerce that he expects oil to range between \$65 and \$75?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question. Certainly, oil prices appear to be in the range of \$65 to \$75 per barrel. No one knows for certain because this is obviously an inexact science. Certainly, no Premier of Alberta or Prime Minister of Canada, for that matter, has control over international oil prices.

What these circumstances do demand on the part of the government of Alberta is to control what we can control, and that is our public finances, to be prudent, to be cautious, to be disciplined, and ensure that we have control on the expenditure side of the government, which this Minister of Finance is doing.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, they can't both be right. For the record I do think the Premier was right. At least, I hope he was because today oil dipped below \$65. Morgan Stanley says that Brent could average \$53 next year and dip as low as \$43. Regardless, basic math says that if oil spends the rest of the year below \$75, then it can't also average \$75. Now you know why we're opposed to all that fuzzy math. Why is it that the Premier is letting the Finance minister build a fiscal outlook on an oil price that the Premier knows is wrong?

Mr. Prentice: Well, I thank the hon. member for her question. I can assure the House that the Finance minister is building both this budget and the next budget on sound, conservative fiscal principles and on the most realistic projections of oil prices which

are possible, which at this point appear, by the reckoning of most commentators, to be in the range of \$65 to \$75 per barrel. This clearly has an implication on our province in terms of our finances. This province last year produced close to 2.6 million barrels of oil per day. We'll be cautious and disciplined as we move forward.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it is this budget year that we're concerned about because this discrepancy between the Finance minister and the Premier is important, and it's significant. Every dollar drop in the average oil price results in about 200 million fewer dollars in the government's coffers over a year. A \$5 difference has a billion-dollar impact. If the Premier's projections are right and the Finance minister's projections are wrong, they will be short by hundreds of millions of dollars this year. Will the Premier order the Finance minister to do a revised fiscal update using more realistic numbers?

2:00

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, when I talked about \$75 a barrel oil, that was the second-quarter update. We'll be coming out with a third-quarter update. Oil right now is at about \$63.28, which is going to make things interesting for us over the next little while. As a government we're committed to bringing in sound, conservative fiscal principles, and we'll do everything we can to make sure that core services and Albertans are looked after.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see the Finance minister is watching those numbers as closely as we are.

Rural Health Facility Utilization

Ms Smith: Last week the *Edmonton Journal* highlighted how this government has failed to maintain and properly utilize Alberta's hospitals. While we don't agree with the reporter's conclusion to close rural hospitals, it is very clear that the government should use the extra capacity to take pressure off urban hospitals. For instance, my hometown of High River has an effective, full-service hospital, that performs about half of the hernia operations in the Calgary region. Why won't this government use our rural hospitals to make Alberta's health system work better?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, this government, this Premier in the initial stages set out to look at rural hospitals and what they can do and the contributions they can make by setting up a rural health strategy. That report is coming out. We'll look at that as it comes out in the next couple of weeks, and we will take some steps according to that.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me give you an example. Last year I visited a small-town hospital which uses one of its operating rooms for storage. Now, this hospital is just a 90-minute drive away from here. Surely Alberta Health Services could relocate elective procedures to small hospitals close to our big cities and use the new capacity in our big hospitals to make progress on wait times for more serious procedures. Alberta is missing its key wait time targets in nearly everything. Why won't the Health minister look at better using our rural hospitals to improve the system?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. We are looking at wait times. Wait times aren't as simple as using a hospital here or a hospital there. They're a matter of capacity, of dollars that we are able to invest in the system, and the time we need in order to implement those changes. We're looking at that now. We'll be coming out with some ideas on change in the next

little while, which we hope will expedite some of the processes for some of the delayed surgeries.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, all this government wants to do is study. They never want to make decisions.

This government and AHS's centralizing bureaucracy constantly reject ideas which would improve the health system. Let me give you an example. An example of this failure to embrace an innovative proposal is from the Newell Foundation. This novel proposal is to build a life-lease facility in Bassano that would include innovative continuing care, long-term care nursing beds, and a small acute-care hospital. It's a very good idea. It's being offered to the government at virtually no cost. Why does the government constantly drag its feet on these kinds of health care innovations?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate that question. I've had an opportunity to meet with the Newell Foundation and the Bassano community. We're moving forward with that. It's a great idea. We look forward to working with them to bring that to fruition.

The Speaker: Next question, hon. leader.

Ms Smith: A good answer for a change, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Health minister.

Government Effectiveness

Ms Smith: The Premier has said that Albertans should judge his government on its progress, so let's ask some progress questions. On September 16 the Premier promised to sell Alberta's air fleet. Now, Albertans may think that we are out of the government aircraft business, but the planes have continued to fly senior members of the civil service around. Since the announcement there have been more than 40 flights. To the Premier: when can we expect the government air fleet to actually be sold, or has the Premier changed his mind about getting rid of it?

Mr. Prentice: I can assure the hon. member that the Premier has not changed his mind on that matter. This is a province under new management. We are listening to Albertans. We heard that Albertans do not want the government of Alberta operating an airline. I have never set foot on one of the government aircraft personally, Mr. Speaker, and our government ministers and political staff since September 15 have been flying commercial and driving as an alternative. I understand that there have been flights. The LG has used aircraft, and from time to time the shuttle service between Edmonton and Calgary has been used for officials.

Ms Smith: That wasn't a clear "We're selling the planes" answer, so maybe I'll have to ask that one again, Mr. Speaker.

Also during the by-election the Education minister announced on his campaign website that he was approving new modulars for William Reid school. Now, leaving aside the propriety of that announcement since it's being investigated by the Ethics Commissioner, the parents at William Reid would like to know the progress on that promise. During the floods the government showed it was able to build and install modulars at some school sites in less than three months. Can the Education minister tell us if William Reid school can expect to get their portables by February, and if not, why not?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, we certainly take seriously our responsibility to ensure that we have adequate capacity in our schools to respond to growing utilization. William Reid is one of those circumstances. I believe that the utilization rate there was well over a hundred per cent. We've made a commitment to provide modulars there and in other school jurisdictions as well, in the city of Calgary and across the province, and those will arrive in a timely way to ensure that all children will have adequate capacity to be educated in our schools.

Ms Smith: That doesn't sound like a yes either, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure when we're going to see those modulars installed.

Another progress question. On September 19 the Premier announced that Michener Centre would not be closed and that its residents could live out their lives there. What has not been made clear is if any of the 46 Michener residents who had been forced out would be allowed to return. We know that at least five of them have died since being forced out. We also know that for many of these residents Michener is the only home they've ever known. Can the Human Services minister tell us whether these Michener Centre residents will be allowed to return home, and if not, why not?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, just to encapsulate this exchange, Albertans will see what they've asked for, which is more portables, no airplanes owned by the government, and that the residents of Michener Centre who have left have been invited back and have been welcomed back. The minister can certainly provide the details of the exact numbers. I'm not current on the most recent numbers, but I do know that people who had left Michener have returned, have been welcomed back, and are satisfied with what this government has done to protect them.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, plain and simple. Alberta Liberals want equal rights for all, but the PCs proposed a state-sanctioned segregation law which would have created different classes of citizens based solely on their sexual identity. In trying to defend this atrocity, the Premier simply said that rights are not absolute. To the Premier: what rights of school children does the Premier not support and want to limit?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've said previously in this House that there is no room for intolerance in our education system, that we support a safe, dignified learning environment, a learning environment that is respectful of all students. That is our aspiration. As I indicated last week, Bill 10 has been paused, and we will consult and hear from Albertans their views on this, and I stand by that decision. It's an important decision, and that's exactly how we intend to deal with this.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the Premier says that he wants to put the whole process on pause – and you heard him right here – while he takes more time to consult. Well, we can tell you that not accommodating all requests for GSAs is unacceptable to the LGBTQ community and many Albertans. Even the president of the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association says that their boards will follow the law the province ultimately brings forward.

To the Premier: will you now have the political courage to do the right thing and make GSAs a reality in every school where students request them?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly, we will all follow the law, and we all intend to live up to the provisions of the Charter and the Alberta Constitution and fulfill the obligations that we all have to our children. In the days ahead there will be an important conversation with people in this province, and that will include people from the LGBTQ community, it will include people from the school boards which the hon. member has referred to, and it will include other Albertans who have a point of view on this matter.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative record is clear, dragging their feet until the courts force them to do the right thing. The fact is that LGBTQ students have a constitutional right to be free from the sort of discrimination that allows other students to form clubs but not them. Bill 202 would have automatically provided safe and inclusive schools to all students. The Premier said that Bill 202 was divisive, but how can he say that when he never even allowed it to come in the Legislature for debate? To the Premier: will you withdraw Bill 10 and allow Bill 202 to get the debate it rightly deserves right now in the Legislature?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, to reiterate, I heard in the clearest of terms from Albertans over the course of the last week that they wish to see further discussion. They wish to be heard with respect to the issues that are contained in Bill 202 or in Bill 10. That's precisely the reason that the bill was put on hold and why it's not been brought back to this Legislative Assembly. We stand by that decision. This is an important matter. We intend to get it right. We intend to hear from and listen to Albertans.

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

2:10

Women's Shelters

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day hundreds of Alberta women gather the courage to flee the abusive situations they are facing at home: they pack a bag, they gather their children, and they seek refuge at an emergency shelter. But the latest data shows that in total these brave women were turned away 17,000 times because the shelters were full. To the Premier: what does this say about our province when on 17,000 occasions women fleeing these dangerous situations can find neither shelter nor support?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The goal is to ensure that women and children get the help they need when they it. We know that if shelters are full for the evening, the support that's provided for emergency accommodation in a hotel room and the wraparound workers that we have to support the families are absolutely critical. As well, emergency protection orders have to be issued. We know those are very important. Unfortunately, in the last eight months we've had to issue to 900 women protection orders for their situations.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that doesn't answer my question at all, and I'm pretty sure that wasn't the Premier.

In the last few years rent in Alberta has skyrocketed while vacancy rates have dropped to 1 per cent in major cities. At the

same time the number of women and children accepted into shelters has actually gone down because those few who do find refuge can't find anywhere else to go, so they stay longer. Again to the Premier: why is your government neglecting vulnerable Alberta families by failing to ensure that there is genuinely affordable housing available for those who so desperately need it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows full well, we support the 30 women's emergency shelters as well as the second-stage shelters. We know that there is a need for affordable housing and for women and families to get into the homes quicker and not to stay in the shelters as long because that's a temporary solution. It goes back to the housing first solution, that we need to work on, and I look forward to working with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, just trying to figure out exactly the numbers we're working with so we can solve this problem together.

Ms. Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned that this does not appear to be a priority for the Premier. Now, his minister – his minister – has said that his government is finding a place for families who are turned away from emergency shelters by putting them in hotels. To the Premier: if this is a priority for you and you're prepared to answer it, do you truly believe that stuffing vulnerable families into a motel on the edge of town provides the necessary security and support that these women and these children need at such a fragile time in their lives?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly, this is a matter of concern to all Albertans, it's a concern to the hon. member, and it's a concern, I would assume, to every single person in this House. We need to protect women and their vulnerable children in these circumstances. We all know that. We do, as the minister pointed at, support the network of women's shelters in this province. We are working with the Council of Women's Shelters to improve the situation, and it's why we support things such as the White Ribbon campaign and, the week before last, the Moosehide campaign. This clearly matters to the government. We are dealing with it. These are challenging circumstances, and we all need to do the best that we can.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Energy Policies

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are in a belt-tightening mode. Clearly, the drop in oil prices means that there will be some difficult budget decisions ahead. Given that resource-dependent countries such as Norway, Mexico, and several Middle Eastern countries routinely hedge their annual royalties as a way to manage market risk, why doesn't this government adopt a risk management policy to hedge and lock in some or all of our expected royalties?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. Again, I hear a lot about Mexico; I hear a lot about Norway. I think it's important to understand that, you know, right now in today's economy there's no place you'd want to be other than Alberta. We're the only jurisdiction in Canada that can weather this storm. Moody's came out last week about our triple-A rating, saying that even if oil hits \$60 a barrel, this jurisdiction will weather the storm. When I look at Norway, you know, it's a

country; we're a province. I think that we'll be in good shape moving forward.

Mr. Anglin: I think you hedged your answer on that one.

Given that Alberta has deregulated its electricity market to pave the way for a free-trading market, why have regulatory costs rocketed from \$13 million to \$137 million annually since deregulation, and what is being done to control these out-of-control regulatory costs?

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I'd have to question the premise of that question. I think he's probably talking about the full regulatory system, not the regulation of the deregulated electrical generation market. The costs are open. The regulatory process is very clear. We're watching the costs all the time.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Canada's risk-free rate of return is below 1 per cent, given that the two-year bond nominal yield is below 1 per cent and that the 10-year bond nominal yield is below 2 and a half per cent, why do Alberta's regulated utilities receive a guaranteed rate of return of 9 per cent, and what risk are they undertaking to deserve such a lucrative guaranteed rate of return?

Mr. Oberle: Actually, they don't, Mr. Speaker. The member is mistaken in that. The companies receive a rate of return dependent on how good they are at managing their business, and it's not guaranteed to be 9 per cent.

MLAs' Nominations as Federal Election Candidates

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Justice, who is responsible for elections legislation in the province. Public service is a privilege, and we're all familiar with the old adage that a person cannot serve two masters. Can the minister explain what Alberta's policy is regarding members of this House standing as federal parliamentary candidates while continuing to hold provincial office?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, this is crossing over into another jurisdiction, but if you have an answer you'd like to give, let's hear it.

Mr. Denis: Yes, I can, Mr. Speaker. There's not a specific regulation in our elections laws, but there is a regulation under section 65 of the Canada Elections Act, which makes it clear that an MLA in a province is not eligible to be a candidate in a federal election. Just in common terms, what that would mean is that once a federal election is called and if a person here was signing off to become a candidate for whichever party in whichever district, what would happen is that that person would have to resign here under the federal law.

Dr. Brown: To the same minister: the former Member for Calgary-Foothills did the honourable thing and stepped aside when he got the nomination, but since the law does not require such a thing, are we relying on the individual ethics and judgment of individual members in the House?

The Speaker: Hon. member, we're treading into an area here that is really beyond the jurisdiction cited, in particular asking for legal opinions. That is also something that is dicing on the side of a dangerous precedent here. I'll allow one more answer here.

Mr. Denis: What I would indicate, Mr. Speaker, is that the former Member for Calgary-Foothills, a gentleman named Len Webber, became the federal candidate, and he resigned immediately. I think he did the honourable thing. There was a by-election called, and subsequent to that, we did receive a very good member from Calgary-Foothills to replace him.

The Speaker: Do you wish to try again, hon. member?

Dr. Brown: Would the minister consider bringing forth legislation to ensure that MLAs are working full-time for the interests of Albertans?

The Speaker: Briefly, hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I have no plans to change the legislation at this time, but I would encourage Albertans who are concerned about MLAs moonlighting for other political parties to maybe give them a call. Albertans are our bosses. They deserve our one hundred per cent, undivided attention every day.

The Speaker: I may choose to comment on this at another time.

Let us move on to Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Rural Hospitals

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, rural hospitals are a key component of the overall structure of smaller communities across Alberta. Not only do they ensure the health of these communities, but they also create jobs and inspiration for young people to lay down roots and live in our remote communities. To the Infrastructure minister: will your government's new approach to rural health care infrastructure mean that large areas will be dark and bare of local and regional health care and emergency services?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We had an intensive discussion last week, in this Chamber actually, about the facility condition index and the status of our rural hospitals in particular. We're committed to ensuring that our hospitals are in great shape. We have over \$222 million committed in our current capital plan to catch up on the maintenance in our hospitals, and we'll continue to invest to ensure that they're safe and secure for Albertans.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you. This government's front bench continues to provide no real answers on the plight of rural hospitals. Clearly, they have been well coached, but Albertans deserve to know what exactly is going on. Given that we've heard a lot of responses to questions about health care infrastructure particularly or platitudes and generalizations like, "This government is always looking after the health interests of Albertans," I'm going to give the Minister of Health a chance to be perfectly clear. Are you going to close rural hospitals? Yes or no, sir?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Alberta is incredibly important to this government. One of the Premier's first steps was to create a rural health care strategy, which we're moving forward

on. That will give us some direction on how we can better support our rural hospitals and our rural communities.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Yes. Thank you. Well, Minister of Health, you wrote a column for the *Edmonton Journal*, published on December 6, that outlined this government's approach to health care infrastructure, but in it you only talked about large urban centres like Edmonton and Calgary. Once again to the Health minister: will you set the record straight by committing today to the support of rural hospitals and ensuring that these crucial rural facilities remain an integral part of the regional health care framework?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to every hospital in this province. We'll continue to work with every community to try to make sure they have the kind of health care within their community and around their community that they can be proud of. We'll continue to do that. This Premier has given us direction to do that. Maintenance is an important part of what we do. We'll continue with that approach.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Animal Disease Prevention and Surveillance

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Disease prevention and surveillance is just as important in animal health as it is in human health. Thanks to the co-operative efforts of producers, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Alberta Agriculture, and my veterinary colleagues our province is free of a number of diseases that cost millions to other jurisdictions. It is a proud record but one that requires constant vigilance. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: with the recent diagnosis of a highly pathogenic strain of avian influenza on poultry farms in B.C., can the minister assure Albertan poultry producers that specific measures are being taken to prevent this disease?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. Yes, I'm sure we've all seen on the news that there is an outbreak of avian influenza in the lower mainland of B.C. Five farms have been affected. They've all been quarantined by the CFIA. Our provincial veterinarian, Dr. Hauer, and his staff are monitoring this very closely. They do have an action plan in place. I should say that I've visited that centre several times when they've been just doing trial runs, and these are people that are very committed to their job and very ready.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Avian influenza is only one potentially devastating condition. Our hog industry currently faces the threat of porcine epidemic diarrhea, or PED. Given that this disease has been recently diagnosed in Ontario, Quebec, and Montana and that the virus has been detected in Alberta off-farm, are additional educational and biosecurity measures being taken to prevent this devastating disease from being established in Alberta, or are hog producers going to be left on their own to deal with the devastating consequences, like they were with the H1N1 outbreak of 2009?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer to the question is that, yes, steps are being taken. I should mention that both in the case of the avian influenza and in the case of PED, which involves pigs, we're working very closely with industry. It's not that industry is sitting on the sidelines. They are fully engaged in this, and in this particular case it was an industry initiative, a random check, that found the PED bacteria in an office. It has not involved any animals in Alberta, but that just shows you the extent of the surveillance. We jumped right at it, and they've taken extended measures now.

Dr. Starke: Well, finally, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Without question, the most economically devastating animal disease to affect our province in this century has been bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or BSE. A lot of work was done to reopen markets, but it took years of effort and lots of testing. Now the World Organisation for Animal Health currently lists Canada among countries with controlled BSE risk status. What, if anything, is your department doing to maintain that status or, better yet, to move us into the more favourable category of negligible risk like the U.S.A.?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is something that we are watching and working on very carefully. It is true that the BSE epidemic was devastating for our industry, but one of the things that evolved from it was enhanced traceability, a much greater awareness in terms of industry, governments, and the public. I would say that we're much better prepared now to deal with these types of situations. In 2015 we can apply to the World Organisation for Animal Health – the acronym is OIE – for a risk-free status, so we're hoping to do that then.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Faith-based and Private Schools

Mr. Hehr: Last week this government failed when it refused to allow gay-straight alliances in all schools where kids want them. Last spring the Heritage Christian academy and the Prairie Christian academy, both fully funded public schools, required students and staff to sign an agreement stating that they would not engage in homosexual behaviour. To date neither this government nor these schools have made public the wording of their new document that may try to regulate student and staff morality. To the Minister of Education: can the minister tell us whether or not students and staff at these schools are still required to sign this morality agreement?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I can say that we expect that all school boards, all jurisdictions that are under the authority of this government will ensure that they are operating within the legal framework that is required by our Canadian Constitution and by the laws of this province.

Mr. Hehr: That doesn't sound like much of an answer.

Recently a private school, the Green Learning Foundation, went bankrupt. In an act that can only be described as complete and utter incompetence, this government forwarded money to this school when it was in financial disarray. As a result, families were left without money to be used for their kids' education. What has the minister done to rectify the situation, and what steps has he taken to ensure that this does not continue?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, this certainly was a stressful situation for the students and the families concerned, and we want to ensure, of course, that the students continue to have a good education wherever they will be. I understand this matter is in bankruptcy proceedings, and we will wait to determine what the outcomes of that will be.

Mr. Hehr: Well, that doesn't sound like too much.

The troubling fact is that 69 private schools have gone out of business in the last five years. While this government compels all public school boards in this province to make available their financial information by posting it online or on the ministry website, why aren't private schools required to do the same when they receive public money? Are parents not entitled to know this information?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, I understand that a number of private schools have closed. They normally close because enrolments drop, and they simply cannot sustain their particular operations. We ensure that all schools in the province, whether they are public or private, meet our financial disclosure obligations, that they go through the appropriate auditing processes, and that I and my officials are satisfied that public funds are being spent appropriately on the education of children.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. While running to replace a Premier who had broken her promise to adequately fund postsecondary education, this Premier promised to restore all funding that was cut from our province's institutions. Despite these promises, his minister for advanced education has suggested that more cuts will be coming to our institutions rather than restoring the funding the Premier promised. To the Premier: will the Premier's promise to keep the promise that was broken again be broken, or will he keep his promise to keep the promise that was broken?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to put some facts on the table. First of all, no budget decisions have been made yet. What I can tell you is that Alberta invests in our students. Our latest numbers show that Alberta has the third-highest expenditures per full-time student in all of Canada. Campus Alberta is very well funded. This year we invested \$2.1 billion among our postsecondary institutions.

2:30

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that this government's negligence has forced universities and colleges to turn to student fees as a financial alternative and given that recent proposals for market modifiers by several institutions will gouge students and place many professional careers out of reach of kids from families of modest means, to the minister of advanced education: will you assure potential students from working- and middle-class families that their futures will not be snatched away from them because of underfunding of postsecondary education by this government, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Let's put some facts on the table again for that member. Accessibility is a priority for our government, and I'm proud of our record. We invest \$234 million in student aid supports. That includes scholarships, bursaries, and grants. In addition, we make \$408 million available for student loans. Any Albertan who qualifies for a student loan gets a student loan. Our graduates are very successful, and they're successful at paying back their student loans. We expect that 90 per cent of student loans that are issued this year will be paid back.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the minister would like some facts, I want to ask him if he's aware that this province cancelled the remission program a number of years ago, leading to some of the highest student debt in the country and the lowest participation in postsecondary attendance of any province in Canada. Our postsecondary institutions are running big deficits. Given the importance of education to Albertans, can he look Albertans in the eye and tell them that his government will ensure that there are no further cuts to postsecondary education?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, what I can tell you is that there have been no budget decisions made at this time yet. We're still going through the process. What I can tell you is that we're going to continue investing in our postsecondary institutions. I can tell you that we're going to continue making sure that young people have access to their postsecondary institutions. We're going to continue investing so that our students get the best education.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky-View, followed by Lethbridge-West.

Education Curriculum

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few years ago the government launched a bold new initiative called Inspiring Education. The goal, as stated in the document, is to completely transform education. In other words, they want to change what kids learn, and they want to change how kids learn. While there are terrific initiatives under way at the local level, a lot of people find the government's new initiative – shall we say? – less than inspiring. To the minister. Your government is under new management. How will that affect what you do or don't do with Inspiring Education?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, Inspiring Education was the product of many months of hundreds, indeed thousands of conversations that took place across the province with Albertans regarding the future of their education system. There is much in that particular document that is indeed inspiring. It is a visionary, inspirational, and directional document that helps provide guidance for where we go in the future. Does that mean that education is going to go through a revolution? Of course not. We have a wonderful education system. We're going to continue to ensure that it's top-drawer for our students.

Mr. McAllister: Well, that clears things up.

In 2008 the government changed math textbooks in the province to line up with the new fad, discovery-based or inquiry-based learning. Not coincidentally, the publisher of this textbook, *Math Makes Sense*, also sits on the curriculum-development team with

the province. That's a conflict of interest, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: will you provide another resource for math instruction to teachers that focuses on direct instruction and includes things such as standard algorithms so that we have a better balance for our students in the classroom?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, once upon a time in a former life I was a teacher and a school principal and a chair of a board of education in this province, and I understand that there are many ways to accomplish the goals of education. There are many pedagogies that work. Direct instruction is one. Inquiry education is another. If anybody thinks that there's only one best way to go about teaching, they're mistaken. So we will ensure that we have a curriculum – and I will sign off on that at some point in time – that is going to be the very best for our students going forward into the 21st century, focusing on basics and focusing on 21st century skills.

Mr. McAllister: I'm sure the minister's office smells of rich mahogany, too, but it doesn't answer the questions we're asking.

I'll give you another opportunity to prove you're under new management. Minister, I had to beg, plead, pretty much embarrass the former Education minister to meet with Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies, who represents tens of thousands of Alberta parents who have concerns with what's going on in the classroom. She is supported by a team of highly qualified expert mathematicians. Minister, will you agree to meet with Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies and her team, not your department officials but you personally, sir?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I just indicated that we are committed to building and maintaining and strengthening an education system that will do the very best to provide our students with 21st century skills learning and also basics in literacy and in numeracy, the kinds of things that all of us would want our children to be successful at. In that process there are many people who are engaged in speaking to the curriculum-design process. We will continue that. Many voices will be heard, and we will have an excellent curriculum for the 21st century.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Workforce Supply

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the weekend we had the privilege of having our Premier down in southern Alberta to visit with many rural and urban constituents, and while I was there having a chance to hear from these folks, I heard one consistent theme. There is a great deal of concern about the temporary foreign worker program and the Alberta immigrant nominee program. We have people being sent home that are valued employees that are helping to keep rural and urban businesses alike going, and while they're doing that, we're losing employees. So I'm going to ask the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: what are you doing about this backlog in the nominee program?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a question that I've heard from the hon. member's constituents, too. The fact of the matter is that we have no backlog in Alberta. Alberta is limited by the federal government to a maximum of 5,500 certificates each calendar year for AINP, and as of last week we have issued

all 5,500 of those certificates for this year. We have worked and will continue to work with the federal government to find long-term solutions to better respond to Alberta's labour demand.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As these workers are being sent home, we have businesses that are struggling to meet the needs. They're closing early, and they're reducing their hours. What is the ministry doing to support those businesses that are facing these challenges and having to reduce their hours of operation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member must be taking the same phone calls I am, once again. The government's priority always has been and still is that Albertans and Canadians get the jobs available first. We recognize the difficulties that some businesses are experiencing in finding permanent personnel for those permanent jobs. Our government has strategies in place to support employers in recruiting and retaining the workforce. We also support initiatives to help Albertans gain the skills and training they need to fill the available jobs. Despite these initiatives we expect to be 96,000 workers short by 2023.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've just heard the minister say that he's hoping to see Albertans fill these vacancies. So I'd ask the minister this question, then: what is he doing to make sure that these Albertans are trained and ready to go to work in these jobs and businesses?

Mr. McIver: Well, of course, Mr. Speaker, through my colleagues the ministers of Education and Advanced Education there are a lot of programs. We also work with the federal government on the Canada-Alberta job grant, which shares the responsibility for training people between the government and business, thereby involving business in doing this, too. It's a team effort. We also have to get involved. We also are working to help underrepresented groups participate more fully in the labour market through the First Nations training programs. We continue to work with employers and the industry associations on a constant basis, but it's a big job.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Women's Shelters (continued)

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The social supports for women fleeing violence in this province are inadequate. According to recent reports over 17,000 women were turned away from emergency shelters last year. That's 2,000 more than the year before, and it's enough to fill Rexall Place. This is a troubling statistic made worse by the fact that these women are being turned away at a critical time, when they are most concerned about their own personal safety and the safety of their children. To the Minister of Human Services: why is your government denying support to thousands of vulnerable women every year?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd first like to thank the hon. member for his powerful statement on the 25th anniversary of l'école Polytechnique.

We know the work we have to do. As I indicated earlier, shelters are just one part of the equation. It's about increased supports to women in violence with front-line workers and first responders such as police. We work with them to help them with their immediate safety and needs, but again it's temporary, and we're looking at the housing first model as much as we can.

Mr. Wilson: Last year I raised the issue of unfunded capacity existing in our emergency shelters, and in response the province allocated funding for an additional 70 spaces in the system. Minister, is there additional capacity in our shelters today, over and above these 70 spaces, to do more if the funding was made available, and will you be advocating for that in your budget this year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, we did allocate 70 more shelter beds last budget for a total of 710 beds. One of the other areas we allocated funds for was shelter enhancement, which was about \$260,000 across Alberta for shelters to use funds for extra expenses. That's been very successful. With respect to maintenance there are some agencies that have funded that in Calgary. We know that it's important to have these available and to have the conversations with the shelters to meet their needs.

Mr. Wilson: The additional spaces are a start, Mr. Speaker. We all recognize that this is a multifaceted and complex problem with no simple solutions. When a woman makes the choice to seek help, which requires a huge leap of faith in our social system, and our collective response is to send them right back into the violence they are attempting to flee, we are failing them, Minister. This is not a new problem. What are you going to do about it?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Again, Mr. Speaker, as I've said previously, we know that women are reaching out for help, and that's contacting the family information line as well, which I said is available in 170 languages. I'm looking forward to working with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters to ensure that we have a consistent way to collect data to see exactly how many women and children we're able to help. I know that sometimes women may contact a shelter by phone before they decide to leave a tragic situation. I can assure you that Human Services and this government are working very hard to support women and families.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Edmonton River Valley Park System

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, Edmonton is known for its parks and trails. My constituency of Edmonton-McClung contains many of these parks and trails as it is bordered by the North Saskatchewan River. In the First Session of this Legislature I proposed a motion for the government to continue its commitment to the creation of a world-class capital region river valley park by working with the city of Edmonton to connect all of the river valley parks into a single, continuous, and protected park. My question to the minister of the environment and sustainable resources: how . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Can you guess what his question was going to be?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, I can imagine because I've sat with this member and I know how very passionate he is about the river valley in Edmonton, so I want to thank him for his passion.

Mr. Speaker, the goal and the vision of the River Valley Alliance is to create North America's largest river valley park system for the enjoyment of all Albertans. I'm happy to say that to date a number of projects have been completed in support of the river valley park system, including the Fort Edmonton Footbridge, Voyager park in my constituency of Devon, and also in Fort Saskatchewan and many others. Funding is being utilized, and projects are . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. First supplemental.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you to the minister for the compliment.

My supplementary question to the same minister: how have Albertans benefited from the river valley initiative since that time, and how have you improved access and connectivity in the river valley area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The end result of this project is to create an almost 80-kilometre river valley park system for all Albertans to access and to use. Every time one of our partner communities completes a project, we get closer to our goal, and each completed individual project adds value and creates new opportunities: a vibrant stretch of trail connecting seven municipal communities along the river valley, complete with parks, trailheads, facilities, docks and boat launches, pedestrian bridges, and so much more.

Mr. Xiao: To the same minister: how will your department ensure our parks and trails in the river valley are preserved and sustained for future generations?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, this project is about creating, protecting, and preserving a capital region river valley park system. Alberta Parks staff are working with our municipal partners to develop a conceptual plan for facility development and recreational opportunities within this system. With \$50 million invested in this project by the province, we have a vested interest to continuing to work with our partners on the completion of this important and unique urban park system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Little Bow.

Service and Rescue Dogs

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not every business in Alberta is complying with the provincial legislation that protects the rights of individuals with disabilities who use service dogs. A recent survey shows that Alberta's cities treat service dogs and their owners poorly, turning them away from public places like restaurants and grocery stores even though their rights are protected. This includes many of my constituents. Laws and obligations are one thing, but ensuring compliance is another. All of my questions are to the Associate Minister of Persons with

Disabilities. Minister, why aren't you standing up for disabled Albertans and their service dogs?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. associate minister to respond.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know how important it is for Albertans with disabilities to use dogs and have access. People with a qualified service dog and a team can go anywhere you and I can. Failing to do that, there is a fine of up to \$3,000. We're working on a very aggressive public awareness campaign to make sure that all businesses are aware of this. Of course, if someone does not comply with this, it is a provincial law, and you can report it to the police.

Mr. Young: There are those who can't access service dogs that they need trained. There is a huge demand that is not being met and that impacts Albertans' ability to live a high-quality life with the supports they need. Why are you denying Albertans the right to live these high-quality lives, and what are you doing to support these service dogs?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to making sure that every Albertan has the best quality of life. In terms of the service dogs we absolutely know that it's important for the individual to have access with their service dogs. In terms of the shortage we're currently working on some regulatory changes so that owner-trained dogs can also be tested under ADI standards, without compromising public safety, to make sure that people can have access to service dogs and can enjoy their quality of life.

Mr. Young: Emergency search and rescue dogs and their handlers are invaluable in emergency disaster situations. Will the minister extend the provision of service dogs to emergency service and rescue dogs that are deployed to an emergency?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're absolutely grateful for the service that both service dogs and rescue dogs provide, and I'm quite thankful for the hon. member's passion in terms of the search dogs and guide dogs. As the hon. member is aware, they go through rigorous training. Search and rescue dogs and guide and service dogs have different training to make sure that we're meeting the needs of Albertans. A law protects the rights of persons with disabilities, and of course it's about allowing access to individuals to go to public . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the bell sounding the end of question period has rung. Just before we have a 30-second pause here, could I have unanimous consent, should you wish to give it, to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. A brief introduction.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly

three individuals who have joined us to watch second reading of Bill 203. Seated in the members' gallery we have Mr. Paul Whittaker, the president and CEO of Alberta Forest Products. Many of you can remember Paul from his time as Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs. Seated with him is Mr. Brock Mulligan, director of communications with the AFPA. Brock was previously my CPC assistant and was a true asset to this government for five years. With them is Rory Koska, technical advisor with Wood Works! Alberta. I'd ask them all to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now we will resume with the next order of our Routine.

2:50

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Edmonton Food Bank Donation by Sikh Community

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to congratulate and thank the Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan Committee and members of the Sikh community of Edmonton, who are also part of my riding of Edmonton-Manning, for their generous support to raise donations to donate to Edmonton's Food Bank this year.

Mr. Speaker, on the occasion of the annual celebration of the birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikhism, the Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan Committee contributed to Edmonton's Food Bank with \$13,000 and 7,500 pounds of food as well as \$40,000 to the University of Alberta. In addition, with combined and driving efforts the Punjabi Media Association and the Sikh community were also able to donate \$65,000 and 4 tonnes of food.

One of the important teachings of Sikhism is sharing with those in need so that no one goes to bed hungry. Over the past three years the Sikh community in Edmonton has donated over \$200,000 to Edmonton's Food Bank. The Nagar Kirtan Committee and the Punjabi Media Association have for many years now made great efforts to reach out to the community for donation appeals through radio, print media, and TV programs in order to help in the efforts to provide support where it is needed.

I praise and salute the efforts of the Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan Committee, the Punjabi Media Association, and the Sikh community for their kind donations and for giving back to the community by helping those in need this holiday season. I encourage all of us and every Albertan to donate this holiday season. God bless Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Official Opposition Policies

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you believe in shorter wait times for hospital surgeries, you just might be a Wildroser. If you believe prioritized public lists for infrastructure construction would prevent politicized decisions and reduce waste, then you just might be a Wildroser. If you wish the government had been putting half its surpluses into the heritage savings trust fund, you just might be a Wildroser. If you believe the interest on what should be a \$200 billion heritage savings trust fund would provide a nice cushion during times of lower royalty revenues, you just might be a Wildroser. If you think government, like baby diapers,

should be changed regularly and for the same reasons, you just might be a Wildroser. If you think one of the three great lies is, "Hi, I'm from the government, and I'm here to help you," you just might be a Wildroser. See me later to find out what I think the other two lies are.

If you think paying 1 and one half billion dollars for a structure that was quoted at \$500 million is unacceptable, you just might be a Wildroser. If you think that AHS would collapse if it weren't for the skill and dedication of front-line service providers, you just might be a Wildroser. If you think the best use of teachers in a classroom is teaching, not filling out a myriad of reports, you just might be a Wildroser. If you think cabinet voting itself a 35 per cent raise is unconscionable, you just might be a Wildroser. If you think public servants should receive pay and benefits similar to what the private sector can afford, you just might be a Wildroser. If you think \$375 million for MLA offices is a waste of money, you probably already are a Wildroser. If you think golden parachutes and million dollar severance packages should be illegal, you just might be a Wildroser.

If you think governments that award all these things and do all the things I've just mentioned should be voted out of office, then you're definitely a Wildroser.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, you've caught my attention.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ask for unanimous consent of this Assembly to continue past 3 p.m., waiving rule 7(7).

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Let's move on. Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Calgary-East.

Leduc No. 1 Energy Discovery Centre

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. February 3, 1947, was a day that forever changed our province. That day oil was struck at Leduc No. 1, and Alberta went from a have-not agricultural province to an energy giant that became the economic driver of this country.

The story of oil is the story of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and Leduc No. 1 Energy Discovery Centre, located on highway 60 in my constituency of Leduc-Beaumont, showcases this story and the importance of this industry to our daily lives. This world-class museum offers hands-on education in the science of oil and the history of Leduc No. 1 and the role it played in helping shape Alberta's identity. It offers a working oil rig, the world's largest drill bit, public tours, educational programs, interpretive displays, and archival information. It has hosted tourists and students from across Canada and around the world.

In true Alberta spirit it was developed and built through the hard work and dedication of volunteers. The Leduc No. 1 Energy Discovery Centre exists today as a not-for-profit museum owned and operated by the Leduc/Devon Oilfield Historical Society. However, Mr. Speaker, after 17 years the discovery centre is struggling. Its volunteers are aging and actually passing on, and its financial resources cannot keep up with rising operational costs. Myself and my colleague the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon have met with members of the society to offer what we can to help keep its doors open.

I would encourage all members to visit this fine testament to our province. I would love to see it become an official provincial

museum. The financial support and increased profile would help keep its doors open for generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Autism spectrum disorder is a complex condition that impacts brain development, leaving individuals with communication problems, difficulty with typical social interactions, and a tendency to repeat specific patterns of behaviour.

Families with an autistic child spend an immense amount of time and energy learning to understand and communicate with a child who does not respond in typical ways. Mr. Speaker, learning how to adapt as a parent of an autistic child can be incredibly difficult and can cause parents a great deal of hardship and self-doubt. Families can be greatly stressed by uncertainty about the future of their children. Determining what services are available to help can also cause great strain.

However, Mr. Speaker, there can also be great rewards for families with an autistic child when they have the proper support. The agencies that provide support for families dealing with autism in our province need more help and more direction from this government to help them overcome inefficiencies. Work can be done to optimize communication and to help organizations work together and streamline support services to ensure families get the best support on a timely basis.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that this government is committed to providing the best possible care. I'm also confident that we will continue to work diligently to overcome these obstacles and give Alberta families the proper support they deserve to meet the needs of their children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Volunteers

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the strength of our province flows from its people, and leading the way are thousands of dedicated volunteers who've stepped up to make a real difference in their communities. Their efforts create excellent social and cultural programs and provide opportunities for Albertans to participate in recreation and sports activities that help to make every Alberta community a wonderful place to live, work, and visit.

Our volunteers also help to ensure that our citizens continue to enjoy a quality of life which is one of the best in the world, Mr. Speaker, and because an Albertan stepped up to volunteer, other Albertans were able to develop a talent or learn a new skill. Many new Albertans were made to feel at home here while others were able to find the help they needed to get through a crisis.

Mr. Speaker, International Volunteer Day was recognized around the world this past Friday, December 5. On that day we celebrated and recognized the enormous impact that these dedicated individuals have upon their communities, their province, and our nation.

3:00

The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism presented the Stars of Alberta volunteer award to six incredible Albertans. Akshay Verma from Edmonton and Mitchell Mulhall from Fort McMurray were

in the youth category. Jim Hole and Ingrid Pederson from Edmonton were in the adult category. For the senior category we honoured Donna Du Bois from Three Hills and Gail Wolfe from Cold Lake. There was a very special tribute to Tracy Stewart, who overcame personal challenges to volunteer over 20 years at Edmonton's Norwood extended care facility.

The outstanding contributions of these volunteer stars are an inspiration, Mr. Speaker, to all Albertans and remind each of us that we have the power to make a real difference in our communities.

I now ask that all members of the Assembly join me in thanking our incredible Alberta volunteers.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Hehr: It should be no surprise that once again this province is in difficulty as a result of the rise and fall of the price of oil. This has happened time and time again in this province – it's from good times to bad in the blink of an eye – yet this government prefers to play the role of the ostrich and bury its head in the sand instead of fixing our fiscal structure to bring in necessary revenue to fund core programs that families need. Two years ago it was the bitumen bubble, today it's \$65 oil, and tomorrow it could be worse.

Yet it doesn't have to be like this. Alberta is the lowest tax jurisdiction by a country mile. If we adopted Saskatchewan's tax code, the second-lowest tax jurisdiction, we'd bring in roughly \$12 billion more. Accordingly, there are solutions to this roller coaster ride that will provide predictable and sustainable funding. We need to strive not only for a strong economy but a strong society. In my view, we are not doing the best we can.

We need look no further than the Progressive Conservative platform from the last election to highlight where we are failing. Of the 50 schools promised, not one has been completed. We are 2,500 teachers short of where we were in terms of per capita numbers from five years ago. We are the last province without full-day kindergarten. Our 10-year plan to end homelessness has stalled, and 17,000 women fleeing violent situations cannot find room at a shelter. Albertans are languishing in hospitals instead of being in long-term care centres.

So what's the answer? Well, it seems that it's already been provided. In 2008 a blue-ribbon panel stated that we needed to raise revenue. Every Tory Finance minister who has left politics has stated that we have a revenue problem. Although we're under new management, it appears that we are still lacking the intestinal fortitude to raise revenue to ensure Alberta's future is as bright as its past. To be blunt, Mr. Speaker, anyone should be able to figure out what has happened. We have no PST, a flat tax, and the lowest corporate tax rates in the land. Accordingly, this government has options . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

That concludes members' statements.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Bill 2 Alberta Accountability Act

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today to request leave to introduce first reading of Bill 2, the Alberta Accountability Act.

This legislation is part of a package that would help restore public trust, improve accountability, and end entitlements. Bill 2 will strengthen the conflict-of-interest guidelines for political staff, extend the cooling-off period for political staff and designated office holders, and clarify the distinction between the role of registered individual lobbyists and government consultants. Complementing the legislation will be two Treasury Board directives that will eliminate sole-source contracts except in exceptional circumstances and will restrict severance packages for political staff.

Mr. Speaker, with the Alberta Accountability Act we will hold the government to the highest possible standards of public service. The actions and behaviour of those privileged to work for the government must be guided by respect for Albertans and their tax dollars. These people are our bosses. We work for them, not the other way around. These accountability provisions are strong. Albertans deserve no less.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Calgary-Mountain View and Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings here today. First, is the appropriate number of copies of a postcard from a campaign on the Bill 9 condo act put forward by the Canadian Condominium Institute. The card reads: "I am concerned that Bill 9 has not had the needed public scrutiny that it requires." Undoubtedly the government will be receiving many of these postcards in the coming weeks.

My second tabling is in regard to a letter that was sent by a nurse to the Minister of Health. The letter is clearly illustrating the frustration that many front-line workers have about the serious state of our health care. She writes that the patients are not being looked after properly and that the workers are frustrated as well.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have five tablings in relation to Bill 9, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014, with each one concerned deeply about the fact that government is leaving too much to be written in regulations rather than properly debating and outlining options in the legislation itself. I table the full amendment recommendations of the north Alberta chapter of the Canadian Condominium Institute.

Also from the northern Alberta chapter: Band-aid Fix for Condominiums Not Enough and that the "new act lacks input from owners, relies heavily on undebated and yet to be developed regulations."

A third is from Mr. Brian Durkin, a lawyer who attests that to represent Albertans, we need to reconsider Bill 9 and not ram it through without the necessary discussions, consultations, and amendments.

From Dr. June Donaldson, an Alberta condo owner advocate, is the same message about pausing on Bill 9 and ensuring we do the right things in this critical issue for Albertans.

Finally, Mr. Robert Noce, an Edmonton lawyer specializing in condo law, is saying that amendments simply have not gone far

enough and don't specify remedies for the problems. He wants to see this addressed before we pass this bill.

The final two tablings include an article by Annie McEwen, PhD public policy candidate at Carleton University, on child poverty.

Child poverty is not a mysterious unknown threat like terrorism; poverty is hiding in plain view and we all know its awful effects. It's up to all Canadians to listen to our children, to say something, because this is a threat we should all see.

And, obviously, act upon.

My final tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a publication in the *Calgary Herald* by James Wood titled Catholic School Leader Discounts Idea of Legal Battle on Gay-Straight Alliances.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is a letter from Sherry Miller to Hon. Heather Klimchuk. [interjections] Sherry is a lawyer in Calgary who is writing on behalf of the PDD community. In her view there needs to be more assessment done, and she outlines five very good principles that should be followed and that would add value to our current system, which she finds very onerous and very complex and not serving the interests of the PDD community.

My second tabling stems from my question where I noted that 69 private schools have gone out of business in the last five years. I provide that tabling to back up what I stated in question period.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. And you heard the response from the House when an hon. member was referred to by personal name, which is frowned upon here.

Let us move on to Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the required number of copies of a letter that I wish to table. It's from the Bassano parent council, and it's signed by Sandra Mitchell. In this letter they talk about the weighting of the diploma exams. They would like to see that decreased from 50 per cent to 30 per cent, and they have some examples of why they would like to see that done. I would like to table that for future reference for the Education minister if he so wishes to take this under advisement. I know that it's something that has been talked about in the province before, and I'm sure that it will continue to receive some comments.

Thank you.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the news release from the Alberta Forest Products Association applauding Bill 203.

As well, I have five copies of an article published in the *Edmonton Sun* that discusses the benefits of Bill 203 in the urban setting.

I have five copies of a letter of support for Bill 203 from the mayor of Whitecourt.

Also, I have five copies of a news release from the Canadian Home Builders' Association endorsing the plan for six-storey residential structures as proposed in Bill 203.

Thank you, sir.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Mandel, the Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Occupational Therapists 2013-14 annual report, the Alberta College of Optometrists 2013 annual report, and the College of Alberta Dental Assistants annual report 2013-14, June 1, 2013, to May 31, 2014.

On behalf of the hon. Minister Dirks, the Minister of Education, school jurisdictions audited financial statements for the year ended August 31, 2013, sections 1, 2, and 3.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there were no points of order today.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 201 Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014

The Chair: I recognize the Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be brief in my comments in Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Anglin: Point of order.

Mr. Hale: I see I have a friend in the back making comments again. That's okay. We'll just carry on.

I would like to propose an amendment to Bill 201, and I will wait while the amendment is passed around.

The Chair: Sure. Please. We will circulate that. A brief pause.
Hon. member, you may speak to amendment A1.

Mr. Hale: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. When this bill was first proposed, I took some time and talked to a number of stakeholders in the electricity industry, and this suggestion comes from a few of them. They were in agreement that the name should be changed from "regulated rate option" because there was some confusion.

For the record I would like to read my amendment. It says:

Mr. Hale to move that Bill 201, Electricity Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014, be amended in section 2, in the proposed section 149.1(2)(b), by striking out "variable market rate" and substituting "variable default rate".

Now, the reason it was suggested to change it to the "variable default rate" and not have it as the "variable market rate" is that they felt that there could be some confusion with the wholesale market. That is a market that is used by a number of different distributors and suppliers such as Spot Power.

Just to avoid any more confusion, you know, because in the title of this bill it's "Transparency in Billing," I felt that if we could put in the default instead of the market rate, it just makes sense. If you don't sign a contract, the price you pay is the default price. As I mentioned, the regulated rate is based over 120 days, and then there's the wholesale market flow-through rate. That is variable, and that's what they use, what the spot price uses. This just avoids any more confusion.

I would hope that the members would agree and all vote in favour of changing the name to the "variable default rate." Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Although I commend the member for bringing forward this amendment, it's too prescriptive, and it's an issue that I had discussed with the ministry to try to correct. I don't disagree with the attempt, but I'm not going to support the amendment. There will be another amendment that will follow that, hopefully, will correct to what the Department of Energy would like to see.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment?

Mr. Kang: I just want to clarify this. Will the consumer be paying the default rate, or will they be paying the variable rate?

Mr. Hale: What this amendment does is that the member is changing the name from regulated rate to "variable market rate." That's the rate you get when you don't sign a monthly fixed contract. If this bill passes, then you would get the regulated market rate. I'm saying: don't call it a variable market rate. Call it the variable default rate, because if you don't sign a contract, you get the default price, and that is variable, whether it's the variable market rate or the variable default rate, which I think is better. This doesn't come from me. This comes from industry, from the electricity industry. I've talked to a number of the stakeholders, and they feel that to better clarify, to avoid any type of miscommunication or, you know, any issues, to make it more transparent, they say: call it the variable default rate, and then the consumers know that if you don't have a fixed-price contract, you will default to that variable rate.

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Sorry. I just need some clarification here, then. It's just a different way of saying the similar thing, which is to say that if someone doesn't have a contract, then they are just having their electricity rate reflected on the up-and-down monthly charge, right? It's not like we are pigeonholing people to compel them to have a contract, which I don't often ever advise my constituents to do. I don't want to be tying us down to something like that.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Yeah. Hon. member, it doesn't pigeonhole anybody. It just clarifies that if you do not sign a fixed-price contract, if you don't sign a contract with whatever service provider for whatever rate they will guarantee you, you fall back on the variable default rate, or, as the bill states, the "variable market rate," which is not fixed. I just would like to change it to variable default because it makes a little bit more sense. I want to make sure that there is clarity in the market. There are wholesale market flow throughs. If we talk about the variable market rate and then the wholesale market, this is just a better way to determine, to distinguish that it is the default that you pay without a contract signed.

3:20

Mr. Kang: Just, you know, for further clarification, by striking out "variable market rate" and substituting "variable default rate,"

do you think, in your opinion, that consumers will benefit from this change? That's the clarification I want from you.

Mr. Hale: Yeah. That's exactly it. Some of the power players in the province have told me that they would like to see a variable default rate so that it's clear for the consumer.

The Chair: Are there other speakers to the amendment?
Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We're back to the main bill. The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have an amendment that I'd like to introduce and move.

The Chair: Okay. If you would just pause for a moment, hon. member, we'll have that circulated.

Hon. members, we'll refer to this amendment as A2.

Hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, you may proceed.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the bill be amended as follows. Section 2 is amended in the proposed section 149.1 (a) in subsection (1) by striking out "6 months" and substituting "8 months" and (b) by striking out subsection (2) and submitting the following:

- (2) The report of the Commission must include
 - (a) a proposed standardized bill for customers that identifies all electric energy and non-energy charges or credits, and
 - (b) proposed amendments to this Act and any related enactment, including the Regulated Rate Option Regulation (AR 262/2005), which must include the replacement of the term "regulated rate" with "variable market rate" or another term that the Commission determines accurately reflects the variable nature of the rate for electricity charged to customers under the regulated rate tariff.

And, finally, by striking out subsection (4) and substituting the following:

- (4) In this section, "customer" means an eligible customer who is not receiving electricity services from a retailer.

Mr. Chair, extending from six months to eight months was negotiated so the commission could take a little bit of extra time to look into this. The matter is actually quite complicated though it might seem simple to many legislators here. In the issue we just debated, industry did have some concerns on the prescriptive nature of what to call the other option, whether it be the variable market rate or the variable default rate. What I've done in this amendment is kept the language but allowed the commission to come up with another term that would satisfy the industry. What I found was that some industry members could not agree on what it should be called. It's going to take a little bit of consultation to come up with something that's acceptable to most and to reflect exactly what it should be called.

Now, I changed also "fixed and variable costs" in the bill to "energy and non-energy charges or credits" to better reflect what happens in the industry and to allow the commission time to figure out how it is going to standardize the bill.

Again, one of the things I did remove was the mandate of tabling the report. Unlike an investigative report, this is something that the ministry actually wants. It is something that the Market

Surveillance Administrator already agrees on. There's a lot of confusion around the billing of utility bills to customers, and they're not able to make choices. What we've done is that we've simplified the bill a little bit, and we've identified exactly how the commission, the Alberta Utilities Commission, should proceed to try to standardize the billing so they can provide a standardized billing process so that customers can be better informed. That's the goal here, to give the commission the flexibility to better inform consumers.

That is the essence of this amendment, and I ask all members to support this. This is something that I have talked with industry and with the ministry and with the commission about on how to proceed, and this is something that the Market Surveillance Administrator would like to see come forward.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Speaking to the amendment, to amendment A2.

Mr. Kang: Mr. Chair, I just want to get a little clarification. Has the industry given any indication to the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre what that term will be called? Have they given you an indication what that will be called, the new term you're looking for? Will it confuse things, or will it be simple? What will that be?

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

Mr. Anglin: Yeah. This goes to both amendments just brought forward and why we don't want to be too prescriptive. Right now it's called the regulated rate option, and I proposed "variable market rate." Industry is not necessarily in alignment, so I want to leave that up to the commission. It is their sole responsibility for clarity. I did not want this act to be so prescriptive that we could miss out on the possibility of clarity. The idea is to leave it open for the commission to consult and give it the best possible description so that consumers can make better choices.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Chair: Are there other speakers to the bill? The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Chair. I'm just bringing this on behalf of the Minister of Energy on Bill 201. The changes being requested on Bill 201 focus on making consumers' electricity bills easy to understand. Others include showing the details on bills for consumers currently on the regulated rate option and changing the name of the regulated rate option, also known as RRO, or the monthly rate of electricity.

The bill also asks for the Alberta Utilities Commission to be involved in the RRO name change and to submit a report proposing a revised electricity bill for RRO customers that identifies all charges and credits clearly.

Amendments being recommended on the bill: section (1), changing the timelines for the Alberta Utilities Commission to provide a report to eight months instead of the proposed six months. This change will give the commission . . .

The Chair: If I may, hon. minister, are you proposing an amendment, or are you just speaking to the amendment that was just dealt with?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Just speaking in general.

The Chair: Please carry on. Thank you.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Chair.

This change will give the commission time to complete their work, including consultations to see what customers need. We need to take into consideration the resources capacity of AUC given other demands. The AUC has various other proceedings under way, and we do not want resources taken away from the AUC's core business. Also, the AUC has a critical role in making timely decisions on the siting of power plants and major electricity and natural gas transmission facilities; regulation of investor-owned electric, natural gas, and water utilities; and adjudication on market and operational rules.

Replacing section (2) of the bill clarifies the standard components of a bill and allows the AUC to recommend a new name for the regulated rate option based on consumer feedback. The changes will allow for a bill that is clear and easy to understand and that will show all energy and nonenergy credits.

The RRO sounds like a rate protected by government. In reality, the RRO is a variable rate that changes every month. If the AUC is to provide a report with recommendations, then it would be consistent to have the AUC also propose a replacement name for the regulated rate option. The amendment clarifies that the AUC may propose a change to the name of the regulated rate option. The AUC will consult with stakeholders and consumers to come up with a name that explains the rate.

The new section (4) clarifies that the commission's report is to only apply to customers on the regulated rate option and not those who have chosen a competitive retailer. In the original wording of the bill it's not clear if standardized bills applied only to regulated-rate consumer bills or also to customers that choose a competitive retailer. The amendment clarified that standardized bills would only apply to regulated rate option customers' bills. Competitive retailers provide competitive prices, and AUC cannot impose the kind of bill private companies or retailers use for their services and customers.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, a safe, reliable, cost-effective, environmentally responsible electricity system is a key priority, and I thank the member for his foresight and his support to improve electricity choices for Albertans across the province.

3:30

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
Are there other speakers?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: The question has been called.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 201 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, did you wish to move that the committee rise and report?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yes, I'd like to move that the committee rise and report Bill 201.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration Bill 201. The committee reports Bill 201 with some amendments. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask for unanimous consent to proceed to third reading of Bill 201.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Bill 201 Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, members of the Assembly. The Market Surveillance Administrator recently reported that information available to Albertans on the cost of electricity is inadequate, insufficient, unclear, and confusing. The report went on to say that lack of accurate information about the cost of residential electricity contracts makes it difficult for householders to choose the lowest cost energy provider. In its State of the Market 2014 report the MSA stated that it has the "view that the tools currently available... are inadequate to facilitate easy, accurate comparisons."

Electricity providers seldom disclose administration fee charges, which vary widely from utility to utility, and don't provide comparisons of the all-in cost of electricity generation, transmission, and distribution. The intent of this bill is to improve disclosure and transparency of the all-in costs included in the ancillary cost of a utility bill. This bill will help consumers to become better informed and better equipped to compare options in a very complicated market.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Are there other speakers on third reading of Bill 201?
Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a third time]

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

**Bill 203
Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures)
Amendment Act, 2014**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations to the mover of Bill 201. Good work.

It's an honour for me to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014. The purpose of Bill 203 is to enhance and amend the Safety Codes Act, accepting proposals provided in the 2015 edition of the national building code, sir. The proposals we speak to today relate to the height of wood structures. Bill 203 would amend the Safety Codes Act, under which the building code regulation is made, to allow buildings of wood construction to be built to a maximum of six storeys, or 18 metres. Our goal is to adopt in its entirety the code proposals for six-storey wood constructions as proposed in the 2015 edition of the national building code.

Mr. Speaker, this government believes that consumers should have access to a variety of choices when it comes to housing in Alberta, and I agree. Today we are facing many challenges as our population continues to increase. This means that infrastructure is a key priority to ensure that we are meeting the needs of Albertans now and into the future. Bill 203 will ensure a commitment to safe, sound, and affordable structure development and will contribute to the growth and prosperity of municipalities and communities across Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I had a support letter from the mayor of Whitecourt. At this time I'd like to read it into the introduction.

Our community's history and heritage is entrenched in the forest industry, and the economic and social impact this industry has in our community is immense. Most notably, our community was recognized nationally for two years in a row as the "Forest Capital of Canada" for the strong commitment both the community and local industry have made to enhancing and sustaining the industry. Bill 203 will provide greater market opportunities for our local industry, further enhancing the economic viability of not only the Town of Whitecourt but also the Province of Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: And you'll table that later, hon. member? Tomorrow?

Mr. VanderBurg: I tabled it earlier.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, you did. Wonderful. Thank you.

Mr. VanderBurg: Bill 203 will ensure a commitment to safe, sound, and affordable structure development. Mr. Speaker, this bill will allow contractors and all approved parties of the construction project to utilize wood as building material as long as the building does not exceed six storeys, or 18 metres, in height and the materials used meet national and provincial engineering standards. The changes we are proposing today have been studied, tested, and approved across various professional disciplines, and Alberta can be certain that its safety is and always will be the most important priority in all the proposed code changes in our province.

By increasing the permissible height for the buildings made of wood, we give contractors more affordable options when

undertaking low- to mid-rise building projects, increasing consumer confidence throughout Alberta. By aligning ourselves with the best industry practices, we ensure that the industry professionals are able to provide Albertans with the best options in affordable and safe housing.

Mr. Speaker, as some may already know, the city of Calgary announced in November that they would be accepting building permit applications for six-storey wood-frame buildings for already approved land-use zones. This decision came after two years of participating in engagement with industry and responding to the public review comments regarding the national building code. The goal of accepting six-storey standards is to provide more options to industry and communities to address the housing crunch that Calgary is experiencing while also considering the overall safety of its residents. This is an example of industry working together to push new initiatives in building standards, and I applaud them for their efforts. Calgary has also been adamant in taking advantage of the association of cost savings with wood construction. Up to 20 per cent is what's proposed.

3:40

I believe it's important that we move on this initiative and align Alberta building codes with current standards being used across Canada. Mr. Speaker, B.C. has adopted six-storey wood buildings since 2009, and Ontario will be accepting the same standards in 2015. Since 2009 B.C. has built over 50 six-storey wood buildings.

Mr. Speaker, earlier I tabled some documents of support. The Alberta Forest Products Association:

"This is great news for the [Alberta] forest industry and for Alberta's economy," said AFPA President and CEO Paul Whittaker. "Wooden midrise buildings are faster and more economical to construct, far less carbon intensive, and use a renewable, locally-sourced material. Using wood also supports a major part of Alberta's economy and provides jobs in communities throughout the province."

As well, the Canadian Home Builders' Association endorses building plans for six-storey residential structures.

Building with wood can reduce costs by 15 to 20 per cent, a significant savings at a time when the cost of buying a home is rising out of reach of young people and families [across Alberta]. This innovation can also help municipalities reach their targets for higher density by allowing more units to be constructed on sites that were previously limited to four storeys, said Jim Rivait, CEO of Canadian Home Builders' Association – Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I look forward to hearing from the rest of the hon. members from all sides of the House on the debate of Bill 203.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to offer my congratulations to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. As Winston Churchill famously said at one time, "He is the only . . . bull I know who carries his [own] china closet with him." But I appreciate the fact that he has been able to get this done and done swiftly. Congratulations.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy today to rise and support Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014. This bill seeks to increase the maximum height for wood structures to six storeys from the current limit of four. There are a

number of good reasons to support this bill. Wood construction is a cheaper alternative to other types of construction. Not only are the buildings less expensive to construct, but this would mean that more units can be constructed on the same site, further reducing costs. Estimates are that the cost of the building can be reduced by 15 to 20 per cent when wood construction is used. This can help builders to provide more affordable housing at a time when our province is struggling to meet the demands of our fast-growing populations, and this is great for both new neighbourhoods and for infill projects.

In Calgary we typically have a vacancy rate of around 1 per cent. This has put some extraordinary pressures on the city for a long time. Finding affordable, available housing is sometimes next to impossible. Earlier this year Calgary and Edmonton saw fixed-sample rental rates rise by up to 6 per cent, a reality that is hardest on our low-income residents and also keeps people from moving to Alberta. We simply need more space. On top of the benefit of increased housing this bill will also support Alberta's forestry industry, which provides renewable building materials.

This change to the Safety Codes Act follows similar changes by British Columbia and Ontario and is in line with the recommendations of the national building code of Canada for 2015.

I would like to recognize that there are some legitimate concerns about safety. I understand that there is a need for the installation of more automatic sprinklers in these structures and that water pressure to feed those systems must be adequate. This means that these buildings aren't appropriate for every community in the province, but given the presence of and use of appropriate safety standards, this is a good solution to a big problem that Alberta is facing.

I would like to thank the member for bringing this bill forward, and we will be supporting it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't cite the same facts that have already been cited. I rise to support this bill for all the logical reasons that have already been given but mostly because I don't own just one chainsaw; I own three chainsaws. I support the forestry industry. I always have supported the forestry industry. It is a renewable resource, and it's one of our greatest economic drivers in this province right now. This legislation helps our own local industries. Not only that, it does address certain other needs with low-cost alternatives. There's a whole lot of things that are good about this bill. I will tell you that the industry and Alberta Forest Products Association support this bill because it supports them.

To the hon. member: thank you very much for introducing this. I will be supporting the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Edmonton-Calder, followed by Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some interest to speak about this bill. I must say that my first impression, before we did some research, was that there must have been a rule or a law that had prohibited this for a reason in the past, you know, and: what can we learn from that, and how have things changed so that a structure of six storeys made of wood is actually safe? My understanding is that there are six-storey structures made of wood already, but we have to go to a federal level to approve that height.

This bill seems to be changing that somehow. I won't repeat what many of the other speakers have said already, that there are some advantages to building with wood. Its durability is clear, its insulation capacity is clear, and it is more economical as well. There's a level of sort of a renewable aspect to wood, which is good as well. But, of course, my first instinct on this is probably, really, the reason why they in fact have not approved six-storey wood structures in the past, and that's the issue around fires.

I mean, anecdotally, I have seen a number of terrible condo fires and row housing fires that we've had here in the city of Edmonton over the last number of years, either with often large condo structures at sort of the last stages of their construction or even fires getting out of control in established buildings that have been inhabited. So I just have a real reservation about these sorts of structures unless we do something to change the way in which we provide sprinklers and safety equipment as well.

I know from the fire chief here in Edmonton, that I speak to on a fairly regular basis, that they have real concerns about modern construction and the capacity for a building to go up in flames, to be engulfed in flames. There's a standing sort of rule that you want a building to sustain, even when it is on fire, the capacity for people to get out for a number of minutes, maybe up to 20 minutes, so that lives can be saved. That's my main concern, but it seems as though my concern has been mitigated by a number of people that have said that they can sustain a safe structure at this height as long as adequate sprinkler systems and escape mechanisms and other rules are put into place about limitations on barbecues on decks and so forth.

I know that we had a terrible fire here in Edmonton not even two years ago where the fire started from flowerpot containers smouldering from cigarette butts and then burning down multistorey structures made of wood. So that's just my main concern.

I think it's not unfair to be obsessive about fire, and I think that is the main question that I put forward to the mover of this bill, to ensure that all of those precautions are met. Otherwise, I think it's actually an interesting bill, and it certainly would be something I could support if I knew that the level of safety was comparable or exceeded existing structures that we already approve here in the province of Alberta.

Thanks a lot.

3:50

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise on Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. There are two parts to the bill. The bill proposes increasing the demand for lumber to increase housing affordability. Since the member hails from the Whitecourt area, which has been named the forest capital of Canada for the last two years, it's likely that his motivations stem mostly from the former, but this is going to make housing affordable for young families, for new immigrants, and for newcomers to Alberta.

In Surrey the condos are built from wood. They are selling from \$300 to \$370 per square foot compared to concrete buildings which are selling from \$425 to \$450 per square foot. This is an innovative way to make housing more affordable for Albertans, Mr. Speaker, because wood is easier and cheaper to build with than concrete or steel. Homebuyers will have access to more housing options at a larger range of price points.

As the housing market is getting really, really tight and rent is getting very expensive, it's just getting to be way out of reach for most new families or one-income earners for the building that I live in. The regulations say that, you know, we should only be spending 30 per cent of our gross income on housing, but the rent has gone up so much, and some families are spending almost 40 to 50 per cent of their income on rent, Mr. Speaker.

Allowing six-storey wood construction will increase the demand for lumber and should help stimulate the province's economy and the province's forestry and construction industries, Mr. Speaker, which I think is badly needed in light of what is happening with oil prices. Other provinces are already doing this, and Canada's national building and fire codes will soon permit this as well starting in January 2015. In Alberta the city of Calgary already accepts building permit applications for six-storey, wood-frame buildings, and the province needs to catch up. With this bill, I think we will be catching up with other jurisdictions.

As a renewable and recyclable and environmentally sustainable building material, we should be encouraging the use of wood in more applications. This is going to make housing more affordable for young and new families, as I've said before, Mr. Speaker.

My concern is about the fires and the safety of firefighters, you know, in case the building is on fire. Those are the concerns that I have with wood-frame buildings, Mr. Speaker. If those concerns are somehow mitigated or addressed, that would be great. I hope there will be stricter fire regulations that those buildings will have to meet. I am concerned about the hallways, elevators, and staircases. How safe and fireproof will they be? As long as the firefighters are safe fighting those fires – you know, safety is paramount. As long as safety is met, I think that would be great. Overall, this is a good bill, and the Alberta Liberal caucus and I will be supporting this bill, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a real honour to rise and speak to this bill today. To express to you how I feel about the bill, I need to tell you a little bit about my relationship with wood and with forestry. I graduated school in 1975, and after a brief stint at the University of British Columbia, where I majored in significant rock concerts of the Pacific Northwest – my parents were proud – I left university, and I went to college to study forest technology. I did so for two reasons. One, my father was in the sawmill business, and I knew a little bit about the sawmill business at the time, but, secondly, I just simply loved wood. My father was always into woodworking, and I did it myself. I absolutely loved wood, and that was the start of a career.

So I went to college, the College of New Caledonia. I did a forest technologist program and did a speciality in forest resource harvesting technology, so harvesting systems, road and bridge construction, that kind of thing. It started a lifelong love of forestry, and I did a number of years with the B.C. Forest Service, mostly in the protection divisions, so I was a firefighter. That's where I met my wife. She was the first female forest fire helitack firefighter in B.C., and we worked together. I worked a number of years. In addition to fire, I worked on the mountain pine beetle program in British Columbia.

I came to a point in my career with the B.C. Forest Service where I didn't feel I was going to achieve what I wanted, so I left, and I went to university. I went to the University of New Brunswick for five years and completed a degree in forestry. I worked in forestry in New Brunswick and northern Quebec, did

undergrad research work – I had an NSERC research scholarship as an undergrad – and I absolutely loved it. I met some just incredible people in the industry, in academia, just amazing. I've always loved it.

So I got my degree, and I left, and I was on my way back home and never made it. I actually stopped on the way home to B.C. to visit a project in Peace River, and I never made it past that, Mr. Speaker. I became a professional forester in Alberta, registered with the college, and I became a planner, forest management plans for Diashowa-Marubeni, the pulp mill in Peace River. Moving through other positions there, I wound up as their senior forestry adviser. Through all of that, I enforced the fact in my own mind – and I hope in a lot of other people's minds – that wood is an absolutely incredible material. It is a sustainable, renewable material, and it is absolutely beautiful. To this day I still love it.

If anybody in this Chamber has never had the opportunity to go to Calgary's Canada Olympic Park and have a look at Hockey Canada's facility there, do so. In there you'll find the world's longest curved glulam beams. They're just an absolute work of art, and they're made of wood. I should probably point out that glulam beams in that application perform better than steel does in roof girders. In a fire a steel beam, as soon as it gets hot, will fail. A wood beam will snap and crack, and it'll stay there for hours and hours. It performs better than steel, Mr. Speaker. It's an absolutely amazing material.

I am so proud to have spent my life in forestry, in a career that I was proud of and never regretted for a minute. I was proud to embark as well on a second career, Mr. Speaker, as an MLA. I'm very proud that I was elected to represent my constituents. But I've never forgotten my first profession, one that meant so much to me.

In my first profession as a forester I still have some requirements. As a registered forester you have to do certain things, and one is educate and inform the public because forestry in Canada is a public resource. In this second career that I love I've never forgotten that first obligation. I've obviously had the opportunity in my career here, serving briefly as the minister of SRD but always being involved in some natural resource policy position here, to be involved in forestry. Every once in a while, actually quite frequently, those two careers collide, and I get to talk about representing my constituents and talk about forestry, and those are great days, indeed. I've had significant opportunity to have input in natural resource policy.

Today is one of those days, Mr. Speaker, and I want to congratulate the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne and the forest industry as well for this bill that's before us today.

4:00

This is, unfortunately, new to us, Mr. Speaker. These buildings have been going up around the world, actually higher than six storeys. Unquestioned safety record.

I'm very, very proud to support this bill and, in fact, urge all my colleagues in this House to do the same. I would say: do it because it's safe, or do it because wood is an absolutely excellent insulator. It's one of the best natural insulators there is. Do it because wood is a truly sustainable, renewable product. Do it because the production of wood has a very low carbon footprint. It's a very environmentally responsible business. Do it because when you harvest wood and manufacture wood products, all of the residual material is used; nothing is wasted. Do it because the harvesting of wood leads to regeneration and the production of future habitat out there. That's our opportunity to ecologically manage our landscape going forward, the use of the forest industry on this

landscape. It's very important. Mostly, do it because wood is beautiful. It's an incredible material. We should use more of it.

I thank the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne for the bill and for the opportunity to speak to it today.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Safety Codes Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. Alberta is a province that is bountiful in its natural resources, and one of these resources, obviously, is our forests. Lumber is one of our most abundant renewable resources and has been a vital component for construction in this province.

As our urban areas expand, we look to build higher so that we can deal with the higher population densities, making cities and towns more sustainable. Wood is an abundant, renewable, local product that can reduce the cost of a building, conserving our more expensive materials like concrete. Unfortunately, current legislation restricts the construction of wood buildings to nine metres or three to four storeys. Bill 203 would amend building code regulation 117/2007, allowing wooden buildings to be built to a height of 18 metres or six storeys. This comes on the heels of recommendations by the national building code of Canada to raise the maximum building code to 18 metres. There's been a movement across the country to use wood in construction of mid-rise buildings. Initial skepticism has led to increased safety provisions included in Bill 203. The code proposes including mandatory provisions for standard life safety features, sprinkler systems and fire protection materials.

This legislation is not just about cheaper housing. It is about allowing the use of materials other than plastic, steel, glass, or concrete. If passed, Bill 203 will allow builders to use less of these materials on six-storey buildings in favour of wood. In doing so, we can conserve costly and limited-time materials like concrete and plastic for building large infrastructure. According to recent Alberta Treasury Board and Finance population projection figures Alberta's total population is projected to reach 6.2 million by 2041. This will put a significant burden on already tight housing markets in our province. Furthermore, it will make the cost of buying a house drastically increase. However, Bill 203 has the potential to alleviate some of these problem by making high-density housing cheaper and easier to build. This shift is expected to reduce the cost for people entering the housing market. Specifically, it is expected to lower the cost of construction by 15 to 20 per cent. This has a great potential value for building affordable housing across the province of Alberta.

It's also very beneficial for the forestry industry, whose work will likely make a huge difference in my constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky. Mr. Speaker, I firmly believe that Bill 203 has the potential to positively affect our economy. As you may know, my constituency is heavily involved in the forestry sector. Grande Prairie-Smoky contains several lumber mills, including Canfor, Weyerhaeuser, Ainsworth, and Millar Western. For the people of my constituency the use of wood as a building material means one fundamental, and that's jobs. Having a chance to use more domestic products locally will benefit our forestry sector and create wonderful opportunities for the constituency and all of Alberta.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Allowing our forestry industry to grow will also help spur innovation in our province. The development of new technologies will make our province stronger internationally. This innovation can come from both the forestry and the construction industries. For example, in Grande Prairie there has been a recent advancement regarding a new saw head. In order to adhere to new safety standards, industry will need to create a different approach for the use of wood. Being able to develop solutions at home that also work abroad adds value to the entire lumber industry and will help to further highlight our industry.

Finally, I'd like to point out that Bill 203 would help make building materials in our province more sustainable. It will do so by using wood for construction. I'm sure it is quite an obvious point but nonetheless an important one that the renewable resource of wood has an abundant supply. Alberta is covered by about 38 million hectares of forest. As a result, we have access to a large supply of domestic lumber. This will allow the use of expensive materials for large construction projects that need them while using wood under six storeys. This will also conserve resources for smaller buildings.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 will help us utilize our resources more effectively and also make the work of ESRD much easier and even more valuable. Bill 203 offers Alberta a creative way to conserve nonrenewable building materials and access available local resources while creating jobs and keeping Alberta safe. For the people of Grande Prairie-Smoky this represents the potential for a significant boost in the use of local labour and resources.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank everyone for allowing me the time to speak today and supporting this bill. I commend the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne for his bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, please.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and participate in the discussion on Bill 203, Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. I want to thank the hon. member for bringing this bill forward and for being a promoter of sustainable construction and building safety.

If passed, Bill 203 will amend the Safety Codes Act, which falls under the building code regulation. This amendment would increase Alberta's access to a comprehensive range of selection in building construction. The amendment would allow the use of wood in construction of buildings to a maximum height of six storeys or 18 metres. This bill would put into motion certain policies that were brought about in the 2015 edition of the national building code.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to see the hon. member advocating for Alberta to remain modern and current in terms of infrastructure for the province. Presently the Alberta building code states that all wood buildings have a height restriction of nine metres, which is approximately three to four storeys. That restriction dates back to 2006 when it appeared in the national building code, but the national building code has been modernized. As I stated previously, the newly released standards for 2015 propose a height of 18 metres, which doubles the previous standard. Other provinces have already followed in the federal government's footsteps. Provinces like British Columbia, Quebec, and Ontario have already made changes to their standards. Alberta, however, currently trails behind. It's time for Alberta to catch up with the other provinces. I support the hon. member for bringing this issue to the forefront.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue for my constituents of Banff-Cochrane. We live, especially in the Bow Valley, in an incredibly fragile and environmentally sensitive area. Allowing a reduced footprint, therefore higher density, will accommodate the growing housing needs in our community but, at the same time, reduce the footprint in an already fragile and stressed environment.

4:10

From a municipal perspective, Mr. Speaker, if public transit is ever to succeed in our major urban centres and our smaller urban centres, for that matter, we need to have the densities to allow that to happen. Six-storey structures that are affordable because of their wood construction are an absolute necessity if we're going to see public transit succeed and remove many of the vehicles from our roads.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government has demonstrated its commitment to principles of sustainable forest management and responsible stewardship. This has been done through development of rigorous legislation and policies: policies for protection, for conservation, and for the sustainable management of forests. Government foresters and biologists work alongside forest industry representatives to develop long-term plans that ensure that forest capital is maintained for future generations. I'm proud to say that Spray Lake Sawmills operates in our constituency of Banff-Cochrane, and they are a great example of forest stewardship and forward thinking. They are constantly moving ahead, exploring new methods to reduce the impact that forestry has on our landscape.

The forestry sector is an integral part of our provincial economy. It will continue to play an important role in the diversification of Alberta's economy and Alberta's prosperity. Bill 203 would build on this success. The Alberta forestry sector is a vital part of dozens of communities around the province, providing employment for some 13,000 people, about 400 of those in my constituency, Mr. Speaker. The forestry industry in Alberta creates billions of dollars each year for the provincial economy. Forest products produced in Alberta range from commodity lumber to market pulp, from animal bedding materials to a variety of engineered wood products. Companies in this sector also provide ecosystem services like land-use planning, reclamation, and carbon sequestration.

I'm very pleased to stand here today, Mr. Speaker, in support of Bill 203. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did have an opportunity to talk with the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne when this bill first came out, and I took a look at it. One of the things that concerned me about the bill was that it did not address the requirement for sprinkler systems in the building. I got a suitable answer back, I felt, that that would have to be another change in the Safety Codes Act and dealt with through Municipal Affairs, probably. So I'm happy with that response, and I'm pleased to support the bill.

Alberta should not be lagging behind others in increasing choices for builders, owners, and developers. Wood is a low-cost, green, renewable construction material which would support Alberta's forestry industry, and we all want to see that happen. The fact is that it's renewable like a crop you plant and harvest. It lowers construction costs probably 12 to 20 per cent, somewhere in there, over other materials, and can be erected more quickly than concrete or steel, saving time and money for developers. The

initiative furthers the whole scope of providing affordable housing by increasing the density.

I had some concern regarding smaller communities and how they would respond to this. I think the smaller communities kind of fixed the problem themselves. Fire departments would have to have ladder trucks and so on. They'd have to have a sufficient water supply to supply a full sprinkler system. I think that kind of cures itself, so I'm not so concerned about that anymore.

It harmonizes the laws of Alberta with the laws of British Columbia as a member of the New West Partnership. As I've said before, it supports Alberta's forest products sector and provides construction material close to the source.

With that, I think all the other comments have been made, but I do support the bill and will be voting in favour of it. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. I commend the hon. member for his continued service and dedication to the bill that we speak of today. Bill 203 proposes to amend the building code regulations to allow wood constructions to a maximum of six storeys or 18 metres. The intent of the bill is to adopt code proposals for the allowable height of wood construction to six storeys as proposed in the 2015 edition of the national building code. This bill brought forward will ensure a commitment to safe, sound, and affordable infrastructure development in this province, much of which we've heard support for from many members in this House. These factors are important to the growth and prosperity of municipalities and communities across Alberta, and I'm proud to rise and support it today.

Many jurisdictions have already begun to implement the standards allowing for six-storey wood construction. The city of Calgary will be the first jurisdiction in Canada to accept the proposed changes to the 2015 building code standards, that suggest that six-storey wood construction is safe, sound, and an affordable building material. Sustainability is also an important aspect to using wood as a construction material, and I believe that by raising the allowable height for buildings constructed of wood, we are paving the way for affordable and sustainable infrastructure projects, which benefit all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario recently approved changes to the Ontario building code to allow for what they have called wood-frame construction for buildings up to six storeys. There have been two bills introduced in their Legislature supporting this initiative, with no luck in passing due to a prorogued government, but the Ontario government understands the benefits of raising the allowable height for wood-constructed infrastructure in their province. Height increases in Ontario have finally been approved and will be effective on January 1, 2015. These changes will bring the province to similar standards set in British Columbia as well as several jurisdictions in the United States and in the European Union.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 is simple. This is a housekeeping bill that will allow stakeholders to follow an updated Alberta building code that is technically in line with national standards. I believe that it is important to all of our industries that will be affected by these changes. The changes being proposed here today will offer designers new opportunities for innovation that will help municipalities meet urban densification plans and create more affordable housing options.

Mr. Speaker, that is the part of the bill that is most important to me. The cost and the time allocations that are currently in place do not allow for enough affordable housing, and there's clearly a crisis of affordable housing in this province. Just as we have, Ontario, B.C., and now Calgary have realized the benefits experienced by adopting the national proposed changes to the building code regulations. Executive director for Ontario Wood Works!, Marianne Berube, said that they are looking forward to the new mid-rise buildings that will be created as a result of the recent amendments. Natural Resources and Forestry minister Bill Mauro mentioned that one of his main goals in the January 2015 legislation is the jobs that will be created through the expanded use of a sustainable resource.

This simply shows that the benefits of adopting the proposal to increase the height for buildings made of wood construction can have benefits that spread across a range of different industries. Over the years experts in Ontario have been following the controversial height changes to wood-constructed buildings. Early last year a group of Ontario engineers and architects toured half a dozen new British Columbia condo developments where they have been pushing the limits of wood construction since the Wood First Act of '09. Steven Street of Wood Works! Ontario was among the group that travelled to B.C. By the end of that trip Mr. Street claimed that what B.C. had done was fantastic. They had been successful in building nice and affordable places to live.

Mr. Speaker, today we speak to the same initiative in Bill 203. By increasing the permissible height for buildings constructed of wood, we are impacting the industry in a positive way, allowing more affordable projects to be completed in a considerably shorter period of time. Further to Ontario experts travelling to B.C., it was realized that upwards of 170 wood building projects were being constructed at the time. Ontario was able to see first-hand that by removing the barriers to using materials other than plastic, steel, glass, and concrete, the industry was able to flourish in a way that benefited consumers, retailers, and users.

4:20

Tad Putyra, chief executive developer of Great Gulf homes' low-rise division in Ontario, stated that most importantly, six-storey wood construction can be as much as 20 per cent cheaper than traditional concrete and steel and far faster to build. This is going to make huge improvements in affordable housing initiatives. Mr. Putyra outlined that much of the materials can even be prefabricated and constructed on-site, which is a huge efficiency that affects the overall costs.

Mr. Speaker, wood construction has been very popular, very respected, and very successful for many years in other jurisdictions, not only in Canada but also across the globe. I believe that there is an increasing demand for affordable low-rise infrastructure in this province as our population continues to rise. Alberta's population growth is rising at a steady rate, and it is our responsibility to address the needs that result from this growth, including increased demands for jobs and affordable housing. Bill 203 will ensure that we are able to meet these demands while showing our continued support of industry professionals and experts that have been waiting for these changes for years. As we look at the proposed changes to the Safety Codes Act in this bill and consider the potential advantages that would be experienced in this province, as they have been in others, I see no reason that we do not move forward with this initiative.

As I have already mentioned, Alberta's population is increasing at a very rapid and consistent pace. It is, again, our responsibility to make sure that we have the appropriate infrastructure in place to meet the population demands that our province will soon be

facing. I believe that Bill 203, brought forward by the hon. member, is steering us in the right direction. I will support this bill, and I would like to thank the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne for proposing the bill that will see benefits in industries and for everyday Albertans across this province for years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand up and actually support Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014. I just want to start off by saying that it's been a while in this House since I've seen legislation, private members' bills pass so quickly through the Legislature. We've seen Bill 202 pass very, very quickly, and now we're on to Bill 203. What's even more interesting to me is that we're finally starting to get some debate from the government members, which I think is nice to see, actually. I would like to see more of that if we could when we're talking about government bills. I think that's more important than anything when we're debating some of the government bills that are crossing this floor back and forth.

If we could take what we're seeing today and what we've seen in the past, other than Bill 201, what we saw in Bill 202 and Bill 203, government members standing up and speaking – maybe we'll hopefully see that tonight when we're dealing with Bill 9, the condominium act, and some of those. I know that there is some real concern outside of this Legislature from stakeholders on Bill 9. I know that our Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills is going to be providing several amendments on that particular bill. So I'm looking forward to seeing some good discussion tonight.

I have to say that the conversation I've heard so far on Bill 203 has been interesting. I loved the comments from the minister when he talked about his experience as a forest technologist I think was his word and his love for wood. I actually am reading a book right now called *The Boys in the Boat*, which talks about construction with wood and building a boat and their win in regard to the 1934 Olympics and the love for wood that the particular trainer had when these young fellows were paddling – I guess that's what it's called – and what wood can do and the type of wood.

Our Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne I've known for a long time and actually have a great deal of respect for him. When I was sitting as a member of the government, he was talking to me about the importance of forest technology and some of the forest companies that are in his area and the importance of the forest technology to this province. Obviously, the wood is what we're centred on in this bill about affordable infrastructure development and its conduciveness to the growth and prosperity of municipalities and communities across Alberta. Anyone who is involved in this Legislature knows the importance of bringing affordable housing into this province.

I am, honestly, the last person that should be standing up and talking about building anything because anything that has anything to do with building or technology I end up breaking. So I'm not the best person in the world to talk about making anything with wood, making anything with anything, quite frankly. My husband always says: whatever you do, don't let my wife touch anything to do with technology. I needed to get a photocopy of something, and I said to the young page, "You do not want me touching that because I will break it, honestly. So if you could just sort of show me through the process." Anybody who knows me as an MLA knows that everything I touch breaks.

I like the idea of what he's doing. One of the things that I hope the member will stand up and speak to, which I'm a little concerned about – and I'm sure he has the right answers – is fires. Wood burns very, very rapidly. I hope the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne is paying attention, that he will talk, stand up, and tell me about the safety of wood, because I'm concerned about fire. Anyone who has seen forest fires knows how quickly wood can burn. I'm sure he has the right answer, honestly. I can't imagine this particular individual would talk about wood construction and wood homes and what we're talking about – it's an increasing choice for builders, owners, developers. It's low cost; it's green; it's renewable construction. I haven't heard anybody talk to me about the safety factors yet. I may have missed that. I can imagine that some of the fire and safety industry people are not fully supportive of taller wood buildings, and I need to understand why they are not supportive of that. Is it because of fire? The six-storey wood construction requires more sprinklers, obviously, because it burns quicker. Concealed areas could be a problem.

I guess for me the process of allowing this bill to go forward is key. It makes a lot of sense to me. I understand that B.C. has had six-storey wood construction since 2009, so obviously the member can talk to us about how that's developed in B.C. Has there been any fire hazard? Are there some problems that B.C. has seen since they implemented this in 2009? I know – and it's been brought forward in the past – that Mr. Stanley, who's the general manager of planning development and assessment for Calgary, likes the idea.

I'm worried about the zero lot lines that we see going up, especially in Calgary, and how close a proximity we're seeing homes together. One sees the fires that we see going on now just with the construction that homes are currently built under. I guess for me that's my biggest concern. I'm sure that the member has the answers for me. I just haven't heard what those answers are, how you're going to prepare for that. We talk about – and I brought this up just earlier – the need for more automatic sprinklers. I guess that with forest products and wood products I really would like to hear what the member has to say when we're in second reading. Is he going to address the concerns of the fire and safety people? If I may, that's what I'd like to say. I like where he's going with this. I don't think anybody can say that we don't need affordable housing. If he would address the issues of fire, I'd be more than pleased to continue speaking in support of this.

4:30

Mr. Jeneroux: I'll be brief, Mr. Speaker, but I would like to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014, and I would like to thank the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne for bringing forward this bill. Bill 203 amends the Safety Codes Act, under which the building code regulation allows wood buildings to be built to a maximum of six storeys, 18 metres.

You can never talk enough about wood, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure the hon. member pined over the intent to adopt the code proposals for six-storey wood buildings as proposed by the national building code 2015.

Mr. Speaker, I believe strongly that Albertans should have choices when it comes to construction materials as long as the construction is safe. Wood was once tossed aside in favour of steel and concrete for mid- and high-rise buildings, but now new information is waking us up to the potential of wood construction once again.

Understanding the potential of wood products is simply about knowing the bare facts. There have been "tree-mendous" numbers of studies and reports, Mr. Speaker, showing that six-storey wood construction can be safe. Many of those reports have been issued in Canada. The Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes, CCBFC, has looked closely at the 2010 national building and fire codes of Canada; specifically, the restriction of wood buildings to four storeys in height.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, a joint task force was established in 2011 which would lead to the review of current requirements and make recommendations. The task group ensured that the matter was studied extensively. Four specific areas were examined: fire protection, emergency response, building and plumbing services, and structural and earthquake design. The task group concluded that the height and aerial limits for buildings constructed of combustible materials could safely be increased to six storeys.

Ontario and B.C. have chosen to allow six-storey framed construction, and I understand, Mr. Speaker, they have been very "poplar."

Bill 203 would allow Alberta to take advantage of this trend to the benefit of those who live, work, and build in this province. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak here today and would encourage all members to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following the dissertation from the member previous, it's going to be a knotty situation to come forward with my presentation. As a long-time agricultural producer I, too, recognize and appreciate the value of wood although where I live, in the diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler, poplar is not necessarily popular. It's not very tall, but willow and sagebrush, the lower growing vegetation, are.

I want to make mention of another previous member's comments regarding zero boundaries for some of this wood construction with certain height characteristics. I think that's important because in some generational societies we've seen where improperly protected wood structures can create a fire hazard. With our modern abilities for sprinkler systems and that sort of development and other modern features, there may be able to be safety presentations brought forward there. In something as significant as a six-storey wood structure that would certainly be significant.

Again, the facility of using wood is significant in that it is a renewable resource and is popular in this country and in this province. It also provides a substantive industry for the harvesting, regeneration, manufacture, and presentation of that product. I think it's an interactive source of sustenance for our society. I, too, am supportive of any innovative way that we can use regenerative products. I know that may not be a "poplar" word, but I'm trying to get it out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for a chance to speak to this. It's an important subject for my constituents, for my constituency, and I'm pleased to have the chance to speak to that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, followed probably by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to add a few comments. It is a privilege to rise here today to join in the discussion on Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. I think it's important that we all spruce up

our knowledge of the latest technologies with respect to the treatment of forest products and now the obvious safety of using those materials in wooden structures up to six storeys. Most of it has been said already. I think the arguments have been made.

I very much support this bill, and with that, I conclude my comments. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour. I'm not going to . . .

Mr. Eggen: Make a wood joke.

Mr. Anderson: I can't best – you know, I have no wood jokes. [interjections] No. There are too many ways that that could go wrong at this point, so I'm going to refrain from that.

I am going to stand and speak in favour of this bill. I do want to congratulate the hon. member, the hon. government whip, and say that he's done a fantastic job on this bill.

An Hon. Member: Agreed.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. It's good that we've got agreement there.

This hon. member has, actually, a history with private members' bills. He seems to find those little gems that are just kind of things that were left out for a while that should have been done, kind of the holdouts. He finds them and gets them in through private members' bills or government legislation. This is another one.

This is a very good bill, and the reason is, in my view, that obviously we have an issue in this province. Although the economy probably will slow down a bit over the next couple of years, we will always be facing a challenge of affordable housing. That's always going to be an issue, and I think that some of the knee-jerk reaction to that sometimes when we face these issues is that, well, we have to bring in new subsidies or that we have to bring in rent controls or that we have to somehow interfere in the market in some way to look like we're doing something when, really, there are some very practical solutions that could be introduced that will lower costs for housing and let market forces allow for a lowering of costs with regard to affordable housing.

It's not just an example such as the one here. You know, I look at this issue in and around secondary suites and so forth, obviously a bit of a minefield. I know the former mayor of Edmonton would probably agree that it's a bit of a minefield with regard to secondary suites. At the end of the day, these are very simple solutions, with no cost to government to implement some of these common-sense solutions that will use market forces to lower the price of housing in a sustainable way and won't interfere in the market unduly, and I think that that's important.

4:40

As has been said here, I will say as well that one of the reasons why this is a good solution, why it will decrease the cost of construction, is, of course, that using wood lowers construction costs – the estimates vary – 12 to 20 per cent over other materials and can be put up more quickly than concrete or steel, which, of course, saves time for developers as well and, again, lowers the price of the housing. That is definitely something that I think we'll see immediate impact from going forward as, obviously, if it costs less to build something, it generally will cost less to purchase. So that is definitely a very good reason for passing this bill.

Obviously, there are some issues we're going to need to deal with. I'm assuming that this will be taken care of by other safety

code regulations, but if not, they certainly should be updated. Wood is more flammable than other materials like, obviously, steel and so forth. There are different treatments that you can give wood that will minimize that risk: pressure treating and so forth, new technologies, chemicals – and there are others – things like that that make it less likely to burn. Also, of course, we already have many regulations that include sprinkler systems and so forth that should mitigate these risks.

So, yeah, I support this, hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. This is a good job. This is good work. This is quality work. Let's all give him a round of applause.

I will take my seat for the next 10 or 15 minutes, and hopefully I'd love to hear what other hon. members across the way feel about this bill. If you would, please stand. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and then Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will and I would. I'm not sure that that goes together.

It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. I commend the hon. member for his continued dedication to the bill that I rise to speak to today.

Bill 203 proposes to amend the Safety Codes Act and the building code regulations to allow wood-constructed buildings to be built to a maximum of six storeys, or 18 metres. I would digress for a moment in that the city of Edmonton really believes this is a vitally important project. We need to find new and innovative ways to build housing in our city and across the province, so I really commend the member.

Mr. Speaker, the very intent of this bill is to adopt code proposals for increasing the allowable height of wood buildings to six storeys as outlined in the 2015 edition of the national building code. The bill being brought forward today will positively impact consumer confidence and satisfaction across the construction and housing industry here in our province and open up doors for all kinds of new housing ideas. Among the factors that will contribute to the increase in consumer satisfaction are the lower construction costs, which are vitally important, associated with wood buildings, not lesser quality but lower construction costs.

Wood Works! Alberta along with various other stakeholders operating in the industry has highlighted this as an important aspect of increasing the permissible height for wood-frame buildings. Mr. Speaker, Wood Works! Alberta is a joint program of the Alberta Forest Products Association and the Canadian Wood Council. Depending on the building design, industry experts continue to state that a 12 to 20 per cent saving is experienced when wood is utilized as a construction material. But even more than that, the time in which you can put a wood building up is substantially quicker, which saves even more.

Marco Civitarese, manager and chief building official with inspections and permit services in Calgary, continues to state the importance of updating Alberta's building code regulation for wood construction. Marco highlights that Bill 203 would save time and money, adding to consumer confidence and overall satisfaction. Mr. Speaker, by saving money on such projects, consumers and professionals are able to utilize high levels of cost savings, contributing to overall industry confidence and consumer satisfaction in Alberta. Experts confirm that when using wood as a construction material, much of it can be constructed directly on site, creating countless scenarios for high cost savings, and there are many places in Alberta right now where they're doing modular

construction, that can even speed up this kind of construction by building things in a plant for six-storey buildings. The amendment we speak of today will ensure that more housing projects are completed on budget and on time.

This speaks to another positive aspect of wood as a construction material, that is outlined by experts, the facilitation of increasing urban populations. Our population totals are on the rise, with no signs of slowing. Good news. By enabling the construction of six-storey wood buildings, we are actively meeting the growing need for urban housing in this province. Mr. Speaker, this is very important to note because without affordable housing options we run amok with rising debt and we run amok of being able to attract people to our urban and rural environments. We have all been honest about this. I believe Bill 203 will have a lasting and positive impact on affordable housing across Alberta. Allowing for six-storey residential wood construction sets the stage for the construction community to offer lower cost housing for all Albertans.

Utilizing wood as a construction material also lessens our environmental impact and our overall carbon footprint. To measure this, experts focus on the overall life cycle of a building's materials, from extraction or harvest of raw materials through to manufacturing, transportation, installation, use, maintenance, disposal, and recycling. Mr. Speaker, studies consistently show that wood is far better for the environment than steel or concrete in terms of embodied energy, air and water pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions.

The forest industry has reduced waste by optimizing sawmill operations and by using wood chips and sawdust to produce paper and composite products. There are even ways to use waste for fuel for clean bioenergy. In North America wood producers are able to use 99 per cent of every tree that's harvested. That's 99 per cent of every tree that's harvested. These are astounding, positive, renewable factors that will increase the confidence of consumers. According to industry experts tree and forest products play a critical role in helping to tackle climate change and reduce greenhouse gases. In addition, using wood products that store carbon can minimize our carbon footprint over the long run. Mr. Speaker, this means that wood buildings require less energy to construct and operate over time, resulting in more cost savings for consumers.

In addition to the benefits of lower construction costs, lower carbon footprint, and the facilitation of increasing urban population is added support for Alberta's labour industry. Mr. Speaker, using wood supports people working in Alberta's forest industry. This industry is a major employer in 50 communities across the province and provides an important source of economic diversity for Alberta. Between 2011 and 2015 our forest industry will invest \$1.5 billion into Alberta's economy. This translates into jobs in construction, distribution, and manufacturing and the timely creation of housing for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, many notable jurisdictions have accepted the amendments we speak of today, and I look forward to passing a piece of legislation to provide Albertans with more of the services they need. Such provincial building standards and regulations coincide with national practices. It is time that we extend ourselves to meet best industry practices, following suit with provinces across Canada as well as our neighbours.

Calgary, especially, has been very creative in this. The city of Calgary will be adopting the six-storey standards contained in the 2015 national building code, effectively being the first jurisdiction in the country to do so. These adopted standards for six-storey building codes, since 2009, have brought tremendous feedback

from industry professionals and very public support. Mr. Speaker, it is time that we embrace these same standards.

With that, I urge all my colleagues to support Bill 203 to help prepare Alberta for a lasting and prosperous economy. I'd like to thank the hon. member for sponsoring this initiative in Bill 203, and I look forward to hearing the remainder of this debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, I believe.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. I know the hon. member's intentions have always been in the best interests of Albertans, as we've heard here time and time again, and I commend him for his ongoing service and dedication to this province and his province's continued record of success. In this season, when we're trying to be naughty or nice, I guess it's all right to speak about knotty today just a little.

Bill 203 proposes to amend the building code regulation to allow wood-constructed buildings to be built to a maximum of six storeys or 18 metres. These construction projects will help build on the success of our thriving forestry industry, an industry that has provided so many people with a sustainable and rewarding place to work. Mr. Speaker, by working with our municipal partners as well as with the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Resource Department, I believe that the needs of both our contractors and our forestry advocates will be approached in a balanced and a sensible manner.

Now, our government is and will always be humbled to serve the people of this great province, and this means being responsible stewards of our majestic forests while diversifying our markets at home and abroad. Mr. Speaker, the Alberta building code is modelled on the national building code of Canada, or the NBCC, and recently the NBCC proposed a number of changes to the building code standards. One of the proposed changes would be to allow for the construction of wood buildings exceeding nine metres, which is, of course, one of the main provisions included in Bill 203. It is anticipated that Calgary will be adopting this new standard.

As I stated earlier, there are a number of benefits to passing Bill 203. Firstly, it would mean not only expanding our forestry industry, but also we could promote a more efficient construction industry while reducing red tape. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's population is growing. We will see an approximate increase of 2.2 million people in just under three decades. This, of course, could pose a bit of an issue in terms of finding housing that will accommodate Alberta's projected growth. It's no secret why people come to our province. They come to take advantage of our strong economy and to pursue a comfortable life that is fuelled by hard work and prudent fiscal discipline. I believe that what is being proposed in Bill 203 would help with the increased demand for housing, and we must start addressing this potential issue just as soon as possible. Coming from many years of municipal experience, affordable housing has been a topic of conversation time and time again.

Of course, the one factor I want to stress is that of safety. The amendments that have been brought forward by Bill 203 have been thought out thoroughly. In 2012, Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes, or the CCBFC, reviewed previous requirements that limited the height of wood

buildings to no more than four storeys. A joint task force that included several CCBFC standing committees was established in 2011. They examined four areas: fire protection, emergency response, building and plumbing services, and structural earthquake design. The joint task force group later concluded that height and area limits for buildings constructed using combustible materials could safely be increased to six storeys. This decision did of course come with recommendations to either introduce new and/or modify various measures to ensure the safety of building residents.

Mr. Speaker, when you factor in all the proposed changes in Bill 203 and consider the potential socioeconomic advantages, it seems only natural that our government would support amendments to the Safety Codes Act. It is our responsibility to make sure that we have appropriate infrastructure in place to meet the population demands that our province will soon be facing. I believe that Bill 203 is taking our province in the right direction by addressing this issue.

I will proudly support this bill, and I encourage my hon. colleagues to do so as well. I thank the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne for proposing this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe that concludes the speaking list.

That being said, would the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne like to close debate at this time?

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank all the members of the Assembly for their outstanding support for Bill 203.

Bill 203 is a practical, Alberta solution to an issue that we're all facing, affordable housing and, in general, the better use of an Alberta product, a sustainable product that we all love and enjoy in our communities. Being raised in a community that's forest dependent, I think it's also fitting that I have this opportunity in the House to promote the use of wood in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I know it's getting close to 5 o'clock. Once again I want to thank all the members that supported this bill in second reading. We'll have a further discussion in Committee of the Whole, and I would ask that we call the question.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne has moved second reading of Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder, in light of the time, if we should not just call it 5 o'clock and move on to private members' motions.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has moved that we now call it 5 o'clock so that we can move on to the next area of business.

[Motion carried]

Motions Other than Government Motions

Child Care Policies

504. Mr. Jeneroux moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the

government to review child care policies to ensure that accessible, high-quality, and affordable child care is available for all Albertans to allow for parents to re-enter the workforce, if they so choose, which will increase personal income tax contributions and address current and future skilled worker gaps in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and open debate on Motion 504. The history behind my decision to bring this motion before the House has its roots in my constituency of Edmonton-South West. Motion 504 takes its bearings from what I have been hearing in conversations with my constituents. The message that keeps coming back to me in the coffee shops, in my office, at community events is a consistent one. Young and new families are frequently hard-pressed to provide adequate child care while simultaneously earning a living for their household.

It's easy to understand why this is the case. Raising young children is a full-time job in its own right, and at the same time it can also be expensive, particularly when there are bills, rent, mortgages, and other costs of living to pay. As a consequence, many families feel a severe strain and are often forced to choose between larger incomes and caring for their children. This is not a comfortable position to be in, Mr. Speaker. The cost of living is substantial, and it's often the case that two incomes are necessary to sustain a family household.

While this government has been doing a great job of supporting families and children, I'm sure we can agree that there's always room for improvement. This is where Motion 504 can begin this conversation, Mr. Speaker. I and our Premier have met with a large number of parents who've been telling us that in this new generation Alberta, supports for child care services ought to be reviewed. All they ask is that we as a government explore our options regarding how we can continue to keep child care affordable and accessible in the years to come.

I know that I do not have to remind the hon. members of this House of the paramount importance of our younger generations, Mr. Speaker. That is readily apparent, but it is always healthy to review how we ensure their safekeeping and invest in their upbringing. After all, these are our future leaders, these are our future decision-makers, and these children are the future of our province. By partnering with families in order to ensure that they have the resources necessary to raise their children, we can also accomplish far more than we might initially expect.

It is a quite common scenario that a parent who might otherwise wish to be in the workforce is compelled to stay home to care for their young children. This could be for any number of reasons, whether because child care services are not readily accessible or because costs are prohibitive. The point is that these are able-bodied and enthusiastic adults who could be contributing to the province's economy if the situation were different. Mr. Speaker, I believe it is worth our while to investigate ways in which we can assist these parents in re-entering the workforce.

In a nutshell, Motion 504, if passed, would contribute to the dialogue of bolstering both dependable child care for working parents and Alberta's workforce. Consequently, this holds promise for increasing the earning potential of households while also expanding the province's income tax base.

5:00

Under the present situation the Ministry of Human Services provides financial assistance to eligible lower income families for

purposes of child care. This assistance manifests in the form of licensed daycare and preschool programs, licensed family child care, approved family day homes, and approved early childhood development programs.

The maximum rates provided by the ministry vary according to the type of program being funded and the age of the child being provided care. The child must be 12 years of age or younger. The parent must be currently working, attending school, looking for work, or have special needs, and the parents or child must also be Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Alberta.

We also support children with disabilities through the inclusive child care program, and Human Services contributes to child care specifically for families with children with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very good track record, and we can take pride in what we do to support child care services in Alberta, but there is a conversation to be had regarding: what else can we do, and what can we do better? Based on what I hear every day, whether it be at my girls' day care or in coffee shops or community events, this is a conversation families want us to have, and that alone makes it worth while. This is a conversation that Motion 504 is to begin. It doesn't end here, but we have to have the courage to assess what we're doing, how we're doing it, and what opportunities we have and owe to future generations.

I would seriously encourage all hon. members to support this motion. Let's build on our past successes, explore new avenues for quality child care, and assist parents who want to enter the workforce. Let's begin that conversation now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and address Motion 504. I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing it forward. Just for the sake of reading it into the record one more time, I will do just that. The motion says:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review child care policies to ensure that accessible, high-quality, and affordable child care is available for all Albertans to allow for parents to re-enter the workforce, if they so choose, which will increase personal income tax contributions and address current and future skilled worker gaps in Alberta.

As I first saw this, Mr. Speaker, I couldn't help but think and reflect back on our former Premier, Premier Hancock. In his role as Government House Leader if he were to see that motion, he would tell us all that we should simply defeat it based on its length and the fact that you're asking multiple things to be done. It should be succinct. It should be concise. Nevertheless, I'm going to support it, and I'll tell you why.

I would like to thank the Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing it forward. It's an important issue. It affects the lives of many families in Alberta, and it's not a simple issue by any description. I just would like to talk a little bit about some of the challenges that families face and that we as policy-makers face while we look for ways to support the child care industry in Alberta.

One big part of the problem is simply having enough spaces. Around two-thirds of the child care centres in Calgary currently have a waiting list. We've heard stories of couples getting on waiting lists for a daycare space before they are even expecting. It's not only that we are short spaces, but the larger problem has to do with where they are located. Provincially I've heard that our utilization is around 80 per cent, which would mean that there are spaces out there, but these spaces aren't where parents need them.

A 2011 StatsCan study showed that the leading reason given by parents for the choice of daycare was location. This more than any other factor determines how a family decides on a child care arrangement. It's important to remember this when we think about whether there actually are child care options for families. If you had to drive over two hours to drop your child off before you went to work, is that a good choice for either the child or the family? Well, of course not. We need to remember that these realities drive many of the decisions that people make, whether they're going to work or stay at home.

A second major issue when it comes to child care is affordability, and I don't want to suggest that this government is not doing anything to make child care more affordable. There are some good programs operating right now. But child care is very expensive. A recent report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives looked at the picture of child care affordability across Canada, and while we are not the least affordable here in Alberta, the information is still worth noting. In Edmonton child care costs about 24 per cent of the average woman's income. In Calgary it's 26 per cent. So child care is a very significant expense for most families, and we need to put our energy and resources into getting the right balance.

There are many ideas out there for addressing the problem. Right now there are subsidies for families with incomes under \$50,000. There are also programs to encourage providers to keep spaces open like the wage top-up program and the grants designed to attract more workers to the industry. For a few years there was an expansion grant given for operators creating a new spot, a program that recently ended. This review could examine the program in detail and help determine whether it should be continued. Sometimes there is work that can be done in partnership with municipalities to make it easier and more attractive for operators to open a daycare or an early childhood learning centre. Figuring out where the barriers are for creating spaces is key and helps address the overall shortage.

We have other related issues when it comes to providing good care for children while their parents are at work. Many child care operators in the province don't care for infants, and even finding spaces for toddlers can be a challenge. Finding a spot for a child with special needs can be an absolute nightmare. For example, families in Alberta with an autistic child can have a very hard time. They must juggle the therapy, the care, and the needs of the child with the child care during the day, which means caregivers who can accommodate those transportation needs and those special needs. On top of this, special-needs children can require complex strategies, and finding a caregiver who is the right fit can be very difficult.

I know of a family with an autistic child who had to transfer to three different day homes in as many months. One of the problems came up due to his transportation needs during the day. After finding one solution that seemed ideal, the next caregiver found that his socialization was more than her home was equipped to handle. This change was not good for the child and was very stressful for his parents.

I want to be clear that I'm not a fan of and do not support a universal system. We don't have to have a Quebec-style program. I don't think that that is the fiscally responsible way to go about solving this problem. I don't think that putting that level of resources into care for children is fair for families who decide to stay home with their children or to make other arrangements such as having a mother-in-law or others stay at home with the children.

We don't have to move forward to a universal system in order to acknowledge that our system needs work and/or improvement.

There are many different philosophies and ideas for how we can incentivize enough good-quality child care spaces in the neighbourhoods where they are needed. The answers are complex, making this a perfect issue for a motion like this one, which suggests starting with a review. We need Alberta-specific, up-to-date information about our system and a very clear, thorough examination of current and past policy.

I want to thank the member again for this motion and the chance to rise and support it in the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to speak today with respect to the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West's motion. This is a very, very important discussion, and I thank him for raising it here in the Chamber.

As you all know, Mr. Speaker, we are so blessed to live in a dynamic and rapidly growing province. We're welcoming people from across the country and around the world to join us as proud Albertans, and people are accepting that invitation, as we all know.

At the beginning of 2014 Alberta's population was estimated to be at nearly 4.1 million – so we can only imagine what it is now – up almost 22,000 people from October 2013. We know that Alberta continues to lead the provinces in population growth, and at just 5 per cent our unemployment rate remains the second lowest in the country.

For parents with young children who become new Albertans, they likely don't have the luxury of bringing their child care provider with them. If both parents work outside the home, child care is a primary need for which there is always demand. The Alberta government believes that parents should have a choice in daycare. During the last year licensed and approved child care spaces have increased by approximately 4,700 spaces, for a total of approximately 100,000 spaces across the province.

Mr. Speaker, the government does not create child care spaces. However, the subsidies this government provides create the opportunity for increased economic growth. Not only do these subsidies make it easier for parents to re-enter the workforce; the demand for child care creates a unique opportunity for new Albertans. They can even become child care providers themselves. They have the opportunity to be entrepreneurs and small-business owners.

My ministry offers a wealth of information on our website to help parents find child care and for potential providers to learn more about licensing and accreditation. Similar to other provinces, Alberta does not cap parent fees that are charged by child care operators. Operators set fees based on where their program is located, their operational costs, and the level of service their programs offer. Parents should be aware that while there are many child care providers out there, not all of them are licensed or accredited. Accredited child care providers have demonstrated standards of excellence that show they provide high-quality child care over and above licensing regulations for children from birth to 12 years of age.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, it's also our priority to help lower income families access quality child care instead of providing an across-the-board subsidy for all income levels. As mentioned by previous hon. members, families can earn up to \$50,000 per year and still qualify for the maximum subsidy, and partial subsidies are

available, depending on a family's income and the child's age. The subsidy is targeted to those who need it the most. In 2013, for example, families receiving the full subsidy paid an average of \$268 per month.

Mr. Speaker, there are approximately 80,000 children enrolled in child care programs in our province. Of these children, 25,000 of them – close to 1 in 3 – receive a full or partial child care subsidy. Of those 25,000 children, more than 8 out of 10 receive a full subsidy. I believe the subsidy makes it possible for parents who either need to or want to work to re-enter the workforce.

In addition to the subsidy, Alberta has one of the lowest personal income tax rates in Canada, and we offer parents the family employment tax credit to help families with the cost of raising children. Again, Mr. Speaker, low-income Albertans also benefit from the provincial tax system with a low personal income tax rate and with the highest basic and spousal amounts in Canada. With the Alberta family employment tax credit a family of four can earn up to \$47,670 before paying provincial income taxes. It's about families keeping more money in their own pockets.

I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, in response to the hon. member's motion today, that we are doing many things across government to support the growth of healthy families, but with more and more families moving here, this motion, this conversation, is absolutely critical. I encourage and look forward to more conversation on this matter.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I have Edmonton-Calder, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Little Bow for the moment.

The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, just to put it forward straightaway, the Alberta New Democrats do support this motion. We support families and advocate for our youngest Albertans.

It's interesting to note that Public Interest Alberta recently released a report showing the dire state of child care here in this province. It showed that we are facing a worsening crisis. Alberta ranked 6 out of 10 provinces in per capita spending on child care, and over the last six years the number of child care spaces has not even been close to keeping up with the number of children in Alberta under the age of six. The percentage of mothers in the workforce with preschool children who did not have access to child care increased 62 per cent. Subsidies are not keeping pace with the increased costs of child care as well. In sum, we have a problem.

While Alberta faces an increasingly severe crisis, other provinces are taking the lead on addressing the needs of Canadians when it comes to child care. On November 18 the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, for example, passed a motion to commit to working on a federal New Democrat proposal for a universal child care system for just \$15 a day for all families that require it. In Manitoba this province provided a targeted subsidy to make child care more affordable for low-income families. In 2008 Manitoba had the lowest child care fees outside of Quebec and in 2007 reduced the nonsubsidized daily fee that was paid for parents from \$2.40 to \$2. In 2007 they increased the subsidy eligibility as well by 13 per cent, regulating the maximum fees to ensure affordability for middle-income families. The province of Quebec not only offers affordable child care, with \$7.30 daycare for Quebecers with an income of less than \$50,000, but also through regulation offers parents high-quality care for their

children as well. This PC government is failing to deal with our child care crisis here in the province of Alberta, and that's why the motion put forward by the hon. member is very timely and very appropriate.

On November 20 when asked about child care and the need for more spaces and affordable options for Albertan families, this government responded by saying that 80,000 children are enrolled in child care programs and 25,000 children receive some sort of subsidy. When asked later that day about the crisis-level shortage of spaces for infants and special-needs children, this government responded by talking about the ability of parents to choose child care providers. It is clear that in this House this government has failed to answer our questions on child care. They have failed to make any real promises to this House about addressing the child care crisis which exists here in the province.

Finally, the promises that they have made, specifically during the election in which most members opposite were elected, seem to have been broken. In 2012 the Redford government made the following promises in regard to child care. She said that a re-elected PC government would continue to deliver new and increased funding to Alberta families to offset the cost increases and changes to the provincial child care subsidy program. This is a promise that the PC government broke. In 2013 the government of Alberta eliminated the quality enhancement grant to child care centres. In response, child care operators had to increase fees and/or cut programs.

The Public Interest Alberta report on early childhood education and care: despite increases in subsidies to child care, the difference between the average cost of child care for low-income families and subsidies offered by this government rose to \$172 a month for infants and \$180 a month for older children. This amounts to an increase of \$115 a month for infants and \$28 a month for older children.

Commitments to child care are just more PC broken promises. Unlike this government, which has shown time and time again that they put some other interests ahead of Alberta families, the Alberta New Democrats are committed to making real change and making life more affordable for Albertans. We support the creation of (a) more spaces, (b) more affordable child care, (c) more publicly funded spaces which offer quality daycare programs, (d) developing a plan to deal with children age six to 12 in addition to pre-school-aged children, (e) supporting the accreditation of facilities and the certification of child care workers, and (f) ensuring quality standards that are based on national and international best practices and regularly inspecting facilities.

Mr. Speaker, in sum, certainly this motion is a great opportunity to start to speak about these issues. We know that affordable child care, not just in different jurisdictions around this country but around the world, is a cornerstone to building a more equal and just society for all and a more stable economy, to creating more opportunities for people to work and to be independent, and to ultimately have quality places not just to mind our children but to help to educate them and to build a stronger future for everyone.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise and speak to Motion 504, affordable child care services, brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West. Child care in this province is critical for the growth and the success of

Alberta. There are many small towns and villages that are within the constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. We've had this discussion with many of the mayors, how important it is to be able to have appropriate child care in order to attract people to their communities. By attracting people to the communities, that attracts business and generates a dynamic that is so important for rural Alberta.

Motion 504 is looking to review the government's child care policies in efforts to grow the province's workforce. I think some of the things that it must consider will be the flexibility of choice. It must also find the balance to be able to meet the Minister of Finance's obligation to balance the budget. I think the third thing that it needs to also consider is parental rights, that parents have the right to make their decisions as to what kinds of services they require for their children. All of that has to form part of a very valuable discussion, and we must as a government look to see what the gaps are in the services that we are providing already.

5:20

Motion 504 is looking to go forward and to review that discussion, but we already are doing some things, as the Minister of Human Services mentioned. Currently we assist lower income families with various services, including daycare; out of school care programs, including after school care programs; approved family day homes; an extended hours child care subsidy for parents working evenings and weekends; a kin child care funding program; and support for stay-at-home parents. Children, of course, must be 12 years of age or younger for these programs and cannot yet be attending grade 7. Families must have one or both parents working, attending school, actively looking for work, or with special needs. They must be a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident living in Alberta. Finally, families may apply for funding if they have their children enrolled in an approved early childhood development program or a licensed preschool.

If families meet these criteria, they can receive some level of funding from the Ministry of Human Services for the following: licensed daycare centres, licensed group family child care, approved family day homes, licensed out of school care centres, licensed preschools, and approved early childhood development programs. Mr. Speaker, these are just high-level examples of what the government already provides to hard-working parents.

Currently our government supports children with disabilities through the inclusive child care program, and Motion 504 could urge the government to build on these initiatives. Mr. Speaker, this program creates flexibility to meet the individual needs of children with special needs or disabilities within the child care settings. Support may include training for child care staff, consultation on programming or inclusion, resource and referral information, and funding for additional staff. The family support for children with disabilities, or FSCD, program is an important voluntary initiative run by our government to protect youth. The FSCD program works in partnership with families to provide supports and services based on each child's and family's individual needs. In addition, all services are available to eligible families of children with disabilities until the child turns 18 years of age.

In order to ensure an appropriate and high-quality impact of the program, families are required to complete an individualized family support plan, or an IFSP, as part of their assessment. I think our world lives on acronyms. The purpose of the IFSP is to assist families in determining goals for their child's development and participation in the home, school, and community. The FSCD representative works together with the family to complete that IFSP. The IFSP is used to record a family's goals and priorities for

their child, strategies to meet these goals, individual responsibilities, and timelines.

Mr. Speaker, it is quite apparent that the Ministry of Human Services is already placing a high priority on assisting Alberta's parents in finding suitable child care. In addition, the Ministry of Human Services has also worked with Mount Royal University and Grant MacEwan University as community partners. This initiative will develop a curriculum for child care educators who work in centre-based child care and family day homes dealing with children aged zero to five years. The curriculum framework is based on a holistic view of child development. It will seek to encompass all areas of a child's growth and learning. It will build a common language across diverse delivery settings, focusing around the importance of play in early learning, emergent program planning, and responsive care.

Mr. Speaker, there are two phases to the project. The first is the development of a draft curriculum framework that is aligned with the content and values and approach of postsecondary training institutions as well as the early learning and child care sector at large. The second phase consists of piloting the curriculum framework and supports in selected early learning and child care sites across this province.

Motion 504 asks the government to review child care, which is an important issue for Albertans. Mr. Speaker, one of our government's initiatives is to build strong communities that are fostered by collaborative spirit. The programs that I've just listed provide these opportunities for parents to access child care. It allows all families the opportunity to do what is best for their children. The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West is to be commended for bringing forward this topic for consideration and discussion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Little Bow.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Motion 504, a review of child care. I, too, commend the member for raising this issue. It's certainly one that I hear a lot on in Calgary-Mountain View, where there are a lot of young families struggling to meet the ever-accelerating costs of living in the big city, where we have not managed to bring under control the spiral that comes with a boom-bust economy. Increasingly, even my own children are struggling with child care and the demands of modern lives.

We're looking for three things – affordability, quality, and accessibility – and we're not providing that for up to a third to almost half of the people who would utilize it if they had the opportunity and who, according to some of the studies, would be paying much more back to society than subsidized daycare would. The evidence from Quebec is that the income taxes gained from having more people employed would actually pay for the whole costs of subsidized child care.

I mean, it raises questions, again, about just how committed this government is to prevention. We see children falling through the cracks in terms of their early childhood development, their learning abilities, their emotional and behavioural challenges that are not identified because they're not in situations where people can actually identify and provide interventions. We're setting ourselves up for more and more costs and lost potential through our health care system, which shouldn't be approaching that at all if prevention was in place; for more and more supports needed in schools when they get into schools and haven't had the

preparation in early childhood; and, certainly, some safety issues around especially single moms who don't quite have the supports they need and are trying to do both, work a little bit outside the home and somehow cope with the demands in the home.

At this point it would be a huge step if we would simply address the backlog of those who very seriously want to and can provide some aspect of the funding for their own child care, but at some point the idea would be a universal child care program.

First steps first, though, and I think the discussion here is an important one. Surely we can help reduce family stresses, mental illness, risk taking, family violence, and, obviously, poverty if we take seriously the commitment that we have said that we've made to the sustainable well-being of children and their educational opportunity and achievement. These are investments for our future, not expenses. Again, the ideological blindness over here with taxes that don't reflect a fairness and a revenue stream that can actually provide for some of these supports is shocking when it's been going on for so long and so many have said that we need more resources to do what's right for Albertans, to ensure that we invest and reduce the costs of all the breakdowns in families and communities that we see because they simply don't have enough supports.

The early childhood mapping project. Again, a funding cut there after five years of tremendous work identifying the developmental needs of children in those critical years under six and identifying what they need and identifying progress or lack of progress in that childhood population. That project was cut. It speaks of a government that's more interested in financial mean-spiritedness and holding onto an ideology of low, impossible taxes rather than one that is being generous and supportive and preventative in their approach to some of our most vulnerable. And I'm including the working poor and those just above, in the low- and middle-income brackets, that are struggling to meet their needs.

Surely 4,000 new spaces in child care is progress but not when you consider that we've got double that number in terms of needs. Let's deal with the reality, and that means not only getting people accessible child care and early childhood enrichment; it also means making sure that that is affordable.

So I welcome these opportunities to discuss but more than discuss to hopefully move to some policy actions and some investment, that are so critically needed in this province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

5:30

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and speak on the motion that the Member for Edmonton-South West has brought forward. I think the key part is that "accessible, high-quality, and affordable child care is available for all Albertans." Child care is key to rural Alberta, a riding that I represent. Being a strong advocate for rural Alberta, I can tell you that that the key for rural Alberta is to make sure that we have all the same things that all of our urban friends have also. As the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville stated before, one of the key things is to support this because it does support rural Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, child care facilities in Vulcan, for instance, are one I can relate to. During a difficult time in my life, when I was raising my two boys by myself, the Vulcan Daycare Society was there for me. It was key and crucial as a single parent to have a safe place for my kids to go, and I can tell you that they had great service there. If you want a good system, you have to sometimes

step up, so I ended up being the president of that society for a little while. There are great people advocating there, and there are great people working there. The quality was second to none. It was a challenge sometimes on the affordability side for some people, that were obviously a little more challenged on income, to make the bills all work out.

One of the things there was making sure that we always had fundraisers and things like that. We did casinos. We did all kinds of things. I can tell you that the quality was always good there, and the accessibility was good. There was sometimes the challenge, though, of enough spaces for everybody.

I applaud the Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing this forward because I think, like with most things, the system is working well, but you always need to review it and keep on top of how things can change.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I will be supporting this motion. I want to thank the member for bringing it forward, and I ask all the other members of this Assembly to also support it. I think it's something key and crucial to keeping Alberta in first place.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to rise today to support Motion 504, proposed by my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West. I want to point out that the motion seeks to review the practice. It didn't specifically say to increase or decrease the subsidy and so forth. I want to bring it back to why I'm so much in favour of that review.

As you know, lots of young families live in our province. Particularly, some of those live in Calgary-Hawkwood. We have lots of need for access to affordable child care in order to have parents who can get out to work and pay income taxes for us. In the meantime we are at a time when the oil price is going down to under \$70, and we're in a very, very difficult time to choose and decide what programs to support and how to spend our money.

The motion from the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West is talking about seeking to review the best practice. I wanted to congratulate him for being thoughtful in proposing this motion. To me, when we have to live within our means and we have to come up with innovative solutions to meet the increased demand, that's something I always applaud a member for doing. That's something good not only for Calgary-Hawkwood but for the whole province of Alberta.

This motion brought us the conversation of: what are other people doing? I have two models here from different provinces that I'd like to share with the hon. colleagues in this House in the spirit of looking for the best practice. One of the models is done by Ontario. Ontario's child care subsidy helps eligible families pay for child care. The Ontario government, municipal governments, and First Nation communities share the cost of the program. In Ontario parents can qualify for the child care subsidy if their child is under 12 years old, is in a licensed child care program, or is a school-aged child enrolled in a recreation program.

The amount parents pay for their child care depends on the family's adjusted net income. There are grants and other supports available from the provincial and federal governments that can help families with the costs of raising children. The Ontario child benefit, abbreviated as OCB, is financial support where low-income families, whether they're working or not, may receive help to provide for their children. Depending on the family income, applicants can qualify for this program if they are the primary caregiver of a child under 18 or are residents of Ontario and have

filed and had assessed their previous year's income tax return as have their spouse or common-law partner.

Motion 504 is urging the government to conduct a review, which may result in looking at the practices of other provinces. Ontario has additional funds for child care, and the Ontario child care supplement for working families is a tax-free monthly payment that helps families pay for the costs of raising children under seven years of age. With the introduction of Ontario's model in July 2008, payments were reduced in part by the OCB amount received. When the OCB benefit level reached \$1,100 in July 2009, most two-parent families no longer needed the benefits anymore, so that was their cap level. This program helps families who are low- to mid-income single or two-parent families, who have one stay-at-home parent, or who have one or both studying or in training. Applicants apply for OCCS if they live in Ontario, receive a Canada child tax benefit, have children under the age of seven born prior to July 1, 2009, and have a proper income level that qualifies for this program.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as a fiscal conservative in Alberta, Ontario's practice may not be the most beneficial one for us to consider. However, it would not hurt to have a robust discussion of what we can do and come up with something that is made in Alberta. If Motion 504 was to be taken into consideration by this government, an important part of the review is to study other forms of government child care relationships and assess their strengths and weaknesses.

The second model that was available for comparison is Saskatchewan's. They have a program called the child care subsidy, or CCS. It is a monthly assistance program that helps Saskatchewan families meet the costs of licensed child care. CCS is provided directly to child care facilities to reduce the fees charged to eligible parents. CCS varies; the scale ranges from low-income to high-income assistance. To be eligible, individuals must have custody of a child or children under the age of 13, receive care in a licensed facility, be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident of Canada, be residents of Saskatchewan, and have a valid reason for care of the children. They list a whole bunch of reasons deemed as valid. For instance, employment or self-employment, attending educational training in an accredited institution, or looking for work has to be one of the reasons.

CCS amounts are determined using a calculation that takes into account gross family income, family size, the age of the child, the location of the child care facility, and actual fees charged. Families with income below the designated thresholds may qualify for maximum aid. A family with income above those thresholds may still qualify for a reduced amount. Families receiving income assistance through the Saskatchewan assistance program or a transitional employment allowance may be eligible for benefits sufficient to cover the entire fee. Maximum amounts are provided to a family with a monthly income below \$1,640. This threshold is increased by \$100 for each additional child under 18. For example, families with two children under 18 qualify for a maximum benefit of \$1,740. Thresholds for families with more than three children are increased similarly without an upper limit.

So the question is: is the Saskatchewan model suited to us? Well, I have to say that I don't know, but what begs the question is the motion put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, which is: given the fiscal constraint, given the rising need, given the best practices other provinces have, what is the made-in-Alberta solution for it?

I look forward to hearing the remainder of the debate on Motion 504. Hopefully, something creative can come as our solution. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

5:40

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West to close debate.

Mr. Jeneroux: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The goal of Motion 504 is to promote and continue the discussion on affordable child care services that are easily accessible for all Albertans. We've heard loud and clear that young families often face the difficult situation of caring for their young children while also needing to make a living and establish careers. By exploring new ways of supporting affordable child care, we could make great progress in strengthening families and nurturing future generations of Albertans. Besides this, through innovative means we could also continue to strengthen Alberta's workforce. The more Albertans we have employable, the stronger our economic outlook.

By passing Motion 504, we win a dual victory, Mr. Speaker. We affirm the importance of strong and cohesive families, and we

will fortify the province's pool of employable working adults. Any support we can lend to families as they raise their children and advance their careers is worthy of our consideration. We have a great track record on this front. Let us see if we can improve further. Families are the backbone of this province, and when they prosper, we prosper.

As such, I encourage all hon. members to join me in supporting Motion 504, calling for the exploration of affordable child care supports. One gesture, one conversation can make a difference, and I believe we owe it to our children to try.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In consideration of the closure of that piece of business and in consideration of the time I move that we adjourn until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:43 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, December 8, 2014

Issue 14e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, December 8, 2014

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 7 Chartered Professional Accountants Act

The Chair: I'm looking for the first speaker. The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. One of my constituents, a chartered accountant, has asked if I would ask the hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour – and I believe that he has already sent you some information on this. He has some trepidation about fighting both a lawsuit and a chartered accountant tribunal hearing over the same subject. He asked if I'd bring an amendment to the legislation, and I believe the minister has received a copy of that. I didn't feel that this was the right course, but I did commit to asking about the process that would ensure that CA tribunals are fair, open, and transparent, with recourse to appeal. Would the minister care to comment on this?

The Chair: Other speakers? The Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On the matter regarding the constituent of the hon. member that asked for a change, I had my staff look at that, and we're of the opinion that the change, with all due respect to the constituent, is not advisable. The disciplinary hearings under the legislation and civil litigation are different. Disciplinary hearings under the regulatory bodies are designed to protect the public regarding such matters as incompetence, unprofessional conduct, that kind of stuff, while civil litigation generally deals with liability issues. I hope the hon. member will forgive me because this isn't a really technical explanation, but it's kind of like never the twain shall meet.

Under the previous legislation the matters of professional conduct and competence would be dealt with under the regulatory body, and liability issues would be dealt with through the courts. That would be the case before the legislative change, and it would still be the case after the legislative change. We are not of the opinion that we should amend the legislation.

I would be happy to have further discussion with you on that, but I had the folks in the department look at it, and that is the opinion that we have right now, sir.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: I will be brief, Mr. Chair. It's a great honour to speak to Bill 7, Chartered Professional Accountants Act, 2014. The purpose of the bill is to unify three professional accounting bodies in Alberta – the Certified General Accountants' Association of Alberta, the Certified Management Accountants of Alberta, and the

Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta – as the Chartered Professional Accountants of Alberta. As more than 50 per cent of Canada's professional accountants are already using the CPA designation, the merger of three professional accounting bodies in Alberta will ensure that accounting professionals working in Alberta and other provinces are able to better transfer their skills and expertise across provincial boundaries. Furthermore, Alberta will be able to attract more qualified accounting professionals to work and live in Alberta. I think that because our economy has been growing by leaps and bounds, it will be helpful for the Alberta economy to attract more professional accountants. I know there are lots of reasons for the outcome of this bill. It's a good bill, so I'm going to be supporting the bill.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 7 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 8 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014

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

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 8, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act. As we've discussed before, it's a long list of justice-related amendments to provincial legislation. I also wanted to comment briefly on the debate that we heard during second reading, particularly around legal aid.

Before I do that, I would like to propose two amendments to Bill 8, one that relates to the Limitations Act and one that relates to the Family Law Act. So I take this opportunity to update the Assembly on those changes, but I think we should probably get the amendments delivered, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Hon. member, if you would circulate those, we'll deal with them one at a time.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Actually, I think they're combined.

The Chair: They're combined, so it'll be one amendment, then. We'll call that A1, and we'll treat them as one amendment.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you.

The Chair: So we'll just pause for a moment while that's being circulated, and then I'll let you start speaking again. You may proceed, hon. member.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to sound a little bit like a lawyer, so my apologies beforehand. I'm going to read out the amendments first, and then I'll try to explain them. The bill is amended as follows.

In part A section 3 is amended (a) by striking out subsection (2); (b) by adding the following after subsection (3):

(3.1) The following is added after section 55.11:

Mandatory clauses
concerning recalculation

55.12 effective March 1, 2015, in making a child support order, the court shall include the mandatory clauses concerning recalculation that are required by the regulations under section 55.8(a.1).

And then (c) in subsection (6)(a) in the proposed section 55.8(a.1) by striking out “section 51.1” wherever it occurs and substituting “55.12.”

In part B section 4(2)(b) is amended by striking out the proposed section 3(1.1)(a) and substituting the following:

- (a) 2 years after
 - (i) the later of
 - (A) the date on which the claimant was served with a pleading by which a claim for an injury is brought against the claimant, and
 - (B) the date on which the claimant first knew, or in the circumstances ought to have known, that the defendant was liable in respect of the injury or would have been liable in respect of the injury if the defendant had been sued within the limitation period provided by subsection (1) by the person who suffered the injury, if the claimant had been served with a pleading described in paragraph (A), or
 - (ii) the date on which the claimant first had or in the circumstances ought to have had the knowledge described in [subsection] (i)(B), if the claimant has not been served with a pleading described in subclause (i)(A).

I feel like I’m back in law school, Mr. Chair.

So what do these amendments mean? We want to make sure that we are as clear as possible.

The Chair: Hon. member, you said “subsection” instead of “subclause” under (ii). Could you clarify your intent under (ii)?

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Subsection (ii): “the date on which the claimant first had or in the circumstances ought to have had the knowledge described in subclause (i)(B), if the claimant has not been served with a pleading described in subclause (i)(A).”

The Chair: Thank you. Please carry on.

7:40

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you.

Let me start with the Limitation Act. The Limitation Act establishes limitation periods for bringing claims, and Bill 8 proposes amendments to the act to clarify, among other things, when the discovery limitation period begins for a claim for contribution under the Tort-feasors Act. So when a plaintiff brings an action, they don’t have to list all the possible defendants who may have been responsible for the injury. However, the current law allows a defendant to bring a claim against another person that they believe is also responsible for the same injury to the plaintiff. This proposed change clarifies how the limitation period runs when a defendant brings a claim against another person responsible for the same injury to the plaintiff, and these wording changes are intended to further clarify this change.

These clarifications were brought forward to us by the Law Society of Alberta, and the drafters of this amendment worked closely with the Law Society to ensure that every lawyer was satisfied with the new wording of this section.

Mr. Mason: That’s an accomplishment.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Indeed. Happy lawyers.

The Family Law Act is the next change. Under section 8 there are four proposed amendments to the Family Law Act that relate specifically to the child support recalculation program. This program helped separated and divorced parents update their court-ordered child support amounts to reflect changes in their income. It gives Albertans a low-cost and convenient way to ensure that their child support amounts are kept current without having to go to court. Since the recalculation program began in 2010, it has helped many Alberta families avoid having to go back to court, thus reducing pressure on parents and on our court system. While the program has been successful, there are opportunities to improve it to help more vulnerable Albertans and enhance client service and further increase access to justice, which we all care about.

The first of the amendments is a mandatory clause that will be required in all future child support orders to specifically indicate whether or not the support may be recalculated by the recalculation program. This requirement is aimed in large part at creating more awareness of the recalculation service so parents understand they have an option to update child support without having to go to court, and the intent is to have this requirement apply to all child support orders after March 1, 2015, including those granted under the Divorce Act.

However, as it presently stands, the mandatory clause amendment is in the general child support order division of the Family Law Act, which sets out a narrower definition of child support order that doesn’t cover those granted under the Divorce Act. So to address this minor oversight, the amendment that I just read proposes that the mandatory clause requirement be moved from the general support order division of the Family Law Act to the division that deals with the recalculation program. The recalculation program division includes a broader definition of child support order, which means that the mandatory clause would apply to child support orders under the Family Law Act and the Divorce Act.

That’s it for my comments on the amendments.

I just want to quickly comment on one of the items that was raised when we were doing second reading. It’s the Legal Aid Alberta funding, certainly something that has been discussed in this House. You know, we all recognize the importance of legal aid services as a means of ensuring that low-income, vulnerable Albertans receive the help they need in court proceedings. [A cellphone rang] Is it the Law Society phoning? No, I don’t think so.

As we understand, we must play our part to ensure that Legal Aid Alberta has the support it needs so that we ensure better access, and that’s why we provided that organization with an additional \$5.5 million to address its budget shortfall for this year. This funding also allows them to raise financial eligibility guidelines so that more applicants, including individuals receiving AISH, have greater access to services.

That said, it’s also critical to focus on the long-term sustainability of the program. We believe that the demand for legal aid services will continue to grow just like everything else is growing in Alberta, and we are working with Legal Aid Alberta to assess their needs and the appropriate level of funding for 2015-16 and onward. Discussions will also focus on how we can ensure a predictable and long-term plan for the delivery of legal aid. At the same time, we are continuing to work with our federal partners to encourage them to fully participate in this jointly funded program.

Mr. Chair, the revised amendments to the Limitations Act and the Family Law Act bring them in line with their intended purpose, and I thank you for your consideration of those amendments.

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm wondering if the Member for Calgary-Varsity can just help us understand, I guess, where the amendments came from, how they came to be. Considering that this is a relatively new piece of legislation, I'm just trying to understand the processes. Considering that I'm not a lawyer, I appreciate you trying to explain it but just want to make sure that what is happening is moving things in the right direction, as was the original intent of this.

Thank you.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: I'm actually very happy to answer that question. It's a very legitimate question. The Law Society and many other groups have been consulted for a long, long time on the amendments in this bill, and I think I referred to the work that had been done, the consultations. These changes came about just to make sure that we further clarified them. In particular, the change to the Limitations Act came about through discussions led by the Law Society.

The Chair: Are there other speakers to the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: We're back to the bill. Speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to just offer a few comments with regard to the bill. It is primarily just housekeeping of many of the justice statutes, and it certainly does bring the legislation in line with the current court rules and changes in legislation and changes "with leave of the Court" to "with the permission of the Court."

The Court of Queen's Bench Act and the Provincial Court Act ease the process for the reappointment of masters in chambers and judges respectively, and they transfer the responsibility for some appointments from the Lieutenant Governor in Council to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

There are primarily housekeeping amendments to the Estate Administration Act and the Wills and Succession Act. As well, the Notaries and Commissioners Act and the Oaths of Office Act have small changes that amount to a clarification of who is meant by a lawyer. The fact that the member believes that all lawyers in the province are in accordance with this act is in itself a very fine piece of jurisprudence or whatever it is. I don't know what it is. It's just unusual.

There are more substantial amendments. The Limitations Act clarifies the limitation period for a third-party defendant.

The Perpetuities Act allows qualified environmental trusts to exist in perpetuity, which is not normally allowed. The qualified environmental trusts are a special kind of trust under the Income Tax Act of Canada that are maintained solely for the purpose of accumulating funds to finance future reclamation of a qualifying site such as an oil sands mine or a pipeline in Canada. In the spring these trusts were dealt with in Bill 7, and we cautiously supported that because they seemed like a good idea as they ensure that funds are set aside up front for remediation of pipelines and mining.

Finally, the Family Law Act has changed concerning the child support recalculation program, which allows a calculation of child support payments due to changes in income without having to go to court. That just makes good sense.

We are generally in support of the changes because they are a modernization of our legislation, and we support changes which address unintended consequences or confusion caused by other legislation. We want to ensure that we create the highest possible quality of legislation in our province.

7:50

We'd like to focus, though, a little bit on the Court of Queen's Bench Act and the Provincial Court Act as the proposed amendments don't do anything to address the serious issue of access in Alberta. We're concerned about access to justice and legal aid in two regards, and that is notwithstanding what the hon. member has just said about increased funding. One, there has been a consistent pattern of underfunding for legal aid. Many Albertans have been denied access to legal counsel as a result. Secondly, many of the most vulnerable Albertans do not qualify for legal aid. For example, Mr. Chairman, an Albertan working a full-time job and making minimum wage is not eligible for legal aid because they make too much money. An Albertan receiving assured income for the severely handicapped is not eligible for legal aid. I have to ask why that is, why we would not automatically just make sure that that access was available.

I think other members of our caucus have probably talked about the importance of legal aid. There is, I guess, a quote from Court of Queen's Bench Chief Justice Neil Wittmann, who said that there is certainly connectivity between the legal aid issue and self-representation that affects our whole system. It's a systemic problem and gives rise to more and more time being spent on cases where there is not legal representation for all parties.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to indicate that we have been strong advocates for better access and more equitable access to justice, and we have been critical of this government's failure when it comes to legal aid. The announcement by the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General in the fall of a one-time transfer to Legal Aid of \$5.5 million is simply not sufficient. Legal Aid predicts that they need another \$8 million a year and will have a deficit in the order of \$15 million by 2016-17. They've had to reduce their services. They've cut the drop-in services. They cut 35 jobs in regional offices and 12 in Calgary. At the same time, there have been 33,000 more applications for legal aid services. As a result, there have been increasing obligations in Alberta courts for government-appointed lawyers for individuals denied legal aid.

I can go into that in a lot more detail, Mr. Chair, but I just want to make sure that we're on the record that the steps that have been taken with increased funding on a one-time basis are just not adequate and will not address the fundamental problem we have in this province with legal aid. I just want to indicate to the House that notwithstanding that and as this is primarily a housekeeping bill that does simplify and streamline a number of acts, we will be supporting this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers to the bill?

Mr. Kang: Mr. Chairman, we will be supporting Bill 8, too. It is mainly a housekeeping bill, so I think it will fix a lot more.

There were some issues raised about legal aid. You know, those concerns will always be there. This bill, with orders to reflect income changes, does help further the idea of reducing the burden

on courts. This bill will take some pressure off the courts because with the recalculation of support the parent won't have to go back to the court again to get the support increased.

It's a good bill in all other senses, so we'll be supporting it. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 8 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chairman, I move at this point that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 7. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 8. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 9

Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014

[Adjourned debate December 3: Mr. Rowe]

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to address the House on Bill 9, the second version of the Condominium Property Amendment Act, this one also 2014. We saw one of these in the spring. After many years of consultation, here we are again.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to be proposing an amendment at this point, that we refer this bill to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities. Before I get started, I will pass that along, and we'll go from there.

Mr. Wilson moved that the motion for second reading be amended to read that Bill 9, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, this is a referral amendment, so we will treat this as amendment R1.

I'll invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw to continue to speak to the amendment.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, this is another attempt to save this government from itself. Today they introduced Bill 2, which might as well have been titled that. But this is just another example of – they've tried. They've tried with this bill to get it right.

Mr. Dorward: So do you.

Mr. Wilson: As much as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar may disagree with me, as he often does, one thing he can't disagree with is the government's history of ramming and rushing legislation through this House.

Let's run through a few of them, shall we? Bills 45 and 46: it was about a year ago last week, I think, we found ourselves here in this House, Mr. Speaker, and this government was adamant about passing these bills.

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

Mr. Wilson: The relevance is that this government is incapable of writing legislation that stands the test of time and is actually usable in a way that we need it to be written and in a way that our stakeholders in this province need this bill to be written, Mr. Speaker.

8:00

As I try to make a case to this House for the amendment, which is to refer it, the reason we need to refer it is because, like many of the bills we've seen in this House, it is at this point in time insufficient.

If I may continue, Bill 45 and Bill 46, both of them, have not been . . .

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

Mr. Wilson: You can challenge the relevance all you would like.

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair, hon. member.

Mr. Wilson: I think I just laid out my case, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Bills 9 and 10, earlier this spring, on pension reform: what happened with those? Nowhere to be seen. How about Bill 1 from earlier this spring? Well, that's now going to be repealed by Bill 11 in this session.

What we see is repeat after repeat performance of this government doing things the wrong way, consulting after they've written a bill or not even doing it at all. Let's look at Bill 10. It was just last week. You guys can't have that short of a memory. [interjection] Apparently they can.

Let's also think about the New Home Buyer Protection Act. This was a bill that was brought forward – I believe it was in the fall of 2012 that we first dealt with this bill, Mr. Speaker, and then this past spring we had, again, amending legislation for a bill that this government passed.

We have tried time and time again in the opposition to save this government from itself, and time and time and time again they walk straight into a wall or they do something, and the only time they realize that they've made a mistake is when the public uproar reaches a point where they have to retreat.

What I'm presenting here in the House right now, Mr. Speaker, is an amendment that would, hopefully, allow this government to hit the pause button, which is crazy in the sense that they've already been consulting for five years on this bill. It's their second crack at it, and they still haven't got it right. But that, in and of itself, should be reason enough to send this to committee, where it belongs. Get it right. It affects too many people, and we don't have the opportunity to come back and fix a mistake in a few months' time. Let's just do it right the first time.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

This is, again, on amendment R1. Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm listening to what the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw is saying. But when I'm thinking back to my constituency, back in 2004 in Fort McMurray we had a condominium complex that opened that had significant deficiencies that, through both board governance and issues with the developer, led to that entire complex – seven buildings – being deemed unlivable in 2011, which evicted over 300 residents, 168 units. What Bill 9 is doing is correcting a lot of the issues. It ties together not just condominium accountability, the governance of the boards, but it ties it in also with the New Home Buyer Protection Act and our Safety Codes Act, which is going to give protection to the buyers that we so desperately need.

Two years ago the Ministry of Service Alberta began a consultation process with Albertans that was overwhelming in its responses. In fact, it was so overwhelming that they had to extend the dates to allow for additional consultation. This is not a matter of us changing something that came up before. This bill was brought forward in the spring, earlier this year, and this government prorogued. As the hon. member knows, that means that it died on the Order Paper. We're simply bringing this bill back. There are no significant changes to this bill. This bill is important, Mr. Speaker. I have had constituents in the last month phoning me saying: "When is this bill coming to the table? When is it coming to the Legislature? It's important. We need this to happen. We need it now."

There is significant development. This province is growing at a rate of a hundred thousand residents per year. As we grow, particularly in our urban centres, we are going to more of a densification in our key areas where there's a lot more condominium living. Affordability is a factor and condominiums are part of that. Therefore, we need to have this protection in place as soon as possible for the residents of Alberta and those that are moving here to assist us with our economic development.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this amendment. My constituents need it. We need this bill to pass at its earliest convenience.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Speaking to the amendment, the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of this referral motion, and I would encourage my colleagues in this Chamber to support and vote the same. I will take a little bit different tack than my colleague did on this issue. Last night I attended an event hosted by the Canadian Condominium Institute. This event took place last night at the Chateau Louis and was attended by 200-plus people with approximately two days' notice to attend that meeting. Two hundred-plus people: the room was

jam-packed. At this event they voted and almost unanimously rejected supporting Bill 9 in its current state.

I congratulated the government earlier this year on the near five years of consultation, but this government has fallen short on including real consumer protection and stricter building accountability measures. It is important for Albertans that we get this bill right and listen to the experts at the Canadian Condominium Institute.

Now, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo mentioned a couple of instances in his riding regarding that Penhorwood condominium project. That was a total disaster. We have young families who've probably made their first investment which will be their biggest investment in their lives. Those people were given hours to vacate that property because it was so condemned. It was ready to fall down at a moment's notice. These people are still making mortgage payments on property they haven't lived in for two years. That's how serious this is.

Mr. Speaker, there are several key areas that the CCI is asking for amendments on, and I'd like to list them here in our House for the info of my colleagues: voting procedures and processes, financial reporting, convening of meeting to elect first board, contributions and accountability of problem owners, rules and regulations set by board of directors, bank account information. These are not minor aspects of the bill. These are significant, with long-lasting consequences.

That is why I urge all members to support this motion to refer Bill 9 back to committee for further review. This way we can ensure that the proposed legislation is sound and responsible. This bill is a large one. It's very complicated. It's taken lawyers hours and hours, days, to analyze and absorb the full impact of it. We in our party have six or seven amendments that we'll have to put on the floor if we don't refer this back to committee. It affects thousands and thousands of Albertans, including first-time buyers who have very, very little knowledge of the real estate market, of the condominium act, or anything else. They're just putting money down, and they take what's handed to them.

Seniors are also downsizing from single family homes that they've lived in for 40, 45 years. They're looking to get out of the maintenance and everything else. They're buying into this and finding out: uh-oh, what have I done? It is extremely important that we get this right the first time.

There's a company in Calgary, Alberta, and the acronym for their name is DIRT. Members, that stands for Doing It Right This Time. Let's do this right, now. Let's take it back to the committee, get it sorted out, hear from the stakeholders on the bill itself, not what was proposed.

I compliment the government on doing extensive consultant work before they drafted the bill. They should have taken that bill back to the people, back to the stakeholders, and asked them, "Did we get it right, or what do we need to change?" and then brought it to this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Other speakers to the amendment? I'll go to the hon. Minister of Service Alberta, then the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

8:10

Mr. Khan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak to this amendment. I'll put some good faith into the amendments coming from Calgary-Shaw. I trust that his heart is in the right place, but unfortunately I can't support this amendment.

As I think we all know and appreciate, Bill 10 speaks to condos, which we . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Bill 9, hon. member.

Mr. Khan: Bill 9. Sorry. Thank you.

We all know that 1 in 4 new builds in this province are condos, and that number is closer to 1 in 3 in the major metro areas. What Bill 9 is going to establish, Mr. Speaker, is a greater level of consumer protection. It's going to establish consistency for developers. It's also going to establish consistency and best practices for condo boards, which will create a much better ecosystem, if you will, for condos and for people who are buying condos.

As the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills suggests, we know that the people who are buying condos are quite often first-time buyers, and we want to provide them with those protections. We also know that there is a larger percentage of seniors who are moving into condos, and we want to be able to establish a comfort level and security and best practice for all Albertans when it comes to establishing condos.

Now, the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills mentioned a meeting that took place last night with a very good organization, CCI north. I want to thank the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for attending. I also want to thank the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne for attending and taking exhaustive notes. My office has a copy of the amendments that were raised last night at the meeting, and I think the conversation was very constructive. We've reached out. We've spoken to the president of CCI north tonight, and we've let them know that we're going to address those amendments. As suggested by some of the conversation across the aisle, a great number of the details and specifics of Bill 9 will be sorted out in regulation. What we've told CCI and what we're telling all of our stakeholders is that they will continue to be involved in that stakeholder engagement as we build the regulations.

I just want to come back again to some of the comments made by opposition members about this bill and some of the criticism about stakeholder engagement. Again, I appreciate the comments from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills in terms of our robust consultation when it has come to the condo act. You're right. The old laws are closing in on 20 years, and we need to establish some new laws. I want to thank our Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. He's absolutely correct when he says that Albertans need these protections now.

We know that the former Bill 13 was presented in the spring and made it all the way through first reading. Contrary to what some of the folks over there have suggested, the bill is substantially similar. I know that Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills knows that because he's a sharp critic, Mr. Speaker. He's taken a look at the law, and he knows. I've told him: this bill is substantially similar; you can start preparing your critique and your investigation of the bill by starting where we left off with Bill 13. It's interesting that the feedback that we received last night from the meeting didn't speak to any of the new elements that we've introduced. There are a couple of new wrinkles, but again it's substantially similar, virtually identical to the bill that we saw last spring in Bill 13.

Now, had we been able to, you know, maybe even work a day or two longer, we would have been able to pass Bill 13, and we'd be well on our way to working on those regulations and bringing this forward. We anticipate, Mr. Speaker, that through the Department of Service Alberta it may take a year or maybe even a little bit more to work through those regulations. I want this condo act to be established and be in place to provide confidence and assurance to Albertans when it comes to condo regulations.

What I'm afraid of, Mr. Speaker, is that if we push this back to the committee, we're going to be two years out before we see any substantive changes to our condo act. I don't think that that's what the opposition wants. I listen in question period on a daily basis about how they think our government doesn't move fast enough. They don't think our government is agile enough. They don't think our government is responsive enough for Albertans.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Khan: See? I think we've got agreement.

Unfortunately, what the Member for Calgary-Shaw is offering us in this amendment just doesn't get the results as quickly as we want to bring them to Albertans.

I also want to address this thought that perhaps there wasn't any consultation that happened over the summer. That's not true. I want to provide the members across the aisle with assurances that although we weren't able to get the bill through in the spring, we took the additional time to tighten it up a little bit, make some legalese changes to it, also make some minor improvements, but all the while continuing our consultations. If you'll indulge me, those consultations – and, again, I want to thank the hon. Member for Sherwood Park for working over the past 18 months and leading those consultations and continuing on those consultations over the summer.

Although we have some feedback from CCI north – as I've said, my office has spoken to them, and I will speak to them – what we do know is that this bill is substantially similar, and we didn't get that feedback from CCI north in the spring, which is interesting. We asked CCI north to continue on in the dialogue in the summer, and unfortunately they weren't able to participate with us. I'm sure there were some logistical reasons for that. But as the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills does say, CCI north has expressed some concerns, and there are some others who have.

If I may, we have the Association of Condominium Managers of Alberta, who we've done stakeholder engagement with. I'm going to read a list of those who we've done the stakeholder engagement with and are really wanting this bill to move forward. There's the Association of Condominium Managers of Alberta, the ADR Institute of Alberta, the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association, Alberta Real Estate Association, Building Owners and Managers Association, Canadian Condominium Institute of southern Alberta – that's CCI south – the Canadian Home Builders' Association, the Insurance Bureau of Canada, the Real Estate Council of Alberta. We have 4,000 submissions, Mr. Speaker, through our web portal in terms of providing feedback.

An Hon. Member: How many?

Mr. Khan: Four thousand, Mr. Speaker, and, through the chair, some of the largest volume of feedback that my office has received while I've been minister was when this session was prorogued. My office received countless e-mails from stakeholders saying: "Please don't let Bill 13 die. Please move fast. Please get this important legislation in front of the House." That's what we're doing with Bill 9, so I cannot support these amendments.

I want to thank everybody for their attention, and I again want to thank the hon. Member for Sherwood Park for her stalwart work on this bill. I want to thank the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for his comments. [interjection] Calgary-McCall has been phenomenal on this issue as well.

And I do sincerely – and I mean this – look forward to some of the amendments from the opposition. I think if we can work

together, I'm all for establishing Bill 9 as the condominium act that's going to satisfy and foster a successful ecosystem for consumers, for developers, for condo boards.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. If someone would like to ask the minister any questions, you can do that.

If not, I'll just recognize the next speaker, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be supporting the amendment. I do think that it would be very useful at this stage to have some open public consultation. The minister has given a list of other organizations that have been consulted, but he didn't share with us the degree to which there was support for the bill as a whole or for specific aspects of the bill. It is a matter of concern that the northern Alberta chapter of the Canadian Condominium Institute is still very concerned. In fact, the meeting that occurred last night, which was attended by our MLA for Edmonton-Calder, expressed real concerns about the bill.

I think it's fair to say that the government has a ways to go before it sorts things out. Now, the government likes to sort things out in regulations rather than doing it up front and out in the open in terms of changes to the bill. We have seen lots of – I've heard that many times, actually, Mr. Speaker, where, you know, maybe you don't like the bill exactly the way it is: just vote for it, and we'll sort it all out once we do the regs, you know, and it'll all be okay. That may be the case sometimes, but it's certainly not always, and it's not an assurance that leaves me with enough comfort to be prepared to support this bill at this time.

8:20

Like our friends in the Wildrose, we have a number of amendments that we want to bring forward, but I think it would be better to do this out in the open and involve the opposition and have some real discussion about how we can improve this bill with the people that do that. I think there are some real issues, that there are some real deficiencies in this bill, Mr. Speaker. For example, the consumer protection measures in this bill are not strong enough, and I think they need to be strengthened. I'll speak more about that later. There is not enough accountability on the part of builders and developers of condominiums. That's what I think the core of the concerns are. It may be that some of those organizations representing builders, developers, and so on are satisfied with the bill, but that may not be for the right reasons. So I think it's important that we have some real, public accountability.

I know the government has consulted, but you know, when the government doesn't consult, it usually gets things wrong, and when the government does consult, it still sometimes doesn't get things right. I think that this may well be an example of that. So for that reason, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the amendment that has been put forward.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a).

I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by Calgary-Bow.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's just a great honour to speak in favour of the amendment. I will be supporting this amendment as the minister claims that this bill was developed with input from a wide variety of stakeholders such as the Canadian Home Builders' Association, the Canadian Condo-

minium Institute, the Alberta Real Estate Association, the Real Estate Council of Alberta, legal experts, and condo owners. In many key areas such as the creation of a framework for a dispute tribunal the bill simply grants the government regulation-making authority. That could have been much stronger. Some stakeholders are now saying that they were expecting much more from this legislation. This legislation doesn't go far enough. Sufficient time is needed for all affected parties to provide more input into this. If that can't be done in this session, then the bill should be carried over to spring 2015.

As the Condominium Property Act is amended every 15 years or so, it is important to get everything right in the latest amendments. Let's do it right the first time. With all the time that government spent consulting on this legislation, you would think they could have been much more specific in prescribing remedies to the problems. In many areas, however, we will have to wait for the regulations before we know exactly what is being proposed. In this new era, Mr. Speaker, where accountability is supposedly paramount, this degree of government by regulation is simply not acceptable. Remedies must be written into the law so that they can't be changed behind closed doors at the whim of the government.

Key stakeholders such as Anand Sharma of the Canadian Condominium Institute and eminent condo lawyer Robert Noce are now saying that Bill 9 is not prescriptive enough and that amendments are needed to fix those other deficiencies. If the government is intent on getting out of the current legislative session as quickly as possible, it should at least have the decency to delay this important bill until the spring, when it can be dealt with in a reasonable and unhurried fashion, Mr. Speaker.

This is what this amendment is trying to do, Mr. Speaker. Let's get it right, and let's refer it to committee as the amendment is trying to do.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, the Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to say that there were extensive consultations when it came to the condominium act. One of the things that I did as an MLA was that I made sure that condominiums in my constituency – I don't have as many as many people have, but I do have them in my constituency, and one of the things I did was to make sure that the people that were actually living in the condominiums had feedback on this bill. I continue to get feedback from them, and what they're saying is: "Please. Let's please just get this passed because we need it."

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

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

Are there speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question of amendment R1.

[Motion on amendment R1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: We're back to the main bill. The Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me to stand on behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 9, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 9, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014, be not now read a second time because the Legislative Assembly believes that the bill delegates too much authority to the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations respecting the details of the legislation and, in many cases, does not prescribe specific remedies in the bill itself, and further input from the stakeholders is required to address the provisions lacking detail in the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, do you have that amendment with you? This is a hoist?

Mr. Kang: No, a reasoned amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: A reasoned amendment. All right. I stand corrected. This is a reasoned amendment. If you'd circulate that to the pages, hon. member.

For the record, hon. members, this will be amendment RA1.

You can speak to the amendment, hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this amendment is self-explanatory. We believe that a piece of legislation of this magnitude should not be rammed through in the middle of the night during the dying days of this session. With all the time that the government spent consulting on this legislation, you would think that they could have been much more specific in prescribing remedies to the problems. In many areas, however, we are being told that we will have to wait for the regulations before we know exactly what is being proposed.

In this new era, where accountability is supposedly paramount, this degree of government by regulation is simply not acceptable. As I said before, remedies must be written into law so that they can't be changed behind closed doors, Mr. Speaker. As before, on record key stakeholders have pointed out that, you know, this government should at least have the decency to delay this important bill until the spring session, when it can be dealt with in a reasonable fashion and in an unhurried fashion. I think the government is trying to rush through this bill. It's a big bill, and I believe there are about 50 amendments. Because this bill is a very important bill and it will impact many Albertans, I think this Assembly owes it to them to get it right.

I'd like to ask all members to support this amendment, and I'm looking forward to the debate, Mr. Speaker. This is a big bill, and I think they should take time to review it and do it right.

Thank you.

8:30

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Why not, Mr. Speaker? I really like this amendment. This is an amendment that I am going to photocopy and put in my files. This amendment could be used on almost any government bill because almost every government bill of any substance at all that we deal with always refers a whole bunch of really important stuff to the cabinet to decide behind closed doors – behind closed doors – if you can believe it.

Is that any way to govern a province? I don't think so. I think that we in fact should insist that this government put forward the substantive elements of its legislation in the legislation and not deal with it in regulations. That is becoming and has over my time here become an increasingly pervasive strategy on the part of the government and not one that I think is either democratic or open or in the interests of the public as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, for those reasons I will be supporting this amendment as well as photocopying it, and I'll just have a little

thing on my computer where I can just replace the name and the bill number because I think we'll have use for this in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Well, I just want to point out for procedural information for those in the House, Mr. Speaker, that generally, when you propose an amendment to a bill because the bill is being rammed through in the middle of the night during the dying days of the session, at least one of those three conditions should generally be true. In this case none of them are. In the case that you propose such an amendment when none of those three conditions are true, it has the flavour that it might have been photocopied from somewhere else, which the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood suggests is a good strategy. I suggest we defeat the amendment and move on.

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

Other speakers to the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: Back to the bill. Any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I was hoping that we could have an opportunity to deal with this in committee, but I think I'm prepared to deal, too, with the substantive elements of the bill. This is just a mildly revised version of the Redford government's proposed changes to the condominium act that were put forward in the spring of 2014.

This particular bill will make a number of changes, not all of them negative: broader consumer protection with more disclosure to buyers, including home warranty information, occupancy dates, and notice of changes to the purchase agreement; developers will have to deposit buyers' deposits with an authorized trustee, pay their fair share of condo fees for unsold units, and have a professional building assessment on buildings converted to condos. That's good, and that's important, I think. It will change board governance with explicit voting procedures, required notice of annual general meetings, owners' meetings to replace board members, and notice of insurance changes. It will delegate authority to the Real Estate Council of Alberta to regulate and set standards for condo managers. It will develop a clearer scope of government authority and stiffen penalties for offenses and create a framework for a dispute resolution tribunal as an alternative.

Mr. Speaker, in Alberta there are more than 8,000 condominium corporations in operation. Condominiums account for approximately 20 per cent of homes sold annually, and 1 in 3 homes sold in Edmonton and Calgary are condos. Because condominiums are such a big part of our province's housing market, it is important that we get it right the first time to ensure that condo owners are taken care of and protected, but despite nearly five years of consultation and two revisions of the legislation, the government continues to fall short on protecting condominium owners and addressing long-standing issues in the industry.

First, we're concerned about the lack of input from condo owners in the process. People who own condominium units need to have some say in the process and the laws that govern their arrangements. We've heard a lot from the government on the ways

in which developers were consulted and the ways in which the proposed legislation has been improved to better accommodate them, but there has been little outreach to stakeholders in the owner community. The Canadian Condominium Institute northern Alberta chapter says that the province has ignored their calls for more complete consumer protection measures and strict builder/developer accountability.

As a result of this there remain many issues that this bill does not properly address, including clarity in matters of insurance, property manager accreditation and training, and document disclosure to owners. Because of the clear problems we're hearing about this bill and the utter lack of notice and complete consultation with all concerned stakeholders, we would like to see the legislation delayed. It's been pushed forward too fast, and not everyone has had their voice heard. Albertans, especially those who live in condominiums, deserve to have their voices heard when it comes to the laws and rules that govern something as fundamental as their homes. We understand the need to update the legislation, but again we want to make sure that we get it right the first time on behalf of the increasing number of people who do own condominiums.

One of the core reasons this bill needs to be given fuller consultation is that so many of the matters that impact condominium owners on a day-to-day basis are just not dealt with in the legislation. They'll be dealt with behind closed doors through regulation, and we don't think that's the appropriate way to deal with these important public issues. The processes surrounding changes that will impact people's homes should happen with the full light of legislative oversight so that as many people as possible can contribute to productive changes in the legislation.

There are a number of things that we'd like to draw the Assembly's attention to. First of all, property insurance: some of the most serious issues facing all condominium corporations in the province are issues related to property insurance. While certainly the condominium boards and owners and possibly the government can do nothing about the rising of premiums, the government could have and should have addressed other insurance issues in Bill 9, including: what property must the corporation insure, and what must the unit owners insure? Second, if a unit suffers damage because of an insured peril, who should actually be responsible for overseeing the work of restoring the inside of the unit, the corporation or the owner? And, three, who should be responsible for paying the deductible portion of an insured loss and under what circumstance?

Under Bill 9 developers are only required to provide as-built documents if they exist. It does not require them to produce them. The as-built documents are construction drawings produced upon completion of a project or particular job. They reflect all changes made in the specifications and working drawings during the construction process and show the exact dimensions, geometry, and location of all elements of the work completed under the contract. A finished building rarely corresponds exactly to the original plans in every detail. This normally happens because of unforeseeable on-site complications and variations from the original plans. Sometimes these things can create considerable difficulty, and it's important that they be produced in every instance.

So these are just a few examples, Mr. Speaker, of what we believe are important matters that have been omitted from the bill. It's clear that the consensus among the condominium owners does not exist with respect to this bill, and certainly the meeting last night attended by 250 people that object to this bill as it's

presently formulated is a good indication for members opposite that it may not just be quite ready to go.

On that basis, Mr. Speaker, we'll be opposing the bill as it's currently written. We will have amendments at the committee stage, and if they're passed, we will be very pleased.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

8:40

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Are there other speakers to the bill?

I'll afford the Member for Sherwood Park the opportunity to close debate if you so decide.

Ms Olesen: I'll call the question and close debate.

The Deputy Speaker: All right, then. The hon. Member for Sherwood Park has moved second reading of Bill 9, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a second time]

Bill 11

Savings Management Repeal Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the hon. President of Treasury Board to move second reading of Bill 11, Savings Management Repeal Act. As you may recall, the Savings Management Act came into force on April 1, 2014. The act established two innovation-related notional endowment accounts within the Alberta heritage savings trust fund: the social innovation endowment account and the agriculture and food innovation endowment account. The act also established the Alberta future fund as an account within the heritage fund. Lastly, the act permitted the transfer of \$200 million from the heritage fund to the Alberta heritage scholarship fund to be earmarked for trade scholarships.

Over the past several months, Mr. Speaker, the government has taken some time to take stock of where we are as a province, where we would like to be, and what we need to get there. Our conclusion with respect to this bill is that there are higher priorities for income generated from our savings. This is well within the context of our commitment to sound, conservative fiscal principles and certainty within the context of our current fiscal condition and the substantial drop in oil prices we have seen since the summer.

Mr. Speaker, the Savings Management Repeal Act will eliminate the social innovation endowment account, the agricultural and food innovation endowment account, and the Alberta future fund. The \$200 million allocated to the Alberta future fund will be retained in the unallocated portion of the heritage fund, and plans to allocate another \$1.8 billion over the next nine years to the Alberta future fund will be cancelled. No money has been disbursed from the future fund. The money for the trade scholarships will remain in the Alberta heritage scholarship fund and will be used for that purpose.

Mr. Speaker, we certainly don't take repealing a bill lightly, and in doing so, we aren't saying that there is no merit in the objectives of the bill. We certainly have not stepped back from promoting a skilled workforce, and in that case I think an endowment approach is the right way to deliver trade scholarships on a sustainable basis, so we've left that alone. But the other three streams of activity are things that the government could fund

through the normal budgeting process, provided the government concludes these are high priorities.

The reality is this. We are cancelling setting aside \$2 billion in heritage fund assets for an Alberta future fund that many across the House opposed. We're cancelling a social innovation endowment, the object of which did not have a clear purpose in the minds of many Albertans and would have paid out \$45 million per year. We're eliminating an agriculture and food endowment that would have paid out \$9 million a year. Mr. Speaker, if we feel the objects of any of these endowment accounts are priorities, we can simply budget for them. We don't need endowments to do so. But we're still adding to our successful scholarship fund to create more trade scholarships to help expand Alberta's skilled workforce.

In short, repealing the act is the right thing to do, and now is the right time to do it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister.

The first speaker, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and talk tonight about Bill 11, the Savings Management Repeal Act. No surprise that we're not going to borrow to save to spend. It didn't make any sense in the first place.

Three things I want to talk about: how we got here, where Alberta could have been from when Peter Lougheed started this fund in 1976, and then a different way to protect this asset for future generations, for future Albertans, in terms of better services, more services, less taxation, and better infrastructure.

How we got here. As the members for Calgary-Shaw and Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood have said, this government so consistently seems in a hurry, seems to want to do things behind closed doors in regulations and rules. With what I've seen in my short two and a half years, I'm going to suggest that you might as well because your consultation doesn't work very well either. I remember when the then Finance minister came to Medicine Hat on the government plane – thank goodness we no longer have those – and said things like: we went around the province last year doing our budget consultations, and it will be passed. Of course, this was just in March of 2014. Again, the Finance minister.

In public forums like the budget consultations and the Economic Summit last year many Albertans expressed support for using a portion of our savings for strategic, future-orientated investments. Bill 1, which we're now eliminating, the predecessor to the Bill 11 repeal act, reflects this desire by defining and implementing a renewed vision and purpose for a portion of our savings. I find this humorous and odd because everybody I talked to in Medicine Hat, even at the consultation, and everybody I talked to at the economic forum at the U of A said that it made zero sense to borrow money to save money and to spend money. It's no surprise that we're not coming up with notional funds or extra funds for social innovation, agriculture and food innovation, the Alberta future fund, and the expansion of the Alberta heritage scholarship fund when we're borrowing money like we are.

I want to talk about what could have been. Peter Lougheed started this fund with \$17 billion in 1976. Surprise, surprise that today, all these years later, all that we have is the same \$17 billion. Our government has pulled out \$33 billion over that time – \$33 billion – taking one asset, the royalties earned from our oil and gas industries, our hard-working Albertans that have added tremendous value to that asset, and it's gone. It's not there. It's been spent. Some studies have been done that show that if we'd have just left this interest to compound, if we'd have just left this

interest to grow from the original \$17 billion that Lougheed put in in 1976, we could have some side of \$233 billion today. Last year's estimate was \$210 billion. Good work at AIMCo and great markets over the year showed a 16 per cent return. That would have been a staggering \$32 billion of interest and revenue generated on money that this government didn't save, on money that future generations don't have access to.

Why is it important? You might remember when I released my infrastructure report a short time ago. The Fraser Institute released a report called Alberta's \$22-billion Lost Opportunity. Mark Milke from the Fraser Institute outlined how our Alberta government had increased spending 54 per cent more than population growth or inflation, more than this 80,000 or 90,000 or 100,000 people moving here every year, more than the 2, 3, or 4 per cent inflation we've gone through since 2005-2006, on operations and programs. Twenty-two billion dollars. I look at the \$33 billion that was pulled out of the interest earned on the heritage trust fund. Okay. From 2005 to 2006 is not the same length of period that from 1976 to now is, but with a little bit of discipline, with some efficiencies, with priorities – priorities – how much better could we have made it for the next generation?

8:50

I do support the fact that this Bill 1, the Savings Management Act, should be repealed under Bill 11. Again, it doesn't make sense to borrow money – and I think our borrowings are up to \$11 billion now – to save money. The old argument used to be that we have to borrow to spend because we can earn these higher returns. Well, in our heritage trust fund committee meeting two or three hours ago it was mentioned how the Canadian stock market, which is 8 per cent of our funds, is down 5 per cent in the last three months, and that probably doesn't count today's mayhem. So borrowing to save and to spend doesn't work for a household; it doesn't work for a government either.

One of the pros of repealing Bill 1, repealing the Savings Management Act, is that it does reduce some of this obscure accounting. We don't have to worry about notional funds and different funds of social innovation, agriculture and food innovation, the Alberta future fund, and ways to play that game. I am concerned, though, that it still allows this government to take out every bit of interest earned above the rate of inflation. We can be playing this game forever, stealing from future generations, not putting in the discipline needed to look for efficiencies, not putting in the discipline needed to look for private innovation.

But rather than just criticize, rather than just point out what could have been different, what should have been different, I want to talk about some ways to actually do something different. As the Auditor General said, you can't make a law for everything, so in the absence of laws you have to fall back on principles. What if we did not transfer any portion of the heritage trust fund, including our annual earnings, into the general revenues until the total annual earnings from the fund exceeded that of the average annual provincial revenues from oil and gas?

Mr. Wilson: What an idea.

Mr. Barnes: What an idea.

The approximately \$11 billion or \$12 billion we get from royalties: what if we left that money in there until the fund generated \$11 billion or \$12 billion? Would that go a long way to cushion oil dropping 40 per cent in a four- or five-week span? You've been the government for 44 years. You've certainly had the opportunity to do it.

What if we invested at least half of all the surpluses? First of all, what if we budgeted the price of oil, the price of natural gas conservatively? If we are a Conservative government, why don't we pick a conservative estimate to budget on, and then let's invest at least half of all the surpluses in the heritage fund until the total annual earnings from the fund exceed that of the average annual provincial revenues from oil and gas? So we'll direct some of the fund, again, to protect against these shocks. When we have a surplus, let's take 10 per cent of that surplus and give it to Alberta municipalities so they can build additional municipal infrastructure as well.

So a thought-out plan to conservatively estimate what revenues will be, a plan to save for future generations – I mean, with this great asset base we have of oil and gas, wouldn't it be great to leave the next generation at least some base of another asset that could add greatly to their future services, their public services, keep their taxes down, and create a better standard of living?

In summary, I too support the Savings Management Repeal Act. I'm surprised that the consultation was as ineffective as it was way back in March, but at least it's a step forward to having a more wholesome look.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond and to speak on the bill and, in fact, respond to the last speaker. I think that for the benefit of those of you that are home, the last speaker was a fiscal conservative, a member of the Wildrose Party. It probably wasn't immediately evident if you were just listening to the speech.

He actually said in his speech that if we had this fund, we could provide more services, better services, and less taxes. That sounds like something the NDs would say except that at least the NDs know that you have to raise taxes in order to pay for whatever you're going to provide. It really expresses the view that your spending should expand to the level of funding available. I don't think that's the job of government at all.

He talked about the superfund and mentioned Norway. That's exactly the pickle that Norway got themselves into. Yes, they have the superfund. They also have a debt-to-GDP ratio approaching 50 per cent. Notice that Alberta doesn't have any debt at all. Okay? You've got to be careful what you wish for.

I don't think it's the job . . .

Mr. Barnes: Point of order.

Point of Order Clarification

The Deputy Speaker: Your citation, hon. member?

Mr. Barnes: Standing Order 23(h).

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Would you speak to your point of order?

Mr. Barnes: I would. I do not recall mentioning Norway. I just think that as a fiscal conservative who's to say that in the future we couldn't save all the interest that this fund earned? Who's to say that we couldn't have lower taxation? Who's to say that we couldn't, you know, continue those principles? It's a point of clarification, and I appreciate the chance to clarify.

The Deputy Speaker: So you're just trying to clarify.

Hon. minister, to the point of order.

Mr. Oberle: I apologize unreservedly, Mr. Speaker. I thought he was referring to Norway with the fund. He's talking about something else, but he did refer to a large fund. I thought he was talking about Norway. I withdraw that.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. So that point of order is dispensed with, hon. member. The minister has withdrawn his comment, and you were looking for clarification. I think we're good.

Mr. Barnes: Yes, we are. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much.

Hon. minister, you may continue with your comments.

Debate Continued

Mr. Oberle: Thank you. Then he talked about the \$22 billion forgone. He forgot to mention the fact that the growth in our budget has been below population growth plus inflation rate for the last four or five years. You know, it's a double-sided argument.

The point is, I think, Mr. Speaker, that a fiscal conservative might look at this and say: "Well, you know what? It's not really the job of the government to hoard the taxpayers' money, to stuff it in our mattresses or our socks or anywhere else we might stuff it. The best place for that money is in people's pockets and out there in the economy."

I do agree that the heritage savings trust fund has to be built to a level. Let's leave it at that. If the member has some productive ways that he suggests that might happen, I suggest that he table those in committee, and we can examine them. Certainly, we're always open to suggestion. I would say that the topic of the bill before us is of course doing exactly that, trying at this stage to guarantee that that fund is not spent. All of us agree that there is some value in maintaining the fund at some level, and on that basis, Mr. Speaker, I would very strongly recommend that the whole House, regardless of our beliefs, vote to support the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think . . .

The Deputy Speaker: My apologies, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if you wish to . . .

Mr. Dorward: I wanted to 29(2)(a) him.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, no, then. Hon. member, it starts now. We'll start with the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and if you'd like 29(2)(a) after that, there will be an opportunity. Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you missed your chance, but you can 29(2)(a) me if you like.

Mr. Speaker, I'm excited to get up and speak after hearing some of the comments a bit earlier tonight with respect to this bill. Now, I'm going to say at the outset that we actually will be supporting this bill because this bill falls under the category of repealing stupid legislation.

9:00

We have seen the government's legislative record in the past number of years: Bill 19, Bill 36, Bill 50, bills 45 and 46, bills 9 and 10, all of which fall under the category of stupid legislation that needs to be repealed. Some of it has been. You know, bills 9, 10, this 10 – that's two 10s in a row – 28. We've seen plenty of examples. Now the government is repealing their former Bill 1. I think, Mr. Speaker, that it's unprecedented that the government's flagship piece of legislation should be repealed by the same Legislature that passed it in the first place. [interjection]

Well, you know, the hon. member talks about being under new management. I know that that's what they'd like us to believe, but there are exactly four guys that have changed, Mr. Speaker. Everybody else is exactly the same as they were under the old management. So it's not really new management. Picking up a couple of Wildrosers is not exactly the kind of thing that indicates a real change of direction for this government.

You know, we had a grave concern with the direction of the previous Bill 1 under the premiership of she who must not be named. It was like the government was reading stuff on Twitter: "Hey, that's a good idea. We're going to do that." All these new and innovative ideas were just stuff they were pulling off the Internet. Alabama did something, or Colorado did something: "You know, that sounds interesting. Let's make a new law." That's how it was.

Now, of course, we would hope that under the so-called new management this would be changed, but I think the recent events around Bill 10 show that the pattern is still in place. It's still a pattern. It's still happening. We felt that the social impact bonds idea was another fad from the States that some minister's assistant found while surfing the Internet, something that allows the government to privatize social problems and to in fact avoid responsibility for sound public programs that actually help people get out of poverty, which should be the objective of government programs. They added a profit motive to social services that I think most Albertans found very distasteful.

Since somebody, you know, actually quoted the Fraser Institute a little earlier, I think I can probably bring up the Parkland Institute. Ricardo Acuña of the Parkland Institute says that the reality, however, is that these social impact bond schemes will only serve to further pad the bank accounts of wealthy investors while turning the very concept of public services on its head and eliminating funding for a broad range of projects and activities. That's why we opposed it, and that's why we're happy to support this bill.

My mother always told me that it was really rude to say "I told you so," so I won't, but I do think that I do need to make some response to the Energy minister's comments with respect to that because I think he's partly right and, of course, partly wrong. He's certainly wrong about Norway. The debt-to-GDP ratio in Norway is more about 30 per cent. If you look at its net debt, which means, of course, including their fund, the net government debt as a percentage of GDP, according to the IMF, it's minus 165.5 per cent, which means that they have a massive – massive – asset benefit over whatever debt they may hold.

The fact of the matter is that Norway, because it charges people who are extracting its natural resources, that belong to the people of Norway just like the resources in this province belong to the people of Alberta – it charges a fair economic rent for those resources – is able to bring in considerably more money, particularly when the price of oil is high. Instead of spending that money on government programs and thus robbing from future generations, they have wisely and prudently invested it.

Now, what's been the result of this? The Minister of Energy wants to focus on some kind of debt-to-GDP bogeyman and misstated the actual situation. But for Norwegians the reality is that their standard of living has risen significantly, and the level and nature of government programs and funding for government programs has increased very substantially. Norway is now one of the richest countries in the world as a result of adopting a set of principles for the management of petroleum resources that were developed by Peter Lougheed, the first leader, the first Premier, of this Progressive Conservative dynasty.

If there's ever an indication that they've lost their way, it is this. Norway, having studied and adopted Peter Lougheed's principles for the development of the oil and gas industry, has moved to a place where they don't have to worry about drops in the price of oil like we do. They don't have to lay off nurses and teachers every time the price of oil goes down because they prudently invest. Their future generations don't have to worry about the current generation spending all of that nonrenewable resource revenue that belongs to all generations just on themselves, to fund their social programs. They can fund their social programs without having to steal from future generations.

It is a very important comparison, I think, that needs to be drawn. It cannot be dismissed just simply by saying: oh, gee, their debt-to-GDP ratio is too high. That doesn't make any sense at all. What's important is that they recognize that the resources, the oil and the gas in the North Sea, belong to the people, not to the oil and gas companies. They belong to the people. The oil and gas companies can provide a service by taking it out of the ground and refining it and getting it to market and selling it, but ultimately it does not belong to them, and they have to pay a premium to do that. They make good money doing that, but the bulk of the money, the bulk of the benefit, comes to the people who own the resource in Norway, unlike here.

Peter Lougheed had set a goal that 30 per cent of the total value of the natural resources should come to the people. Under Social Credit it was only 10 per cent. Guess what it is now. It's 9 per cent. So we're collecting less on the oil and gas resources that we as a people here in Alberta own than the Social Credit government was in the 1960s. Of course, now we're still in the situation where I guess about 30 per cent of our program spending is funded from nonrenewable royalty revenue, which is extremely volatile. That's why I say that we're stealing from future generations. We're using their resources to pay for our health care, and that's just not right.

That brings me to the second point. It's not a question, as the Energy minister says, that the NDP wants to raise taxes. One of the things that happened when natural gas royalties were so high in the early part of this century is that the government gave tax breaks to the people who needed them least. For example, they took the personal income tax and instituted a flat tax. They cut tax rates massively for the wealthiest in our society and, at the same time, brought in increases for middle-income earners.

When we say that we want to go back to progressive income tax, yes, we want everybody to pay their full share, and, yes, some people will certainly have a tax increase because they've been getting away with murder for years, but for the bulk of Albertans it actually would be neutral or even be a small decline in the taxes that they pay. That's just in the interest of fairness and equity.

9:10

In terms of corporate income tax a tax break was offered – and this is on profits of corporations. This is only on profitable corporations, on the money that they declare as a profit. The government has set a goal of reducing the corporate tax rate in Alberta from 15 and a half per cent down to 8 – in other words,

cutting corporate tax almost in half – and they're pretty much along the way. They're down to about 10 per cent, Mr. Speaker. So there has been a substantial reduction in revenue, and it increases the dependency on royalty revenue to pay for programs.

Now, I think we can do better as a province, Mr. Speaker. When the price of oil goes down, we shouldn't have to be rushing for the emergency exits. We shouldn't have to be talking about cutting program spending, you know, laying off teachers and nurses, cutting all kinds of important programs, that were important the day before but suddenly are expendable because we're not managing our economy and our finances as a province properly. I think when the public as a whole realizes how unnecessary and stupid it is to cut your program spending based on the price of oil in a given month or in a given year, then this government has got some real answering that it's going to have to do to the people of Alberta for the squandering of our resources and for the mismanagement of the economy.

It's not good enough to say: "Oil prices are down, and all bets are off. We're going to break our campaign promises. We're going to cut program spending, cut health care, cut education." I don't think the public buys that anymore. Why didn't you fix this? Why didn't you fix it so that you were protected from changes in oil prices? Lord knows, we all know that the price of oil goes up and down. If the government doesn't know that by now, there's something really, really seriously wrong.

Mr. Speaker, we can do better as a province. I think Albertans need a government that actually thinks like an owner and puts the people in the province ahead of their insiders and their friends and their corporate donors. I think the province of Alberta needs a new government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have a couple of questions for the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Keeping in mind that when we go to the Norway comparison, we're part of a federal system where this province transfers net payments out every year of \$10 billion to \$20 billion, approximately. Norway has amongst the highest corporate and personal income taxes in the world. They have a 1 per cent asset tax, so if your house is paid for and you've got some RRSPs – say you've got a million dollar net worth; you write a cheque to the government every year for \$10,000. They have a 25 per cent sales tax, five times what we pay here in Alberta. My question is: which of these huge increases in taxes to corporations and especially to individuals, especially the 25 per cent sales tax, does the member suggest that we force on Albertans?

Mr. Mason: Well, none of the above, Mr. Speaker. What I suggest is that we set an appropriate royalty level, as set out by Peter Lougheed. Peter Lougheed didn't talk about a 25 per cent sales tax. He didn't talk about these massive taxes that the hon. member is talking about, and I'm not talking about them either. I'm talking about being sensible, acting like owners, and making sure that we get full value for the resources that we allow those companies to take out of the ground on our behalf, on behalf of the people of this province.

Now, the tax question is another matter. Certainly, the two tax cuts that were brought in under Ralph Klein at the time that natural gas prices were sky-high and we were bringing in \$8 billion in natural gas royalties in a single year need to be reconsidered. Getting rid of the flat tax would be a really good

start. That doesn't mean that you want to bring in a sales tax. We're opposed to a sales tax. You know, he's posing a false choice, Mr. Speaker. He's saying that you can't talk about what Norway does with its royalties and how it saves its money without adopting all of their other programs and all the other tax structures, and that's just absolutely not true. It's simply not true.

A sensible approach to our natural resources and the royalties that we can get from them and a sensible approach to savings is very important for this province, and the government can't just sort of say: you know, you can do what we're doing, or you can do something else that's completely alien. That's not how this debate is going to go, and I would encourage the hon. member to try and separate some of these issues. We may like some things about the American justice system, for example, but that doesn't mean we want to adopt their criminal justice system completely. We may like some things about the Americans' health care system, but that doesn't mean we're going to adopt everything about it. I think we can raise the intellectual level of the debate here a little bit and stop posing false choices.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

There's still some time left under 29(2)(a).

Hon. members, if I could ask you just to keep the side conversations down to a murmur, please. Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief. I will have a little historical overview about the heritage trust fund. On July 3, 2014, the former Finance minister Ted Morton claimed that the Alberta government took in \$216 billion in nonrenewable resource revenue between 1977 and 2013, the 36-year period in which the Alberta heritage trust fund has existed. Of that less than 6 per cent has been saved. The heritage trust fund was established in 1976 with an initial \$1.5 billion deposit from royalties and another \$600 million from general revenues. Between 1976 and 1982 the province saved 30 per cent of the resource revenues, and the heritage trust fund grew to be \$12 billion. During this initial period it was estimated that the fund could top \$50 billion by the year 2000 if we had been saving that 30 per cent in the heritage trust fund.

However, by 1982 Alberta had already ratcheted down the percentage of resource revenue saved to 15 per cent, and by 1987 the province stopped making deposits entirely. Alberta did not make a single deposit to the heritage trust fund between 1987 and 2005. Through the nineties our yearly income from our initial investment was spent, and over that time Alberta lost \$7 billion to inflation alone. The Fraser Institute noted on March 4, 2013, in a report that between 1977 and 2011 the heritage fund earned \$31.3 billion on its assets, but the Alberta government withdrew \$29.6 billion. The report also says that as of December 31, 2012, the heritage fund was valued at \$16.4 billion, not much more than its \$12.7 billion value in 1987, when the province stopped making deposits linked to resource revenues.

The Calgary Chamber of Commerce calculated in 2011 that had Alberta continued to save 30 per cent of resource revenues in the heritage trust fund, it would now be worth over \$128 billion, Mr. Speaker. Had we been saving, by the year 2012 we could have been sitting on a nest egg with \$128 billion. You know, I think the income from \$128 billion alone could have generated enough income to keep us off the roller coaster ride of oil prices.

9:20

By contrast – here comes Norway again – Norway's oil fund's formal name is the government pension fund global. It was worth

\$840 billion as of the end 2013. It grew by \$200 billion in 2013 alone, Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that the country only started saving resource revenues in 1996. Though use of the fund is limited to 4 per cent, the amount of money that figure represents is growing. The oil fund has quadrupled in size since 2005 and will grow by 15 per cent by the year 2020. That's the government estimate there.

So that's a little bit about the history of the heritage trust fund. Mr. Lougheed was the visionary leader who established the heritage trust fund, and Norway and Alaska permanent funds were established way after Mr. Lougheed established it. So they took a page out of his book, and look where they are now and where we are now.

In 2014 the Alberta Liberal caucus opposed the Savings Management Act when it was debated and passed. The Savings Management Act was very vague about who would be eligible to receive funding through the Alberta future fund and the two endowment accounts. This lack of clarity could lead to monies going to private companies who really shouldn't be funded through such means. In the case of the Alberta future fund there was also the potential that it could be used as a form of slush fund to reward loyal corporations or individuals.

Our caucus was also critical of the fact that social innovation endowment was at least already intended to pave the way for the use of social impact bonds in Alberta. Budget 2014 revealed that Alberta is on track to be \$21.6 billion in debt by 2016-17. Arguably, the government should not be creating new endowment funds as long as it's in debt and that debt continues to grow.

These are the reasons, Mr. Speaker, that we are going to support this bill, because it's going to repeal all those endowment funds, which were created under the former Premier's flag. So I will be supporting the bill, but those were the concerns.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I just need to quickly provide a point of clarification. I said that we had no debt. We do, obviously of course, have debt. We have no net debt, Mr. Speaker. I looked it up. Norway's net debt right now, their actual debt, is \$115 billion. Obviously, they've built their debt to a point where their operational budget can't service that debt, so they're faced with a choice of raising taxes to cover their debt. They have no other choice, which is why they have, as the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona pointed out, the impressive levels of taxation they have given the fact that they actually are in the no net position. They can't service their debt from their operational budget.

So I've got to ask the hon. member a question. Given the conversation today – for example, the NDs talked about: let's not cut any postsecondary education spending. We've talked about all this, levels of service. Even the Wildrose tonight said that we could have more services, Mr. Speaker. So how would the hon. member think that we should fund ourselves going forward? Should we increase the level of taxation in order to greatly increase the heritage savings trust fund and still provide services to Albertans? He's talking about a very, very impressive increase in the level of taxation. Would he support that, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we are on record to have the progressive tax, and if we bring in the progressive tax, we should adopt Saskatchewan's fiscal model, and I think they are the

second lowest tax jurisdiction in the country. I think that will fix lots of our problems.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Mason: Thank you. It's Calgary-McCall, right?

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Mason: I'd like to just provide a little comment for the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall and just to indicate with respect to the comments made by the Energy minister that in fact Norway has – I'm looking at the debt clock. Now, this is the most right-wing economic website you'll ever find. You know, it's got all kind of ads for how you can get rid of Obama and all kinds of stuff, and they have it for every country, but they have a disclaimer underneath it for Norway saying that the net assets of Norway exceed their debt – the government assets exceed the debt – so they're in a positive position. I just wonder what the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall thinks about that.

Mr. Kang: Well, I think that had we kept our taxes where they were – like you said, we'd adopted a flat tax and the corporate tax cut, right? – I think we could have been in a better fiscal position, too. As long as there's no net debt, I think anybody will be in a better fiscal situation. I think Norway is still better than us. I think we should bring in a progressive tax. I think we should be saving for our future generations. We shouldn't be spending these royalties as fast as they come out of the ground, and we shouldn't be robbing our future generations from the kind of living standards that we have. They deserve a better living standard than what we have today. We have to fix our fiscal regime to save some for the future generations.

With the way oil prices are, what if they are down to 30 bucks a barrel? What are we going to do? How are we going to have the predictable, sustainable funding for even our operating budget, for our hospitals, for our teachers, for the schools? How are we going to build new roads? How are we going to build new hospitals? If we don't save anything, the money has to come from somewhere. We have to raise the taxes, or we have to borrow. What options do we have? We're still the lowest tax jurisdiction in the country, and I think that there should be fair taxation system in place. We should all be paying our fair share, and we are talking about paying the fair share.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Other speakers on the bill? The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to stand and rise and engage in this debate on Bill 11, Savings Management Repeal Act. I always do enjoy it, especially when the other side actually does stand up and engage. Normally, we're used to just the heckling.

Mr. Mason: Which is better than snoring.

Mr. Wilson: It's true. That is better than the snoring, Member.

Here we are, Bill 11, and the thing that I love the most about this government, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that they are so willing to change. It reminds me, again, of another Winston Churchill quote. "To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often." Well, I tell you, these guys are certainly striving for perfection, falling quite short but striving for perfection. I think that if they understood my

sarcasm at all, they may wish to stop pounding on their desks. I don't think it's the kind of change that they should be all that proud of. In fact, I would suggest that there is one member across the aisle who has the ability to look anyone in the eyes and say that they believe wholeheartedly and have stood on their convictions around Bill 11, and, Mr. Speaker, that is the Member for Calgary-Varsity. She did what was right. She saw this Bill 1 come across last spring, and she saw it for what it was. She left, and she sat as an independent.

An Hon. Member: Was that why?

Mr. Wilson: That was one of the reasons why.

Here's what we're talking about, Mr. Speaker. We now see a PC caucus that's going to stand and defend the brilliance that they have around bringing forward Bill 11, which is simply repealing Bill 1, that they all stood and supported vehemently in the spring. It's ludicrous. It's kind of a phenomenon to watch. You know, we saw it during the summer, when our new Premier ran against this government's record. He ran hard. He ran hard, and he's still running.

9:30

It seems to me that the talk around the heritage savings trust fund is an important one to have. The case that my hon. colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat laid out here was a hypothetical scenario. I'll give you another example of a hypothetical scenario. Let's just say that, hypothetically, the previous Premier, Premier Redford, was never your leader. Think about all the hypothetical scenarios you've run in your head over the past number of years had that not happened. Well, here's the hypothetical scenario that we are running on the heritage savings trust fund. It's pretty simple if you follow along. Peter Lougheed started the investment in 1976. It was a great idea. Let's save some money that we're making off of our resource revenue.

I remember my parents, when I was younger, Mr. Speaker, telling me how much pride they had in the fact that they were saving money for future generations and using that fund to set up a province that was going to prosper long into the future. It was a brilliant vision. The problem is that this government, when times got tough, continued to skim the interest off of the fund, and year after year after year what we've seen is this fund not actually grow.

Now, there may be a case to be made that that money at the time was necessary to be used and spent, but that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about the hypothetical scenario that that original investment had just simply been left in the fund as, for example, a retirement fund. This government often likes to compare the massive levels of debt it's taking on to a home mortgage. Well, let's talk about this in, you know, terms that maybe they'll understand. Let's think about it as though it's an RRSP, where you put money in and you allow the magic of compound interest to do its work, and over almost 40 years, 38 years later, that fund from its original investment would now be worth roughly \$200 billion. That is simple compound interest. It's the same thing that we base our retirement plans on, Mr. Speaker.

When we talk about that, we say: let's, hypothetically, understand that from 1976 to 2013 we've got roughly \$200 billion. We know that last year Leo de Bever and AIMCo were able to get a 16 per cent return on our heritage savings trust fund. That's pretty good money, and it's not too difficult to do the math to figure out what the return on that is. As the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat said, in a hypothetical world if you had \$200 billion and you received 16 per cent interest in one year, \$32 billion. That's not bad.

Now, again, what we're trying to discuss here is how great it would be to have that cushion right now as a province. We know that oil and gas go up and down. We understand that. Everyone gets it. It's part of living in this province. We've seen it time and time and time again. What we don't necessarily understand, Mr. Speaker, is the importance of having a plan that ensures that when you're spending money and you're spending taxpayers' dollars, you're doing it in a responsible way.

The Minister of Energy earlier tonight suggested that for the last four or five years their budgets have been spending less than the rate of population plus inflation. Now, I do not have the numbers in front of me, Mr. Speaker. I would be interested to see that. I'm not sure if he's referring simply to operational spending or if he's referring to the overall budget, but we have had some very, very, very high budgets in this province over the last number of years.

If the hon. Minister of Energy, who was first elected in 2004, will recall, there was also a savings fund called the sustainability fund in place when he got here. Ten years later that's gone, and we're now \$11 billion in debt. Now, I'm not saying that it's simply his fault. It's obviously not. I'm saying that there is a class of government here. They can call it "under new management" all they want, but at the end of the day these are the same people that had that money in their savings, and it's the same people who find themselves in debt.

When he goes and compares what other members in this House are suggesting around Norway, that they have \$150 billion of debt and their operational revenues can't actually even service that debt cost, well, that's the exact argument that we give on an almost daily basis about why we shouldn't be going into debt in an irresponsible fashion, because the debt-servicing costs are upwards of what is going to be a billion dollars out of our pocket, out of our own tax dollars right here in this province, by 2016.

This province isn't going to stop growing any time, Mr. Speaker, so what does that mean? Does that mean that we're \$20 billion in debt by 2016, and then it's going to be okay to be \$40 billion in debt by 2020? And then it's: "We're going to keep growing. We need some more hospitals. We need more roads. We need more schools." We understand all of these things. I guess it'll be okay if we're \$60 billion in debt by 2024. It's just like a mortgage, right?

What we're talking about here: I'm happy to engage further. The Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill is glaring at me. I think it's important to reflect on what we can do now. We know where we're at, Mr. Speaker. We know that the heritage savings trust fund is worth roughly as much today as it was in 1976. We have an opportunity. It's going to be tough. We recognize that with the price of oil, there are going to be some very tough decisions to make. And I fully respect that the toughest thing that a government has to do is to make decisions and, you know, decide how they're going to spend scarce resources and how they're going to allocate those dollars. That is not going to be an easy task. I do not envy them. But it's what they asked for. They went around and knocked on every door in this province and asked for this opportunity, as did we. The people chose them. We're okay with that. That is now their task. That is what they have to do.

At the end of the day what we would like to be able to do, Mr. Speaker, is to say to the government: "Now that we're back in this really tight time, let's recognize the error of our past, that under Premier Stelmach we started spending at rates that were much higher than population and inflation. Let's use that knowledge to now recognize that we have to get back to that." When we do and we get to the point where we can start running surpluses again, it's

time to seriously start reinvesting in that heritage savings trust fund.

We over here have been talking about 50 per cent of surplus dollars going directly into that. That's a manageable plan. That's surplus dollars. Now, we're starting a little bit behind the eight ball here, but that's okay. We've got, hopefully, some time. All that we're saying in these benches over here, Mr. Speaker, is that we need to find an alternative way of offsetting our oil and gas revenues in this province, and the way that we believe we can do that is by building that fund so that the interest generated from it weans us off our reliance on oil and gas. It's that simple.

Bill 11 is a good step in that direction. We believe that it was a mistake to set up those slush funds in the first place. We're happy to see the government come around and see the light.

With that, I'll take my chair. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to make a comment, and that is about the argument that the Member for Calgary-Shaw has made, and the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, as to the fact that we could have had all these billions – \$20 billion, \$200 billion, or whatever it is – if we only had kept all of the interest in the heritage savings fund.

Well, that's a specious and a fallacious approach to financial management, and the reason is because, number one, this government has had programs which are without parallel in any province in the country. Take seniors' programs, for example. We have the best seniors' programs in the country. We have a health care system that's the envy of many places around the world. If you're going to have a stroke or a heart attack, I tell you, have it in Edmonton or Calgary because you're going to be better treated there than in almost any place in the world. We've got an education system that is fantastic and that performs consistently amongst the best in the world. We have infrastructure that we've built with the savings after inflation-proofing, that we've built with the interest in the heritage savings. We've got schools, and we've got hospitals. We've got roads, we've got bridges, and we've got infrastructure that we would not have been able to build if we had just plowed it into some savings account.

We've got low taxes. Let's talk about the low tax regime that we have here in the province of Alberta. We wouldn't have had that low tax regime if we just piled all that money away. No, we wouldn't have it. No. Because you know what? That subsidized the programs and the infrastructure that we have. And the low taxes: guess what low taxes have done? They have caused people, businesses to come to this province because of the Alberta advantage. [interjections] Sorry?

9:40

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair, hon. member.

Dr. Brown: They've caused businesses to come to this province, they've caused people to come to this province in unparalleled numbers, greater than in any other province in the country and better than in any other regime in North America. In fact, last year it was over 100,000 people that came. They voted with their feet for what we do in the province of Alberta, and it's not to stick money in a sock or put it under the mattress but to use it for the benefit of Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Shaw to respond.

Mr. Wilson: Well, I didn't quite get a question in there, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the feedback, and it's very difficult to disagree with the fact that what we have in Alberta is a fantastic province. There's no question. We have a lot of things to be proud of here. We do. It's not just simply because of the PC government, though. Some would argue that it's despite them.

I'll start with health care. We spend more per capita on our health care system than many of the other provinces across the country do, and we all know that our health care system, once you're in it, is fantastic. Absolutely. There's no question. We get some of the best front-line service you can get in this country. The hon. member is correct. The problem is the administration of our health care system. The costs in Alberta per capita are much higher than in other provinces, and it doesn't translate into better service as a whole.

We'll talk about the education system. Sure, we've got a good education system. Again, no question. Standards are slipping. We're not in a perfect scenario. Mr. Speaker, our PATs just came back, and our scores are declining.

We're talking also about seniors. [interjection] I love the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I would just ask, Mr. Speaker, just one time that he have the capacity to have the courage to stand in this House and talk about the convictions that he clearly doesn't actually have. You just sit there and you heckle and you heckle and you heckle.

Mr. Dorward: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you have a citation for this point of order?

Mr. Dorward: Yes. It's Standing Order 23(h), "Makes allegations against another Member," that I sit here and heckle and heckle and heckle. I don't think I heckle, heckle, heckle.

Mr. Wilson: To respond to the point of order, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, please.

Mr. Wilson: I believe that truth is the ultimate defence, and I don't believe that there's a single member in this House who would not agree that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has a bit of a habit of heckling from his chair. I'll allow you to make your ruling, but an allegation, Mr. Speaker, would be something that, according to the next citation under Standing Order 23, would probably also require it to be false.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, did you want to get in on this?

Hon. members, I think we seem to be looking for a clarification here, and I think the point has been sufficiently clarified between the two members.

If I don't hear otherwise, I'll invite the Member for Calgary-Shaw to continue for another 37 seconds under this 29(2)(a) if you so desire.

Debate Continued

Mr. Wilson: I will finish my 37 seconds. I appreciate the opportunity to address this House.

What I will say is that I agree with a lot of what the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill has suggested. I agree that everyone in

this House – it doesn't matter which party you're from or whether you're sitting as an independent in this House – wants to make this province the best it possibly can be. We just may have different ideas and different views about how it is that we're going to get there. But what you cannot question and what no member in this House should be able to question is the outcome that every one of us here is looking to achieve, and that outcome is the best possible Alberta that we can have.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Are there other speakers to the bill at this point?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing none, the question has been called.

I'll offer to someone on behalf of the Minister of Treasury Board to close debate.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Mr. Speaker, I move that we close debate, please.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour and the progress made tonight and the exhausting debate we've had to this point, I would like to move that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:46 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, December 9, 2014

Issue 14a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)

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Progressive Conservative: 63 Wildrose: 14 Alberta Liberal: 5 New Democrat: 4 Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 9, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Dear God and Holy Creator, help us to remember that as elected members of this Assembly, we are but servants gathered here to represent a diversity of people. May the common thoughts that unite us shine ever much brighter than those that divide us. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, the legislative secretary of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the delegation from the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature: Ms Ndlangisa-Makaula, Mr. Sokujika, Mr. Lwane, Mr. Gqobana, Mr. Botha, Dr. Mbanga, Mr. Basson, and Mr. Langbooi. The delegation is visiting to learn more about our province's best practices in community planning, public service, and sustainability. Alberta is a province with strong international ties, and this includes our long-standing relationship with Eastern Cape and South Africa, Alberta's largest sub-Saharan trading partner. Like Alberta, South Africa is defined by diversity that includes a wide range of cultures and languages, and through our similarities there is a lot we can learn from each other. It is a great pleasure to welcome the delegation on their official visit to our province. We look forward to exchanging expertise and to the great achievements future collaboration will bring. The delegation is seated in your gallery, and I would now ask that our honoured guests please rise and receive the best wishes along with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: We usually begin with school groups, so let's start with Edmonton-Calder and go on to the Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and introduce six students and a teacher from Inner City High School in Edmonton-Calder. Inner City High School is on 101st Street and is a remarkable institution. I'm very happy to see the guests here today. I hope they can rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services, followed by Sherwood Park.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly some constituents from Edmonton-Glenora. I'd ask that they rise when I say their name, please: Ms Natasha Foran, Ms Linda Willis, Mrs. Cindy Paziuk, Mr. Kevin Inkster, Ms Margaret Ingibergsson, Ms Lisa Weber, Ms Brittney Ann Gray, Mrs. Beryl

Keller, Ms Sonya Witzman, and Mr. Mark Woodhouse. Welcome. I'd ask all hon. members to welcome them to the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a group of students from the constituency of Sherwood Park and New Horizons School. They're accompanied by their teacher, Phaidra Ruck. I had the pleasure of visiting with these students about a month ago, and we had our own version of question period. We had a great time. If we could all join in and show them the warm welcome of the Assembly. Thanks for being here.

The Speaker: Thank you to those hon. members for keeping their introductions relatively brief. Let's see if we can keep that trend going.

The Minister of Education, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly three individuals visiting today from Let's Talk Science, an award-winning national charitable organization that designs and delivers learning programs and services to engage children, youth, and educators in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Founded in 1993, Let's Talk Science has engaged with more than 2.6 million children, youth, and educators across Canada. I met with this group earlier today, and we chatted about all of the amazing things the organization is doing for Albertan and Canadian students. We look forward to seeing them tonight, along with colleagues from the Legislature, at their reception. I'd like my guests, who are seated in the members' gallery, to please rise as I say their name: Dr. Bonnie Schmidt, president and founder; Sara Steers, director, external relations; and Michael Gingras, corporate account manager for Amgen Canada. Let's give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through to all members of the Assembly my guests, Anand Sharma and Gregory Clark. My guests are both members of the Canadian Condominium Institute northern Alberta chapter, or CCI. Anand has been elected as president of CCI north Alberta for three years in a row and is also a senior property manager for CS Management. Gregory Clark is a board member of CCI, since 2008, and is currently first vice-president. Both Anand and Gregory are here today to ask the government to put Bill 9 on hold until further consultation has taken place. CCI feels strongly that this bill falls short on protecting condominium owners. I would ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my three guests, who are all part of my Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood constituency team. Susan Petrina manages the office. She's an active member of the community and has called Highlands home for 10 years, during which, among many other things, she served two terms as president of the Highlands Community League. Claire Edwards is my caseworker.

She's a former Assembly page and a third-year honours political science student, who has actively engaged in many youth organizations, including serving as chair of the City of Edmonton Youth Council. Marissa Majek is our placement student from the Grant MacEwan University social work program. I would ask Susan, Claire, and Marissa to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, I understand that your guests are not here yet, so we will move on to Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two introductions. Firstly, I am delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two passionate members of ACCD, the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities. They are Bev Matthiessen and Jackie Beaton. ACCD happens to be in Edmonton-Meadowlark. There are many reasons that persons with disabilities run into problems while visiting their local physicians' offices, so Bev and Jackie have meticulously developed drawings for optimum space use in examination rooms, change rooms, and entrances to medical clinics in order to accommodate people with all kinds of disabilities. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction is Helen McMenamin, a hard-working Albertan from southern Alberta. In fact, she almost became an MLA in one of the ridings in southern Alberta for the Liberals. I welcome Helen to the Legislative Assembly. Thank you, Helen.

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

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a board member from the Northern Alberta Development Council, Mr. Andre Harpe. He has been a board member since 2009. He's in our members' gallery today. I'll ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

1:40 Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have two minutes each for our statements. Let us begin with Lethbridge-West, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Antelope Hill Provincial Park

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the act of a great and generous Albertan. Gottlob Schmidt, a retired farmer near Hanna, gifted his homestead of 380 hectares to the people of Alberta. This is a most generous offer, and I am challenged to adequately express in words the appreciation of this wonderful and unselfish act. Mr. Schmidt donated his land to the people of Alberta for their use and enjoyment. The land is home to a healthy ecosystem that supports rare native grasslands and unique wildlife species. It is an unbroken landscape of majestic rolling hills and wetlands stretching across a portion of the east-central prairie region.

As per his wish the land, recently established as Antelope Hill provincial park, will be managed to support conservation, preservation, and low-impact recreation use such as hiking. Mr.

Speaker, hunting, off-highway vehicle use, and overnight camping will not be permitted within the park. It is the desire of Mr. Schmidt that the integrity of this land be maintained for future generations. Alberta will honour his request. The new park will open to Albertans after Schmidt has departed his homestead.

When the government announced the land donation last week, social media lit up with hundreds of messages of appreciation towards Mr. Schmidt. His donation has been called an incredible stand-up gesture; a legacy to our children, plants, and animals; and generous and forward thinking. Praise of Mr. Schmidt included heart of gold; a sweet, beautiful man; and inspiring. The thank you messages have been many, and it's evident Mr. Schmidt has touched the hearts of Albertans.

I can assure all Albertans that the province will be responsible stewards of his legacy contribution. This land donation not only advances Alberta's plan for parks by acquiring new lands for the purpose of conservation; it aligns directly with our government's mandate.

On behalf of our government I thank Mr. Gottlob Schmidt for his generous donation.

Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Mr. Barnes: Picture this: a trust fund that was on this very day at the \$200 billion mark. You know, that was a real possibility for the Alberta heritage savings trust fund when the act was given royal assent in 1976. It's now 2014, and what do we have to show for the tremendous natural resources this province has developed? Just \$17.4 billion, less than this fund was worth in the '70s. Albertans have been deprived of a trust that would ensure their prosperity if the price of oil dropped 40 per cent in just a few weeks. The resource revenues that were meant to grow this fund combined with annual compound interest on Alberta's capital were to be a lifeline for vital public services and future generations. This possible figure, \$200 billion, was attainable with just the initial deposit and could now have been reached if interest on the fund was just left alone and allowed to accumulate.

However, what we have seen is a government so fiscally irresponsible that it's put all this interest in with general revenues and used this money as part of general spending. The impacts of this are huge. This government has created so much generational debt that multiple generations will be required to pay back this current administration's spending. Right now we are approximately \$11 billion in debt. This will reach \$19 billion by 2016-17, Mr. Speaker, more debt than savings. If unchecked, this will inevitably mean more taxes and reduced services, something this government has already discussed. Either way we are asking future generations to accept less. The current status of this fund showcases one of the greatest examples of wealth squandering in Canadian history.

The Wildrose has a plan that will take 50 per cent of all future surpluses and save this asset for Alberta's future, and we would not raid this account for operational spending. Mr. Speaker, we have a plan to rebuild this fund and deliver good government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Great Kids Awards

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Leadership is essential to building our province, and when we consider leaders, we typically think of adults. However, we should also pay mind to Alberta's young people. Young Albertans deserve to be recognized for

doing great things every day at home, at school, and in their communities, and that's why I'm pleased to remind Albertans that they still have a few hours to get their nominations in for the Great Kids awards. In May 2015 for the 15th year the province will present the Great Kids award to 16 children and youth for their outstanding determination, generosity, and compassion. Albertans between the ages of five and 18 can be nominated for selflessness, kindness, and courage.

For examples we need look no further than last year's recipients. One seven-year-old created a surprise package company, leaving surprise gifts on the doorsteps of those facing hardships. This included delivering homemade cards to three children who had lost their mother to breast cancer.

An eight-year-old recipient had more than 50 radiation treatments for eye cancer, and despite this she handed out lemonade to more than 2,000 volunteers during the flooding in southern Alberta.

The recipients and nominees are very well rounded, showing leadership in areas such as sports, volunteering, and the classroom. The awards are examples of how communities come together and celebrate the efforts of our young people. As a government we want to continue recognizing more young Albertans so we can share their inspiring stories.

Mr. Speaker, today I encourage all Albertans to nominate a child or youth for positively impacting our communities or the lives of Albertans. Albertans can find more information at www.greatkids.alberta.ca and nominate a young person. Now, the deadline is today, December 9, at midnight. For those of you who do best under deadline pressures, there's still time to get those nominations in, so please do it. Nominate a great kid today.

Rural Health Care

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, in the past week there's been a lot of talk about hospitals in Alberta. Some are saying that we should close rural hospitals. Earlier this fall our Premier and Health minister asked me to examine rural health care along with an outstanding group of dedicated health care professionals and advocates, and our diagnosis was quite different.

Just like folks in cities, folks in rural Alberta get sick. They get hurt, they have babies, they contract infections, they get cancer, they suffer from mental illness, their organs fail, and at some point their earthly journey ends and they die. It's called being human. But shutting down facilities and forcing more rural Albertans to drive to big-city hospitals to access basic health services is not human. It's inhumane. And, no, our hospitals aren't as full as the ones in the big cities, but isn't the point to keep people healthy and out of the hospital? In my practice a pen full of sick feedlot calves or a kennel full of sick dogs had me asking: what am I doing wrong?

Rural Albertans have told us that their medical facilities have tremendous untapped potential and that they could take the strain off urban facilities. They're not talking about heart transplants or brain surgery. They understand that those have to be done at urban tertiary care centres. They're talking about everyday stuff and stuff that goes beyond the every day. They've told us about advanced orthopaedic rehabilitation that takes place in Daysland. They've told us about a clinic that's located in a repurposed space in a hospital, that has driven ER visits way down by stressing prevention. Where? In Vulcan. That's what they mean when they say: live long and prosper. Mr. Speaker, ambulance workers do patient rounds alongside the staff at a long-term care centre; they perform treatments and keep their skills sharp. It's all happening in Galahad, population 119.

Mr. Speaker, we know that rural health care faces challenges, but closing rural hospitals is not the answer. The ingenuity of rural caregivers and community leaders is.

The Speaker: Thank you.

We have time for one more. Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Travel Insurance

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The holiday season is fast approaching, and many Albertans will be travelling outside the province to visit family and friends in other countries or to simply get some much-needed hot weather and relaxation. We want Albertans to enjoy their holidays and not find themselves in a poor financial situation because of inadequate travel health insurance.

We've all heard stories of people who've travelled outside of Alberta and suddenly fallen ill. When these Albertans, who are accustomed to our universal health care system, try to access life-saving services, they suddenly learn that they must pay out of pocket to receive care, and these fees can be astronomical. The Alberta health care insurance plan may provide only partial reimbursement for some health care services provided outside of Canada. That is why it's important for all Albertans to not only get travel insurance but ensure that they understand exactly what services are covered.

Our priority is to provide Albertans with high-quality care inside our province, but we cannot cover all medical costs incurred outside the country. Before leaving the country, Albertans should make sure they understand what the Alberta health care insurance plan covers outside of Alberta and what it doesn't, purchase travel insurance and fully understand the coverage, and pack their personal health care card, travel insurance documents, and the emergency contact number for their travel insurance.

I encourage all Albertans to purchase travel medical insurance before they travel out of our country. We don't want Albertans to have their holiday ruined by having to pay out of pocket for unexpected health issues and very expensive medical services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope everybody enjoys their holidays.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: We are reminded that we each have 35 seconds. Let's start with the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Long-term Care Beds

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Health minister, the Seniors minister, and AHS were in front of the Public Accounts Committee today. Albertans know that seniors' care in Alberta is a mess, but what we heard today was truly eye-popping. In the face of all of the evidence that this province has a serious shortage of long-term care nursing beds, an AHS executive actually said that we have an overcapacity of long-term care nursing beds. Can anyone over there tell us how Alberta Health Services could get it so wrong?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I think the individual was referring to different parts of the province that might have a few too many beds. Long-term care beds can be used by anyone, so having too many long-term care beds is good because we can move people up and down in the service level. So I think it's a positive thing, even though I believe the question was a bit misunderstood.

Ms Smith: That's a very generous interpretation, Mr. Speaker.

It seems what is actually happening is that AHS is preparing to win the war on long-term care bed shortages by changing the definition and then declaring victory. AHS wants to declare that patients who require long-term nursing care beds don't actually need it and then move them into lower level, supportive living beds. This bureaucratic dodge will actually make the system worse. Will the Health minister commit to using actual medical need to evaluate who requires long-term nursing care?

Mr. Mandel: I thank the hon. member for the question. Obviously, there is a process under which we look at and review through professionals the calibre of care individuals need. In this government and in AHS that's the foundation. We'll make sure that people get the right kind of care in the right kind of facility, and we will continue to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Smith: Oh, Mr. Speaker, if only that were so. Anyone with any common sense knows that if you move patients who need long-term care into supportive living care, they will just end up in our already overcrowded emergency wards and in our acute-care beds in our hospitals, ambulance times will suffer, patients will get lesser care, and since acute-care beds cost so much more than long-term care nursing beds, the taxpayer will be hurt, too. Will the minister commit to killing this bad idea right here, right now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this year the Premier and I put forward a program of trying to create more long-term care beds for those people living in acute care. We'd now like to report that we have 160, one-third of the beds that we promised for this period of time, already open and operational. So we're quite pleased with that. At the same time, we will ensure that every Albertan who needs long-term care or who needs care will be in the right kind of facility they need to be in. We're passionate about that, just like I know the hon. member is.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions. The hon. leader.

Seniors' Advocate

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our health care system is continuing to let Alberta seniors down, but we will always fight to see that they get the services and the protection that they deserve. One of the ways we have suggested that the government could improve services for seniors is to have an independent Seniors' Advocate who would be able to access government and AHS files and stand up for seniors. Now, the old management didn't want an independent Seniors' Advocate, but will the new management show that they are different by creating a truly independent Seniors' Advocate?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me just say, firstly, that the matters that are being raised by the hon. member are important to the government, important to the minister who has spoken, and they're very important to me as the Premier. I've lived through these circumstances in my own life with my own parents for the last 15 years of my life. It is difficult for all Albertans.

I don't think the answer is more bureaucracy. I don't think the answer is that we have advocates. I think the answer is to get the job done. That's why we have a Seniors minister who can speak to the specifics. That's why we're focused on making sure that we have the continuing care beds that we need for the people who are important to us, our parents.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since we already have a Seniors' Advocate, we are just asking that they be allowed to do their job more effectively.

Here's what the Auditor General has said about the Seniors' Advocate. "The seniors advocate does not have a mandate to compel facilities or AHS to take action or provide detailed information related to concerns raised by residents." Mr. Speaker, if an advocate cannot advocate or shine the light on concerns, the office is essentially useless. Why won't the government create an actual, real, independent, and meaningful Seniors' Advocate that can shine the light on problems and help improve the system?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we want a Seniors' Advocate that can be as efficient as possible, just like every department within government and every role within government. That's why it was established here this last year. If there are ways that we can look to make that more efficient and the Seniors' Advocate can serve seniors across the province and can serve Albertans, then we're open to looking at those. The primary role that that advocate plays now is one of navigation to help seniors and their families as they need to navigate the system and get questions answered.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I will quote the minister on that, too, because this is exactly what the Auditor General said as well. He said that the role of the Seniors' Advocate is "primarily to educate residents and their families and help them navigate through the system." What we have here seems to be more of a seniors' tour guide than an advocate. If the system is broken and the government won't do anything to fix it, how does navigating through a broken system actually help our seniors?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think that's hardly a fair characterization. We've got incredible people across this province and incredible providers from faith-based and nonprofits to even some of the privates that do incredible work with our seniors. To characterize the work that they're doing as broken is, I think, an incredible insult. We want to continue to try and do a better job of everything, but the Seniors' Advocate does have the authority to call for investigations and do a lot of very good work. If we can build on that, if we can make that more effective, we're more than game to do that, and we'll look to do that in the new year.

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

Long-term and Continuing Care Standards

Mrs. Forsyth: A year and a half ago this government promised change for seniors in care. On March 5, 2013, the former Minister of Health announced that continuing care residents will receive a minimum of two baths a week effective immediately. The minister said: "It is an issue of dignity." This morning at Public Accounts we learned that this dignity is still being denied to Alberta seniors. Officials admitted that a number of seniors in care were still not even being offered two baths a week. Can the minister explain why a year and a half after the government promised seniors their dignity, they're still not getting it?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we indicated this morning, well over 80 per cent of the facilities are compliant with the two-baths option, and by the end of the year we will have 100 per cent compliance. Two baths a week is an option if appropriate.

We have to look at what is appropriate for the care. The only rule is: whatever is appropriate based on the care plan. The care plan as outlined by the Auditor General was the one that determines how we deal with the individual. So that's how we do it.

Mrs. Forsyth: Minister, we're talking about hundreds of seniors that still aren't getting baths. Come on, please.

Minister, this is about dignity. Your government is failing to enforce the standards that you yourself have set for the most vulnerable people in our province. A year and a half ago we were told that seniors could access two baths per week immediately, in fact. The Minister of Seniors at the time said: "I want to stress that two baths is a minimum." If a resident requires more, "they will receive more." It turns out that that's not actually happening. Minister, this is a broken promise. What are you going to do about it?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we've committed to ensuring that all of our individuals living in long-term care facilities will be properly taken care of. Whatever that requirement is, we'll make sure we do it. We care passionately about people. We'll continue to do that. Right now the policy is that those who need two baths a week will have two baths a week. We wish it had been done sooner, but it will be done by the end of this month. This is the 9th; that's 22 days.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about a year and a half. These seniors have been waiting for baths. The new management has failed to follow through on a promise made to Alberta's most vulnerable. It failed to provide even the dignity and basic compassion of two baths a week to seniors in care. It's shameful. Albertans were promised better, and actually they deserve better.

The Department of Health began updating the continuing care health service standards three years ago, and the Auditor General says that it's still not complete. We have the old standards being ignored and the new standards in limbo. Minister, can you look Albertans in the eye and tell them that you've made progress?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, with the co-operation of the Seniors minister and with the support of the Premier we have made great strides in ensuring that our seniors community who are in the facilities that we either sponsor or own are taken care of incredibly well. They are unbelievably valuable to us. They are our parents, our cousins, our family members. We care deeply about them, and to insinuate that we wouldn't take care of them properly is not accurate.

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

2:00

Government Accountability

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To usher in his so-called era of new management, the Premier promised a review of all agencies, boards, and commissions. The previous regimes promised the same thing. Premier Stelmach ordered a review of ABCs. Premier Redford had a results-based budgeting scheme. Yet after all these internal PC reviews, Albertans still aren't sure where all their money is going. Alberta Liberals have called for an independent audit to get to the bottom of this, but the PCs have refused. To the Premier. You promised that a performance report on Alberta's key financial institutions would be completed by now. Where is the report, what did it say, and what are the results?

Mr. Prentice: Well, as the hon. member is alluding to, I made it very clear, Mr. Speaker, as Premier that all of the agencies,

boards, and commissions of the Alberta government would be put through a review. We began – the hon. member is quite correct – with the financial agencies of the government of Alberta, including agencies such as AIMCo, the board of directors of Alberta Treasury Branches, and others. I'm expecting the recommendations from the independent panel, that was appointed, within the next week or so. Those certainly will be made public, and we'll proceed on the basis of the advice that we're given.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the Premier said that he was forming a Premier's advisory committee on the civil service to make merit-based appointments that ensure that the right people are in the right jobs. That committee is co-chaired by one Mr. Ian Brodie, former chief of staff to Prime Minister Harper and former executive director of the Conservative Party. In his bio Mr. Brodie brags that he recommended candidates for more than 1,000 cabinet-appointed positions. Wow. Again to the Premier: how is hand-picking a clearly partisan individual to oversee appointments not the very opposite of ensuring that decisions will be made based on merit, unless your idea of the right person is a Tory insider?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, that's quite a stretch. Mr. Brodie is a respected Albertan. He did a tour of duty as the chief of staff to the Prime Minister of Canada, acquitted himself with real distinction in the time that he was there. He co-chairs this particular advisory panel. I would point out that the other co-chair is Oryssia Lennie, who is one of the most respected civil servants in our province's history, someone who's been a deputy minister provincially, federally, well known and well respected for her integrity. These are the kinds of people whose advice we need if we're going to build a quality civil service.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, since the Premier and the Prime Minister are such close friends, I'd like to remind him that his former boss said that a public appointments commission was an important step towards a more open, honest, and accountable government for Canadians. Presumably, the Premier, who was then part of the inner cabinet circle, agreed. Actions speak louder than words. So far all we've seen out of this new-management Premier is one political appointment after another. To the Premier: will you please take real steps to prevent patronage by letting an independent commission manage the public appointments process in Alberta – yes or no – and if not, why not?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member was working himself up to congratulate the government on the selection of two very distinguished Albertans to chair the public service advisory committee because these are capable people with lifetimes of experience around government. We are interested in renewal of the civil service, the professionalism of the civil service, a strong working relationship between the professional civil servants we have and people who are in elected office. This is where we will get the advice of excellent people. I thank the hon. member for his interest. I can't comment on matters of federal jurisdiction.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Ms. Notley: Mr. Speaker, call it a bitumen bubble or a price trough, it's all code for the same thing: another Tory budget full of broken promises. In 2011 Ed Stelmach's council for economic

strategy warned that too much program spending was coming from royalty revenue. My question is to the Premier. You've had years to get off this royalty roller coaster so that public programs will be protected, not cut, so why should Albertans trust your government now when it has done nothing but fail consistently year after year after year?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've actually had about 90 days. I am working on it. I think it's fair to say that people world-wide have been surprised by the drop in energy prices. This is a significant issue for our province. It is a time for caution and discipline in our public expenditures. I spoke about this today to the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, assured Albertans that Albertans are tough and resilient. They expect in these circumstances that their government will be disciplined, conservative-minded. That's what we intend to bring to the public finances.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's only been 90 days if the whole caucus over there is suffering from collective amnesia.

Now, today the Premier's speech included at least five different ways of telling regular Albertans that they and their families will experience tough times through cuts as his government scrambles to fix its multidecade's record of mismanagement yet not one word about fair taxes for the most wealthy and the most privileged. To the Premier: why won't you deliver a similarly conservative and prudent message to your well-heeled friends and insiders and axe the flat tax?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm encouraged that the hon. member and the leader of that party is concerned about taxes and fiscal matters. This is progress. In terms of moving forward, we have the most competitive tax regime in the country. It's something that we're proud of. Many call it the Alberta advantage. It is a fair system of taxation. The flat tax in particular has many strong advocates. But I make the point that this is a competitive advantage which we have as a province. We're mindful of that. We're focused on discipline and being cautious and protecting that advantage.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker. It's not fair. Tax cuts brought in since 2001 have only benefited the wealthiest Albertans. Middle-income families pay more than in B.C. and Ontario while corporations and the most wealthy have the lowest taxes in the country. But when the price of oil drops, the government circles the wagons around tax holidays for their friends and insiders while cuts are made to services that middle- and lower income Albertans depend on. So to the Premier: why are you once again expecting average Albertans to pay the price for this PC government's failure to get off of the royalty roller coaster?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, just to be clear in terms of the public record, Albertans enjoy a competitive tax advantage over any other jurisdiction in this country. It is true. It is true in terms of sales tax. It is true in terms of personal income tax. It is true in terms of gasoline tax. It is true, essentially, in terms of the health care situation. It's true across all of the levels of taxation that Albertans pay. So this is something that is part of the competitive advantage that we enjoy as a province. We face very serious fiscal circumstances – I've made that very clear – but abandoning the tax advantage that we have is not part of the solution.

The Speaker: Let us reduce our preambles to supplementaries or eliminate them completely, starting with Calgary-Shaw.

PDD Service Changes

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the minister of PDD said in this House:

PDD transformation is [all] about the individuals. It's about their needs, their goals, and their aspirations. As a government we will continue to make sure that their needs are met in a very consistent and timely manner.

It all sounds so nice. As a result of the PDD transformation, though, the new process to determine supports requires assist assessment, in-depth support planning by PDD, and meetings that can take months to arrange, resulting in delays during which vulnerable people are left with no supports. So can the minister clarify what he considers timely?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is focused on ensuring that every Albertan enjoys the best quality of life. There are three factors when we're talking about funding. SIS, supports intensity scale, is an interview which is used for the support an individual needs to be successful. It's about their needs, about their goals. It's about their aspirations. The second thing that is used is geographical location, which is used when determining funding; and thirdly, the natural supports that individual has to be successful.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I'm not so sure the minister heard the question, so I'll make it very, very simple. What does your ministry consider to be a reasonable amount of time from when an individual contacts the PDD system asking for support and, assuming they qualify, starting to receive it?

2:10

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once the individual contacts the department, once the assessment has been made, the services start almost fairly quickly. In the PDD system we serve more than 10,000 people, and there is a process which is used to determine the funding. When we look at the overall success rate, less than 5 per cent of the people ask for reassessment. Out of 10,000 people, which we're serving in PDD alone, about 450 people ask . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Wilson: We got our answer, Mr. Speaker. It's "almost fairly quickly."

The tragic death of Betty Anne Gagnon was an example of someone who was known to the PDD system but not receiving the supports that would have ensured that someone saw her and intervened on her behalf. Vulnerable Albertans are being left waiting for this government to act, and there does not seem to be any sense of urgency in ensuring that the needs of these individuals are being met. Minister, will you commit to setting timelines around determining support and hold your ministry accountable for meeting them?

Mr. Bhardwaj: Mr. Speaker, as we go through the process, there are absolute timelines in place to make sure that Albertans get the care they deserve, make sure that they are safe, and make sure that they are in a caring environment.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, followed by Highwood.

Provincial Fiscal Position

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the price of oil continued to plummet last week, the Finance minister was meeting with chief economists from across Canada. I've got to say that I received a lot of calls from residents of Edmonton-South West on yesterday's drop to \$63 oil. This morning it's continued to \$62. To the Minister of Finance. This is looking and sounding a lot like the 2008-2009 financial crisis, plain and simple. Is your department expecting a repeat, and are we heading into a recession?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Finance has indicated, we are going to make some tough decisions in regard to our upcoming budget, based on sound, conservative fiscal principles, as I've spoken about in this House. That work is under way right now, at this point in time, but no decisions have been made at this point relative to next year's budget. Our main priority is actually focusing on the current fiscal year and the reality of \$63 oil, the WTI price that we witnessed yesterday. All ministers certainly have been advised that there will be no new spending for the rest of the year and that they must find savings within their budgets. This is conservative budgeting in practice.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier and the Finance minister have repeatedly spoken about the need for a disciplined approach to spending and given that we in Edmonton-South West need our schools, can the Premier outline any immediate measures that this government will take to restrain spending? I'm hoping that this doesn't affect the projects in my area.

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a great question, but I think it's important to understand that we do have some serious challenges ahead of us, with oil dropping as far as it has over the last 10 days. I can say to you that this government is looking towards making sure that we look after our operating expenses, and we're also going to make sure that we look after our capital expenses. I think it's important to understand that while oil revenues have dropped, the economy of this province is still growing, so we still have the challenges of people coming to this province. We'll have to find that balance between looking after our operating expenses and making sure that we build the schools that are needed moving forward.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Minister of Finance: given that you say that all of us across Alberta will need to be aware of this pending financial situation and the continued drop in oil, what action is the government and specifically your department taking immediately to be fiscally responsible?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Premier said earlier, we have made sure that there will be no new spending. We have told all our departments that they have to find any monies within their existing budgets. We'll be moving forward with very prudent and very fiscally responsible prices for oil, coming out in next year's budget. In talking to chief economists on Thursday, they told us that oil is going to be between \$70 and \$75 for at least the next

three years out. I think that all Albertans need to know that. We'll be making sure that we're very responsible with our operating expenses based on those numbers.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Highwood, followed by Little Bow.

EcoAg Initiatives Environmental Compliance

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some years ago the government approved and partially funded a project in my riding by a company called EcoAg, that is supposed to turn agricultural waste into high-quality compost. The project appears to be a failure, and the firm has been repeatedly fined for excessive waste at their facility. This poses health risks to the livestock in surrounding areas, and it poses a massive risk to groundwater. The firm has been under compliance orders to ensure water protection, but neighbours report that things are not improving. Why has the government failed to protect the environment, especially our groundwater, on this spot?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, the groundwater in this province is extremely important. That's why we do the mapping, and that's why we have strict regulations. All of that is important for this government. If there are instances where faults are happening with the environment, we will be there and will make sure that it is protected.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, EcoAg is years past the date they said that they would be operational. Waste continues to be trucked in, but very little is being processed. This needs to stop. The stored waste material either needs to be reclaimed properly, or the facility needs to get up and running to reduce the material on-site by having it properly processed in a biogas reactor. What is the minister going to do to fix this mess and protect our environment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very important that this situation is taken care of properly. We will be talking with the minister of environment when he gets back so that he can be made aware of it as well. If there are things that are not happening, to make sure that it's working properly, we'll look into it for the hon. member.

Ms Smith: I hope that's the case, Mr. Speaker, but this is not the first time this question has been asked.

EcoAg has been an environmental and economic wreck using taxpayers' money. Also, the government can claim to have done something about the environment, but what's really happening is that groundwater has been polluted, taxpayers' money has been wasted, and neighbouring properties have been devalued. Now, the Premier claims that he wants to protect property rights. Will the government compensate EcoAg's neighbours for their legal costs in fighting this boondoggle, that should have been addressed years ago?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I have said, we make sure in this province that in the south and in the north – and we'll continue with the rest of the province – we're doing groundwater mapping. It's very, very important for us to make sure that groundwater mapping is done. As I have said, when the minister is back, we'll have him look into this file.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Fusarium Head Blight

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This spring the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock brought forward Bill 201, Fusarium head blight. It was sent to the committee and had some very valuable discussion this summer. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. What happened to the report, and when will it be tabled?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for the question. The hon. member is correct. The matter was referred to a standing committee. The bill died on the Order Paper, but in the meantime the standing committee did their report, they tabled their report this past summer, and it is actually available on the committee's website.

Mr. Donovan: To the same minister: given that the seed growers have already cleaned their seed for next year, when will this department come up with a timeline for seed growers to be able to keep the economic advantage in this province?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, this is an interesting issue because there are very strong feelings on both sides of this issue, depending upon what part of the province you go to. The committee itself recommended that we do not relax the zero-tolerance rule that we now have, but they also recommended that there be a further review. That review is happening. If you go to the north part of the province, there's a very strong feeling that we should not relax the rule, and if you go to the south of the province and you talk to our seed growers, they feel exactly the opposite. So it's a very delicate question.

Mr. Donovan: To the same minister: with best management practices already in place for seed growers to deal with the Fusarium – and we're already doing mandatory testing – when will this minister look at the tolerance level that the industry is asking for?

Mr. Olson: Well, first of all, it may not be entirely accurate to say that the industry is asking for it. I do also note that our service boards and our AAMD and C have also said that they prefer to leave it as the status quo, but this is damaging for our seed growing industry. We are looking for some resolution, and one of the things that has been recommended that we look at, which we are considering, with no decision having been made, is a regional approach. I am awaiting a report from my Fusarium Action Committee, and we can expect perhaps some further steps to be taken in the early new year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

2:20

Seniors' Care

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health care continues from crisis to crisis, with worsening hospital overcapacity, unacceptable emergency room risks to both patients and staff, severe quality and access problems in long-term care, and inadequate community home care. Given that staff today in Public Accounts admitted that there is no process to evaluate home care, especially privately contracted home care, which is out of the purview of the Auditor

General, to the Health minister: how is it possible that in 2014 we have no idea what's happening to tens of millions of dollars in home care?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we do evaluate. We make sure that the services are delivered in an effective way. We have good, competent people doing it. We want to make sure that all people are taken care of. Home care is a bit more difficult than having a single facility like a long-term care facility, but we are making every effort to ensure that services are delivered properly and effectively.

Dr. Swann: So 2014 and no evaluation framework. Stunning.

Given the Parkland report From Bad to Worse on long-term care, showing that the return on investment for private long-term care residential is 9 per cent on average, higher than the stock exchange, and that for-profit facilities fell short in staffing levels compared to public services, when will you ensure that quality in staffing in private, for-profit long-term care meets the provincial standard?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we have standards, which everyone must meet. We inspect them. All year long we go out to facilities and ensure that the people are properly taken care of. It is a priority of this government to continue to do that, and we always put the patient and the resident first.

Dr. Swann: Again, in Public Accounts today, Mr. Speaker, it was revealed that there is still no process for reviewing long-term care patient care plans. When can we expect to see an appropriate evaluation of individual care plans in this province?

Mr. Mandel: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General in his report indicated that one thing we need to do better is to have more long-term care plans, and that's what we're trying to do. We're working with the Minister of Seniors to ensure that long-term care plans are put out for every individual. That will help us determine the kind of care they need. I would hope that we'll continue to do that, and I applaud the Minister of Seniors for making sure that happens.

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

Long-term Care Beds (continued)

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning a senior government official actually told Public Accounts that we have too many long-term care beds in Alberta. Maybe he should say that over 1,000 Alberta families actually are waiting for long-term care beds for their loved ones or that 700 of those are waiting for an acute-care bed. To the Minister of Seniors: will you explain to those families how you have lowered the standards of care so that a shortage of long-term care beds has magically turned into a surplus?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the question on long-term care is best directed to the Minister of Health, but I can elaborate on the discussions that happened this morning. I was in that room, and I recall the department official talking about an overcapacity in the province in general but recognizing there are shortages across the province, just like we have in education. We have an overcapacity of classrooms and schools and space, but we don't all have those in the right communities. So we have a real issue, that the Premier

has identified, that we are addressing and we are investing in, and that's to make sure that we have space for our parents and our grandparents.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that just last month we heard about a woman who developed a fungus on her body after busy, overworked staff were not able to bathe her frequently enough and given that these stories have become all too familiar to Albertans as this PC government continues to downgrade every aspect of seniors' care, to the Minister of Seniors: why won't you commit to providing the level of care our seniors actually need, not based on attempts to penny-pinch but based on the inherent respect and dignity of Alberta's seniors?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I don't want to speak about individual cases, but in that individual case Alberta Health Services jumped on it right away. It was a problem; they dealt with the issue. Care for every one of our seniors in every one of our facilities, as I've indicated throughout today, is very important. Our parents, our grandparents are precious to all of us, and we will continue to do the best job possible in this province. We make sure that people get the best care, some of the highest level care in this country. We do more than other provinces as far as giving care in this province.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, given that this PC government is determined to continue their smoke-and-mirrors exercise of downgrading care so that fewer seniors get the full nursing care that they require and given the fact that in Alberta today we have the second-lowest number of long-term care beds in the entire country, to the Minister of Seniors: do you honestly think that our health care system has too many long-term care beds and that it is acceptable to abandon and neglect seniors, who are being shuttled off to lower grade care at exponentially higher monthly rates at private facilities?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think this government under this Premier has demonstrated very clearly that we have a priority on seniors. We believe that there is a need for more spaces and that there is a need for more long-term care, but there's also a need for more supportive living. One of the focuses of this government is to make sure that people can age in their community, the communities that they helped build with their families. By just building long-term care, by just having long-term care without the supportive living, without the dementia unit so people can age in place and beside their spouse in the same facility as their spouse, you're going to split up spouses, and you're going to send them to the next community. That's not a priority of this government. That might be what the opposition would like to see us do, but the Premier has mandated that we want to put an end to that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Energy Company Licensee Liability Rating Program

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year I raised the issue about the licensee liability rating program; namely, how this government drastically increased the amount required to be paid by each oil and gas company. The result was that many junior producers are being pushed into bankruptcy. Now with oil prices hitting a low of \$63 a barrel, there are guaranteed to be some wells shut in, hopefully temporarily, which will increase their liabilities. To the Minister of Energy: can you assure this House that the

AER will not repeat its actions and suddenly force large deposits to be paid?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. The licensee liability rating system was brought into effect to ensure that the Crown would not be responsible for the reclamation and abandonment costs of wells put in place by industry. I think the principle still exists today. We are aware that in this price environment that may put pressures on companies, and we're looking at it.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, the other companies are required to cover the costs of the abandoned wells' reclamation.

Given that the LLR was created to protect Albertans from the responsibility of the abandoned wells' reclamation and given that the program was created at a price of \$95 a barrel and was still unmanageable for some, to the Minister of Energy: what options has the government explored to avert another disaster?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thought that's what I said, that the public is not responsible for the reclamation and abandonment costs, that the companies are. The cost of reclamation isn't dependent on the price of oil. It's dependent on the cost of reclamation and abandonment, and somebody has to pay for it. Now, the member knows very well that we have put a financial management regime in place that allows the companies to build their securities over time. The government of Alberta or the taxpayers of Alberta are not going to be responsible for industrial cleanup.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, given that through our and the affected companies' advocacy last year the AER created the LLR management plan, which implemented more realistic and manageable payment plans for junior producers, and given that junior producers employ many Albertans, will the minister pre-emptively look into this situation and ensure that the plan will responsibly balance each company's liability with their access to capital in these tough times?

Mr. Oberle: Well, now the member likes the program, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to hear that.

Yes, we are, in fact. I've been made aware by a couple of companies that they have issues. We talk to companies all the time. I told him in the first answer that we're looking at it right now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

High Prairie Health Services

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The surrounding area of High Prairie suffers from a heavy chronic disease burden. In fact, it is the fourth highest in Alberta. Because of this, dedicated and specialized medical care is required for the well-being of the residents. To the Minister of Health. The idea of a community health and wellness clinic is being contemplated to fulfill the emergency health needs of the High Prairie residents. Does this clinic have the support of your ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me first say that we're thankful for the care all physicians and health care professionals provide to High Prairie residents. This clinic is good news for the community, and we support it. It was developed in collaboration with multiple stakeholders in High Prairie. The community health and wellness clinic's two physicians, who had previously indicated that High Prairie was not the top choice for their options, decided to come and begin to practise in High Prairie. The goal of the clinic is to provide a robust, interprofessional team, including physicians, nurses, dietary, exercise therapy, social workers, addiction and mental health . . .

2:30

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Calahasen: To the same minister – sorry you didn't get to finish – given the fact that 12 doctors have left High Prairie in the last five years, would the minister be willing to work with physicians on a different compensation model, other than a traditional fee for service, so that we can keep doctors in High Prairie and ensure our residents get quality of care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We want a compensation model that works for both the communities and the physicians. That's an important balance. So we'd be happy to work with the physicians on whatever type of compensation model they'd be interested in. It's not always as easy as one would think. This could include development of an alternative relationship plan using compensation models such as salary, blend of salary and fee for service, or capitation. That's a fixed payment per capita.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Calahasen: To the same minister: regardless of what clinic a physician in High Prairie works in, will their patients be able to access the services at the wellness clinic?

Mr. Mandel: Yes.

Health Care Accessibility

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, I am a true supporter of local radio. I enjoy listening to the news of the day, call-in segments, and hearing about the lovely weather in southern Alberta. However, listening to the radio recently in Cypress-Medicine Hat has begun to trouble me. Many residents in southern Alberta are being enticed by advertisements from south of the border to use American hospitals for surgeries. The lengthy wait times faced in Alberta are driving people away. To the Minister of Health: are you concerned about Albertans going south?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have an option to do what they want to do. We have a publicly funded public health care system that's outstanding. We'd encourage every Albertan to use our system. But this is a free country. They can do what they'd like to do.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If people are leaving this country to access health care, there is clearly something wrong.

The new Medicine Hat hospital will improve services in southeastern Alberta. I welcome the new facility. However, this government failed to add capacity so this new facility could help

more people. To the minister: with 61,000 people in Medicine Hat and \$250 million to \$300 million being spent on this project, why didn't you add any new beds?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, the evaluation was done; the decision was made; over \$200 million was spent. The hospital obviously needed upgrades, and we're glad we could support Medicine Hat and the residents of Medicine Hat. They're a vital community, very important to the province of Alberta. I hope the people of the region use that facility.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government spends 44 per cent, or \$19 billion, on health care annually and outcomes do not reflect the cost, what is your strategy to reduce wait times so Albertans don't have to go to Montana?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, wait times are a major priority for this government, and we're doing a variety of things: better access to home care, setting up better access through emergency departments, and our programs with an adjustment in acute-care beds to move them into long-term care. We're doing lots of things. This is a very, very fast-growing population, a hundred thousand new people every year. We're a province that's growing dramatically, and that puts tremendous pressure on the system. We continue to work to try to find solutions. It's not easy, but we will do it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a follow-up to my member's statement yesterday, autism spectrum disorder is a complex, lifelong developmental disability that affects a person's communications, social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions. Many families in Alberta are having a tough time caring for their autistic child because of the emotional and financial strain. I have received calls from constituents so stressed about what supports there are for their loved ones with autism. My question to the hon. Associate Minister of Persons with Disabilities: why are my constituents and others finding it so difficult to comb through the maze of . . .

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our FSCD program has one of the best supports in the country when it comes to providing services for children with autism. Out of the 10,000 we serve in PDD, 35 per cent of them have autism. We're making every effort as a government. We're meeting their needs consistently and in a timely manner.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that individuals over 18 with ASD do not have many disability supports or programs available to them and they still need access to supports to assist them in various elements of their daily lives, what is the minister doing about that?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As individuals are transitioning out of FSCD to the PDD program, we're working on creating a seamless system. We're starting to have the conversation with families as early as at 16 years of age so that when they do turn 18, there's no gap in services. Generally the turnaround time from assessment to when they start getting the service delivery is within 35 days. Of course, in cases of emergency we can get services in place within 24 hours.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Some of my constituents have told me that they have loved ones with autism living on reserves; however, they don't get the services and supports they need. Why are people on reserves not getting the same supports that they deserve?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to providing services to the children, it does not matter whether you live on the reserve or you live off the reserve. You get the same consistent services. We will continue to work with the communities in the First Nations, making sure that they're getting timely access to the services, as they deserve, that they need.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Ambulance Service in Southern Alberta

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the southwest mayors and reeves meeting the Health minister attended in Lethbridge last month, the member for Calgary-South East mentioned getting ambulance services out from under medical control. This statement has worried quite a few people. In that regard, will the minister please explain what's happening or being contemplated with ambulance services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was a pleasure to meet with all the reeves and mayors in southern Alberta. It was a great meeting.

First of all, I've had an opportunity to talk to many, many mayors in southern Alberta. Most of them are very pleased with their current ambulance service and their paramedic services, so we're not going to change anything that's going to impact them. What we have looked at are opportunities for transfer. Patient transfer between facilities is a big issue. We don't want to use the paramedics and their ambulances up while we need them, when we're just transferring. So that's the issue.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If any jurisdiction or administrative changes are being considered for rural ambulance service in the south zone, what process will be followed? Will the minister guarantee no changes will be made unilaterally but only after input and agreement from all parties?

Mr. Mandel: Well, I think that absolutely we're not going to change service without talking to the people who we support and who deliver the service and who are partners. So, yes, we'd be

more than happy to ensure that we're not changing without working with the communities. I'm not contemplating any changes right now either.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister confirm, then, that first responders will still be able to access medical advice and support when they're on the scene of an accident waiting for possibly lost, centrally dispatched paramedics and, second, that they will continue to receive the medical guidance and direction currently available to assist them in making possibly life-and-death decisions, including whether or not to transfer, without having to wait for paramedics and perhaps to save the life of the patient in the process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that everyone is concerned about situations of life and death. We're confident that those people who come to the scene, especially our paramedics, who are incredibly well trained, will make sure that the situation is properly taken care of and have the correct access to the groups they need access to. We know that it's a passion of every community around Alberta to make sure they have the best paramedic support, and we'll continue to do that. But the most important issue is making sure that care is delivered at the scene in a way that's most effective so that the individual is taken care of.

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

2:40

Influenza Immunization

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year more than 1,200 Albertans had the flu so severely that they had to be hospitalized, and 30 of them died. Thousands more suffered at home. To the Minister of Health: what is the government doing to protect Albertans from the flu?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Flu season has begun in Alberta, unfortunately, and we can expect the numbers to increase over the next month. There is still time to get your flu shot. I hope everybody in here has gotten their flu shot. This year we've ordered 2.1 million doses of the flu vaccine. That's enough to immunize about 45 per cent of Albertans. We'd love to have a much bigger number, but that's almost double what we did last year. It's true that reaching our target of 45 per cent would go a long way in helping us protect Albertans. We would prevent as many as 60 flu-related deaths and many more hospitalizations.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent CDC report is suggesting that this year's influenza immunization does not fully protect us from all strains that are circulating. Should I and my family and other Albertans be concerned?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we are currently reviewing the CDC report to monitor the situation, but there is no cause for alarm. Each year the flu shot targets the strains that are expected to circulate in Canada based on information from the WHO about trends world-wide. This year's vaccine includes the strain that is causing the most cases of influenza so far this winter. It's an A

strain. The vaccine also covers several other strains and the two main types of flu viruses, A and B. The vaccine varies each year. No one has a crystal ball to be exactly right for each year.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Final supplemental.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, of course, the flu virus does strike many different Albertans, especially those in our vulnerable populations such as seniors. How is this government accommodating those who are struck by the flu?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As of last week we've had 145 Albertans admitted to hospital and, unfortunately, nine deaths due to flu, which is very disturbing.

The most important way to protect our most vulnerable citizens is to urge them to get immunized. The vaccine takes two weeks to be fully effective. Don't wait. Get your flu shot right away. As I mentioned, we've increased the number of doses of flu vaccine we ordered from last year. We've also improved our distribution. More than 970 pharmacies are participating, and we're making sure Albertans are aware of the risks from influenza. We also need to do more to raise immunization rates among health care workers.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the time for Oral Question Period has expired. Today we recognized 102 questions and responses. Well done.

In 30 seconds from now we will resume with private members' statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Suffield Elk Herd

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat and I continue to have serious concerns about the effectiveness and knowledge of this government's herd management policies regarding the elk population that was introduced in the late 1990s to the Suffield military base. One of my constituents personally handed the Prime Minister a letter pleading with him to help force this PC government to deal with this unmanaged and self-inflicted wildlife problem.

This exploding elk herd population could lead to an economic disaster for provincial cattlemen. We have already seen the effects in our neighbouring state of Montana, where several thousand heads of cattle have been quarantined due to the brucellosis outbreak there amongst the livestock, contracted from elk in the nearby Yellowstone national park.

Elk in Yellowstone wander onto adjoining ranchland much like the elk here are wandering onto my constituent's ranchland from Canadian Forces Base Suffield, where they were introduced with no known population management plan. Still reeling from the effects of mad cow disease and now with the historical prices that ranchers are receiving for their livestock, it is imperative that the Minister of ESRD come up with a strong herd management plan. To quote my colleague for Cypress-Medicine Hat, we need to immediately get these numbers in check. It is imperative that we have more than a developing strategy. Farmers and ranchers are

demanding a succinct action plan for immediate control of the population numbers of elk entering their property.

Mr. Speaker, in my constituency property rights are definitive. If your neighbour's cows are on your property, he is responsible. In this case ESRD's livestock is causing havoc. Therefore, ESRD needs to get their livestock immediately under control.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 55 postcards from a campaign on Bill 9 by the Canadian Condominium Institute. The card reads: "I am concerned that Bill 9 has not had the needed public scrutiny that it requires. I support the [CCI's] position that the passage of Bill 9 must be put on hold until it is improved."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I notice that my guest has arrived in the gallery.

I have three tablings. The first is the government announcement of the new review of agencies, boards, and commissions, that was supposed to have been tabled at this time, with the appropriate copies.

The second is a professional profile for Mr. Ian Brodie, research director at the School of Public Policy in Calgary, referred to earlier by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Finally, from Ms Joyce Dowdall, who is concerned that Bill 9 has not had the needed public scrutiny that it requires and is supporting the Canadian Condominium Institute North Alberta's position that "the passage of Bill 9 must be put on hold until it is improved."

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

If not, hon. members, allow me to table five copies of a letter received in my office yesterday from the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne dated December 8, 2014, wherein he is requesting early consideration for his Bill 203 to proceed to Committee of the Whole.

Hon. members, I have no points of order, so I think we can move directly to Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Committee Referral for Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007

15. Mr. Denis moved:

Be it resolved that

1. The Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities for the purpose of conducting a comprehensive review of the amendments to legislation made by that act;
2. The committee may, without leave of the Assembly, sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
3. In accordance with section 54 of the Mental Health Act the committee must submit its report to the

Assembly within one year after beginning its review, and that report is to include any amendments recommended by the committee.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. Are there others? The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Time and time again we have heard stories of neglect and mismanagement on the part of this government when it comes to mental health. There are increased calls for mental health supports across the spectrum, whether it be in K to 12 education, in the postsecondary education system, for those who work as emergency first responders, for individuals battling addictions, and the general public who are simply trying to navigate day-to-day life. We have hard-working and passionate front-line workers that are doing their best with the resources that they are provided, and for that they should be commended. However, they are succeeding despite this government, not because of it.

2:50

The Standing Committee on Families and Communities, of which I am the deputy chair, consists of a controlling majority of PC MLAs. Despite voting and agreeing that mental health and addictions should be our specific goal with a comprehensive review of mental health service that started over two years ago, very little progress has been made and very few meetings have actually taken place on this issue as of late. Now with this additional review of legislation the important work of the committee will be delayed even further. While I have no doubt that the review of this legislation will be beneficial, I can't help but wonder why this government doesn't pay attention to mental health issues on a regular basis. This may well be a positive step forward, but there is still so much more work to be done.

Mr. Speaker, I hope this government will start to pay serious attention to mental health and that the review of this legislation is only the first step to working with front-line staff to improve mental health supports in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, shall we request unanimous consent to revert to introductions? Is that what I understood?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to the House a friend and supporter, Helen McMenamin. If she would stand. She is a stalwart in the Liberal constituency of Lethbridge-East and has continued to work tirelessly for positive change in that area. I would ask the Legislature to give her a warm welcome.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

While we're on the subject of reversions, would you mind if we reverted briefly for one tabling.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Tabling Returns and Reports

(reversion)

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, why don't you proceed.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm apologizing for my tardiness previously. I'd like to table the letter with the requisite copies that my constituent Jeff Lewandowski handed this summer directly to the Prime Minister regarding the explosion of elk on his property and that of the Suffield base, that I referred to in my member's statement.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Government Motions

Committee Referral for Mental Health

Amendment Act, 2007

(continued)

The Speaker: Are there any other speakers on Government Motion 15? The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Ms Notley: I will be brief, Mr. Speaker. I just want to join with the comments of the vice-chair of the family and community services committee. It's all fine. I'm sure that the reason that we are reviewing this act is because it's a provision in the act itself that requires us to. It's good that mental health in some fashion is coming before the committee. But I want to join with the concerns raised by my colleague that opposition members on that families and community services committee have been trying since 2012 to get the committee to do the job it had originally agreed to do, which is to do an expansive review of the quality of mental health services throughout the province.

We spent the first six months after that committee was established after the last election having a fulsome conversation with deputy ministers from a number of different ministries as well as getting expert and internal research provided to the committee which showed us very clearly and without qualification that there is a profound crisis in mental health care in this province and that this government is jaw-droppingly disorganized on the provision of that service and completely unaware of the level of service that they're even providing.

On one hand, we can talk about certain amendments to the Mental Health Act, but the bigger picture is that these folks over there have no idea how they're even providing mental health services at this point. We are, in fact, the only province in the country that can't actually draw a diagram of how we provide mental health services in this province because they don't know. Of course, all of this ties back to when these folks created AHS and eliminated the Alberta Mental Health Board. Ever since then it's been a complete disaster. Every day children in schools, their families, their parents, seniors, people in this province desperately need mental health services and don't secure those services because it is a piecemeal, fractured, disorganized, thoughtless approach to providing mental health care to a population, which, like the rest of the world, has 1 in 10 people at any given time suffering from a mental health illness.

Dr. Swann: Two in 10.

Ms Notley: My hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View tells me that it's 2 in 10.

It's a crisis. It's one that opposition members on the committee have been trying to deal with now for over two years. I certainly hope that in the course of deliberating on the specific amendments that are now being referred to this committee, we will be given the opportunity to continue the more expansive work which focuses on the urgent need faced by many, many Albertans and for this government to take responsibility on this very, very important issue.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Anybody on 29(2)(a)?

Are there any other speakers? Calgary-Mountain-View.

Dr. Swann: I'll just lend my support, Mr. Speaker. This is a long overdue assessment that's needed. On the face of it, it looks like we're diverting again after two years to another theme related, obviously, to mental health but not the comprehensive review that we had committed to two years ago. It looks like this government is ducking and diving. They don't really want to know how bad things are in the mental health system. We here, many of us at least, especially me as the Health critic, receive complaints, concerns, real desperate calls at times, especially from young people and their families because it takes up to three months for a child and a youth to get access to a psychiatrist in this province. There are many examples of people who have gone by the wayside and are getting inadequate care.

Again, Mr. Speaker, without understanding how the system can work more efficiently and a comprehensive review of leadership, lines of authority, clear guidance for those on the front lines in terms of how to make some of the changes that are needed to improve access and quality and the cost-effectiveness of our system, it's really troubling to hear from these folks and have nothing to offer them because we haven't done that comprehensive review. We haven't got the kind of leadership and organization at the top of mental health that we desperately need.

So while I support the need for this review at the committee, it's again with some really desperate concerns expressed by my constituents that we, I guess, have to remind the government that this is a key – key – priority in our health care system and that there is tremendous suffering due to the lack of organization, accountability, funding in some cases, staffing in others. Particularly, I'm feeling badly about our young people and their failure at the early stages, when we could have early intervention and real impact, that we're not getting to these young people soon enough.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Seeing no one, is there anyone else who wishes to speak to Government Motion 15? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak to this motion. A few weeks ago I delivered a member's statement about mental health and the ideas and the concerns that came from my constituents in Calgary-Varsity.

I think it's quite misleading for the other parties in this House to suggest that people on this side of the House are ignoring the issues or don't care or don't care about fixing the system. I also think it's quite disingenuous to suggest that change is not happening. In my constituency alone, at the Alberta Children's hospital we're seeing incredible research on brain health, which ties directly to mental health supports for youth and children. We're also seeing amazing things happening at the University of

Calgary in response to the Brentwood murders. Those are profound investments in mental health care by not just the university and researchers but by the community itself. We're also seeing the Chambers of Commerce lead mental health initiatives in the workplace in a very candid and honest way like we've never seen before. We're also seeing a lot of work on Alzheimer's and dementia care, and I for one have asked many questions in this House about that issue.

So as one MLA on this side of the House I have to counter the comments that have been laid before us and suggest that there are many people in this province who care about mental health, who believe we can do it better, who believe we are doing it better. I think the opportunity to share best practices and emerging best practices not just by this government but by all mental and brain health care providers is a really wonderful opportunity for all Albertans. What we've seen with other all-party committee meetings, some of which I participated in and many people have participated in: it's an excellent way to get ideas on the table and shared and accessible to all Albertans.

So I commend this recommendation.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to Government Motion 15?

If not, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 15 carried]

3:00

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2 Alberta Accountability Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to rise to speak about Bill 2, the Alberta Accountability Act.

Bill 2 includes amendments to the Conflicts of Interest Act, the Public Service Act, and the Lobbyists Act, Mr. Speaker. The legislation is part of a package that will help restore public trust, improve accountability, and end entitlements. Bill 2 will strengthen the conflict-of-interest guidelines for political staff, extend the cooling-off period for political staff and designated office-holders, and clarify the distinction between the role of registered individual lobbyists and government consultants.

Mr. Speaker, complementing the legislation will be two Treasury Board directives that will eliminate sole-source contracts except in exceptional circumstances and restrict severance packages for political staff. With the Alberta Accountability Act we will hold this government and all subsequent governments to the highest possible standards of public service.

Mr. Speaker, as someone who grew up in another province, that was rocked by what may have been the worst provincial political scandal in Canadian history, I feel very strongly about the changes being made. Of course, I'm speaking about 14 MLAs, members of two different parties, that had fraud allegations against them. This scandal really shook many people in the province and the whole country, and it did help form my views of government and public service and accountability of elected officials.

I recall, Mr. Speaker, when I was finishing my first university degree, many of us were talking about where we'd like to be in

our careers, and I said that I might want to be an MLA. It really shocked me what the response was from so many people. People thought that MLAs were dishonest. People thought: oh, they're all a bunch of crooks. It really hit me that when events like this occur, it doesn't matter what party you're from, what caucus you sit in, what Legislature you sit in, if you're part of the federal or a provincial parliament, when you were elected. The same thing holds true. It taints us all. When one individual member has an ethical consideration, it taints us all, and it doesn't matter where you come from or what your story is.

I will now provide some details about the bill, Mr. Speaker. The Conflicts of Interest Act governs the ethical standards of Members of the Legislative Assembly and those who work in the Premier's office and in ministers' offices except those in administrative positions. Currently MLAs are prohibited from participating in discussions or using confidential information which would further a private interest and from using their office to improperly influence others to their own personal benefit. Under Bill 2 this prohibition would be expressly extended to the Premier's and ministers' staff.

Another amendment is around postemployment restrictions, Mr. Speaker. Former ministers are currently subject to a 12-month cooling-off period. Under Bill 2 ministers, the Premier, and their staff will be banned from lobbying government for 12 months after leaving their post. As well, the cooling-off period for ministers' and the Premier's office staff would be extended from six months to 12 months.

Another significant change to the Conflicts of Interest Act is related to financial disclosure and reporting. The act currently requires MLAs to make financial disclosure to the Ethics Commissioner when they become an MLA and every year thereafter. Now, under Bill 2 this requirement would be extended to the Premier's and ministers' staff. As well, an administrative penalty would be imposed upon those who do not file their financial disclosure on time.

This new legislation also makes changes in gifts and travel permitted and the reporting thereof. Currently there is a general ban on accepting gifts or noncommercial travel in connection with an MLA's office. Now, again, Mr. Speaker, this does not apply to gifts around Christmas or for a person's birthday or for a person's wedding. These are gifts received as a result of a person holding that particular office. Now, there are certain exceptions such as gifts received as a matter of protocol. It's also worth noting that if a \$200 gift is repeated multiple times throughout a given year, it may cease to be a protocol gift.

With Bill 2 more detail is provided about when an MLA may accept a gift in a protocol situation, and it includes additional reporting requirements about gifts. The exceptions allowing travel on noncommercial flights have also been revised. The new rules are similar to the federal model under the Federal Accountability Act. With Bill 2 public disclosure of all non-commercial travel is required within 30 days of when the travel occurred.

With Bill 2 there will also be amendments regarding the authority and operations of the Ethics Commissioner, and this includes expanding the authority to oversee financial disclosure, conflicts of interest, and postemployment restrictions for deputy ministers, senior officials, and the Premier's and ministers' staff; providing legislative authority to ensure members are reimbursed for the cost of transferring a mortgage, a line of credit, or other account from the Alberta Treasury Branches to another financial institution; providing authority to prescribe the form and manner of disclosure statements; providing authority to post public disclosure statements on the Ethics Commissioner's website; providing authority to approve alternative arrangements with

safeguards for business investments; providing authority to approve investment arrangements with appropriate safeguards for publicly traded securities as an alternative to blind trusts; providing for greater investigative powers for the Ethics Commissioner such as the authority to call witnesses and compel production of documents; and providing authority for an ethics commissioner from another jurisdiction to investigate if the Alberta Ethics Commissioner has a conflict or for whatever reason is unable to act.

These amendments reflect input from both the Ethics Commissioner and the Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee, and I thank them for their help in this consultation.

I will now provide information about amendments proposed to the Lobbyists Act. The current legislation recognizes lobbying as a legitimate activity and that such activities are intended to be transparent. As such, lobbyists are required to register. The current act also prohibits a person or others associated with that person from lobbying and providing paid advice to government or a prescribed provincial official on the same subject matter at the same time. Under Bill 2 a person would be prohibited from lobbying and providing paid advice to government or a prescribed individual on any subject matter at the same time, Mr. Speaker.

If the legislation is passed, anyone who is currently lobbying and consulting at the same time would be required to choose which activity he or she will continue performing and to end the other activity within 60 days of the bill coming into force. Basically, Mr. Speaker, it's one or the other.

In addition, Bill 2 makes changes to the returns filed by lobbyists to capture the new prohibition as well as postemployment restrictions on lobbying, and this is being added, again, to the Conflicts of Interest Act and the Public Service Act.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the third piece of legislation that would be amended by Bill 2 is the Public Service Act. This act governs employment and conduct of provincial civil servants. Bill 2 adds a new part to this act that is parallel to many of the conflict-of-interest provisions applicable to MLAs.

This bill will impose rules on a new category of senior staff called designated office-holders. This category includes all deputy ministers, all senior civil servants, chief executive officers, and chairs of provincial agencies designated by cabinet. Designated office-holders would be subject to conflict-of-interest rules which prohibit participation in discussions or using confidential information to further a private interest, using confidential information to further a private interest, and using their office to improperly influence others for their own benefit. Designated office-holders who are public servants would also be restricted from holding publicly traded securities except in a blind trust or a similar investment arrangement. These provisions mirror what is imposed upon ministers. Bill 2 would also increase the cooling-off period for designated office-holders from six to 12 months. This, too, again, mirrors what ministers are subject to.

Mr. Speaker, exceptions to this rule will be permitted for civil servants to compete for another role within the public service or for a chair of one provincial board to be hired to chair another provincial board.

Designated office-holders would also be required to provide financial disclosure to the Ethics Commissioner similar to what is required for MLAs. There is also a new administrative penalty available to those who file their disclosure documents late. The Ethics Commissioner would be responsible for overseeing these new requirements and investigating and reporting on any potential breaches.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make a few final points before I take my chair. It's important to note that these are significant changes

to legislation, but at the same time it is not the end of the changes being made by government. Bill 2 is part of an accountability package that also includes changes regarding procurement and severance for political staff. Work will continue to be done on extending severance principles to provincial agencies in a way that recognizes both their independence and also their unique circumstances as the case may be. As these are policy directives, I will not speak further on them in this forum.

The proposed amendments and the policy directives will help us usher in a new era of accountability and, in fact, a new management as we continue to restore the public trust. We must never forget that public trust is not given to us; it is earned year to year from our day-to-day actions. This legislation is the result of consultation, with considerable input from Alberta's Ethics Commissioner. I would like to thank our Ethics Commissioner, Marguerite Trussler, a retired justice of the Court of Queen's Bench, for her input into this legislation.

With Bill 2 we're talking about a business approach to government that will ensure high ethical and accountability measures are in place.

Mr. Speaker, I am confident that I speak for all of my colleagues when I say that it is an honour and privilege to serve the people of Alberta, something that we can never take for granted. We are committed to making changes and proving to Albertans that their faith in us is deserved. We must endeavour to prove this every day of this job.

Thank you very much.

3:10

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak to Bill 2, the Alberta Accountability Act. Obviously, issues of accountability, transparency, and so forth have been hallmark issues over the last several years. They are certainly things that the Wildrose caucus has worked very hard on, trying to hold the government accountable for some of the mistakes that were made. Clearly, there's a lot of work to be done, as, frankly, the Premier has said many times in this House and also in the media, to restore that trust. This isn't something that's going to be done overnight. There was a lot of damage done to the perception of politicians and government in general over the last many years.

But you know what? It's never too late to do the right thing. It's never too late to change direction and move in the right direction. I hope that this bill is a first step, albeit, I would say, a relatively small one, towards repairing the damage and, hopefully, starting a new era of transparency and accountability. I really do hope that. You know, one of the legacies, I hope, that all of us want to leave here is that when we leave this Assembly, the perception of politics, politicians, the work we do here, the things that we do, and our reputations has been collectively raised. It doesn't just take one party or two parties or three parties; it takes all parties to do that. I hope that we can leave that legacy no matter how long we're in this building as MLAs.

Bill 2 is an interesting bill. I say that it is a step in the right direction, and it indeed is. It is a small step; there's no doubt about it. Much more needs to be done. Much more, I think, could have been done in this bill, but I do understand that the Premier has been there for 60 days – is it 60 days? – relatively close to that.

Mr. Hale: Give or take 10.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah, give or take 10 days.

Legislation like this and as complicated as this isn't written overnight, isn't written quickly. There are a lot of affected stakeholder groups and there is a lot of paperwork and lawyers and more lawyers to deal with. [interjection] I know. Those damn lawyers. It's unbelievable. I got out as quick as I could, as you remind me often, hon. member.

With regard to what this act does deal with – and I'm going to also talk a little bit about what it doesn't deal with, which I hope one day will be added to this Alberta Accountability Act at a point in the near future. I want to talk about what's in there. What is in there is that, obviously, there are sections that used to just refer to MLAs; for example, not using our office for personal gain, making disclosure statements, and declaring gifts, et cetera. Those rules that applied to MLAs before also now apply to staff in the Premier's and ministers' offices, a very, very, very good improvement.

The cooling-off period for everyone is 12 months for staff; it used to be six for staff. The cooling-off period is, of course, between when you work in a ministry and then go out into the private sector. You can't just turn around and lobby that ministry. There's a cooling-off period. For MLAs I believe that's 12 months. For political staff it was six. Now it's 12 months for everyone.

There is a small change with regard to accepting protocol gifts or the social obligation on gifts. Nonmonetary gifts cannot exceed \$200. The total in tickets, invitations, conference costs cannot exceed \$400 from the same source. Gifts under \$100 also do not need to be disclosed. So there's a little bit of change there. They're all generally, I would say, positive.

Then, of course, there's the issue of flights. Members, MLAs, can accept rides on other people's noncommercial planes if it is "required for the performance of the Member's office." There are exceptional circumstances, but the member needs to get approval from the Ethics Commissioner. So all these things are good.

The Lobbyists Act. The previous act set a very low bar, forbidding a person to lobby on a specific subject matter if they were holding a contract to provide paid advice to the government on the same subject matter. This has now been changed and broadened to any subject matter so that the same well-connected folks can't be going into one minister's office to give paid advice and then going down the hall to lobby another minister on behalf of someone else. Again, that's a positive change.

In the Public Service Act there are some minor amendments strengthening some of the existing policies into legislation. The effect for the most part is to treat deputy ministers as well as selected CEOs and chairs of agencies, boards, and commissions of the province of Alberta as equivalent to politicians and political staff when it comes to conflict-of-interest and cooling-off provisions. Again, good improvements.

That, pretty much, is most of the subject matter of the bill. I don't have any issues with it. There are a few things. I know that in the Conflicts of Interest Act review some of the recommendations I don't think were put into this act, although some of them were. We'll be looking into possible amendments around those, but there are a lot that did get in here, so that's good to see.

With regard to the next two pieces, sole-source contracts and severance, those issues actually are not dealt with in this act, but they were announced at the same time as the act. Essentially what happened is that there were two directives, Treasury Board directives, I believe, that dealt with these. I would have really liked to see those in the act. It's good that these were passed by Treasury Board. It's a good policy to have, but essentially that's what this is. These are policies; they're not legislation. They can

be changed very quickly with a wave of a magic wand, frankly. It can all be changed without having to come back into this House and go before the opposition and be held accountable for making those changes, so I'm very worried about that. I think that in the case of severance in particular those changes could have been put in this bill without much worry, without much problem, and I'm a little concerned that they weren't put in this act. They should have been.

The severance directive itself, with regard to political staff, is actually very strong, and I want to commend the minister for that. They've capped it so that it's three months of severance for anyone working less than one year, and if you're employed for a length of time longer than one year, the employee can receive three months of severance plus an additional one month for each additional year of employment up to a max of six months. That's a very strong severance cap. It's very good. It's reasonable. The point of severance has always been to help someone pay the bills between jobs. If something doesn't go right with a job, and things happen, whether it's – there are many different reasons that people lose their jobs in government, among political staff. But when it happens, we want to help those people, obviously, transition to a new job, and part of that is paying out a fair severance.

But what has happened over the years is that these severances have turned into winning lottery tickets. It's really been that bad. I mean, just look at – some of these severances have been in the millions of dollars, some in the half-million-dollar range, hundreds of thousands of dollars. These severances should not make one wealthy; these severances are to help transition to a new job. This directive, I believe, is fair. I wish it was in legislation. It should be part of this bill, but at least the policy is correct. Obviously, we'll hold the government accountable to following their policy.

One of the biggest omissions on the severance – and I don't know if this is on purpose or if, again, the government is looking at this; I think the Justice minister mentioned that they actually are looking at this right now – is that this severance directive needs to be applied across the government of Alberta. When we're talking about political staffers, we're talking about a couple of hundred people maybe, if that many, probably not that many, located in the ministers' offices, political offices. We're not even talking about their departments, just their political offices and the Premier's office, obviously. I don't think that applies to the Public Affairs Bureau. They're not considered political staff either.

3:20

So this is a problem. We have a possible – I don't want to say that it is a budget crisis right now, but it is certainly a possible budget crisis, a long-term budget crisis that we are going to need to deal with. Guys and gals, if we can't make such a very simple change to the way we do business in this House, how are we going to make bigger decisions and tougher decisions? This is not a tough decision. If you come to work at Alberta Health Services, if you come to work in a public institution of education, if you come to work in any capacity in those higher levels, senior executive levels, there is no reason why we shouldn't have a cap on severance similar to the one that's being introduced in that cabinet directive. It's the right thing to do. It will save money.

People don't understand. We're still FOIPing, trying to get the FOIP back on this, how much we're paying right now in severance benefits and pension benefits to former senior civil servants, former chairs or former executives of certain health regions, and so forth. We've cobbled together enough of these FOIPs that – the amounts are staggering, how much we're paying some of these guys still and will pay till the day that they pass on.

We're not talking about a few thousand bucks a month here; we're talking about tens of thousands of dollars a month to individuals, multiple individuals, and it is brutal that we've done this.

Now, probably no one here in the House, including on the government side, was – I don't want to say nobody, but most of the people sitting on the government side were not there when those ridiculous contracts were signed, and there's not really any way to get out of it at this point. The point is that if you put the severance in place, if you put the rules in place now – obviously, we can't go back and break contracts and so forth; that's not doable – we can at least on a go-forward make sure we don't make the same mistakes. That should be part of the bill. Please add it in an amendment act.

My understanding is that there is a review of expanding this to agencies, boards, and commissions. Certainly, Minister, AHS would be the most important one in that regard because that's where the more flagrant abuses have occurred in the past.

Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have? A couple of minutes? Mr. Speaker? Five, three . . .

The Speaker: Seven.

Mr. Anderson: . . . seven minutes. Okay. Well, I won't take that long.

Finally, sole-source contracts. Here's the issue with them. What this does, what the directive from Treasury Board – again, it should be in legislation, in my view, but so be it. The directive as it reads now lowers the trigger point for having to tender out a contract from government from \$100,000 to \$50,000 in the case of capital and down to \$10,000 in the case of services. That's good. If there's an exception to that rule, if there needs to be a sole-source contract for exceptional circumstances, say, in an emergency, during a flood, et cetera, all that stuff, then the deputy minister has to sign off on that, and then, importantly – and this warms our research director's heart because we're going to have to do a lot less FOIPing, and that's good – it will be posted online during the following quarter. That is an excellent change.

There are rare circumstances when sole-source contracts should be granted, very rare circumstances. That has been abused like crazy, obviously, and we've exposed that multiple times. But just knowing that all sole-source contracts will be posted online within a quarter – I think that immediately you'll see a huge decrease in the number of sole-source contracts provided for that exceptional purpose or reason because the deputy minister will have to sign off on it. It'll go online. Everybody will be able to see it. So when there is an extreme circumstance and a sole-source contract is needed, I think you'll still see it, but it'll be legitimized whereas before it was kind of done behind closed doors, and no one knew about it until we started coming in and, essentially, FOIPing. It shouldn't come to that at all. I think that's a very good change, and I think that will naturally just cut down on the amount of sole-source contracts done in government.

I will say this. Whether this is in legislation or not, the more important question here is one that applies to the Premier and to the ministers sitting in the seats today. You can always have rules, but if you're not willing to abide by them and really pursue following them with everything that you have and count that towards yourself as part of your personal integrity, there's always a way around it. There's always a loophole. There always is. So whether this policy will be effective or not is really up to the Premier and his ministers.

I just hope that – you know, we've been promised so much, over the previous Premier's years and even before that, about how differently business was going to be done and how everything was

going to be different now and how there will be more ethics and transparency and accountability. Every new Premier says that, but it clearly, specifically, especially with the last one, did not happen. In fact, it got to a point that was probably one of the worst parts of our political history in a lot of ways in that regard. I really hope that this new Premier, who's saying all the right things, will make sure that this directive is enforced and that there aren't any loopholes or that there isn't any abuse of any loopholes. We need to make sure, all in this Chamber, to hold him, ministers, and each other to account, to follow these rules, and to not make ridiculous exceptions for ourselves that further our political interests.

Again, I applaud the member for the bill. It's a good first step, Minister, but much, much more needs to be done. I would hope that in the next year or so there's an Alberta accountability amendment act that's brought forward where we can put this severance directive into legislation and expand it to government boards, agencies, and commissions and that we will also put the procurement directive in that law as well or in a separate law if it needs to be a separate bill. That's fine, too.

The Wildrose is ready to support this bill. We will be bringing forward some amendments to the effect of what we were talking about earlier, Mr. Speaker, but the intent of the bill and most of what's in here we support.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by the leader of the ND opposition, and then we will ping-pong back and forth.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Alberta Liberals it's my pleasure to speak to Bill 2, Alberta Accountability Act. A lot of this bill is pretty motherhood and apple pie, so the Alberta Liberals will be supporting this bill with amendments. You know, we call this the Everything That Alison Did Wrong bill.

An Hon. Member: It's not just Alison.

Dr. Sherman: And many other PCs.

Mr. Speaker, the government actually had to bring in a bill to hold itself accountable because of its own failures. This bill is largely a public relations exercise, in its current form intended to undo the legacy of the former Premier and the excesses and failings that occurred during her leadership.

In terms of financial impact for Alberta this bill really deals with just a fraction of Alberta's finances, 1 per cent. Mr. Speaker, we're dealing with – what? – \$62, \$63 oil. Maybe it's headed on the way down. We really have to look at full, broader accountability for the whole government in addition to the accountability mentioned in this bill. For instance, a couple of things are very absent in the bill. The Premier has made speeches, but the bill doesn't coincide with his speeches. A couple of things that are absent are capping severance payments and ending sole-source contracts. It's going to be done by way of Treasury Board directives, and it's not enshrined in the act. The Premier promised that these would be written into the act, and I'm surprised that with such a highly touted bill that's not in there. Liberals feel that that should be in there. I think many other members in this House feel that way as well as in the other opposition parties.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, the Premier is quickly developing a reputation for governing by regulation or Treasury Board directive, and that can be a problem sometimes, in fact many times, because that has

been the problem with the current government, that got us into this mess in the first place. We've got to stop doing things behind closed doors. We need more public consultation. We need real accountability.

Something interesting that I found was that Bill 2 – there's Bill 1, Bill 2, Bill 3 – was actually one of the last bills introduced here before Santa comes. There's really minimum time to debate, minimum time for the public to give input and for folks to digest something that is actually a very important bill.

Mr. Speaker, here's what the Liberals would do differently to improve this bill, which I think is a good idea. I think it's a good idea. It's a good first step because accountability affects every elected member in the halls of democracy, that we're all very proud of, and we always support good ideas.

To make this a better idea, we believe it's important to end patronage. To end patronage, we would like to see an independent appointments commission enshrined into legislation. The only way to make sure that public appointments are based strictly on merit is to take them out of the governing party's hands and Treasury Board's and cabinet's hands and have an independent commission manage the recruitment and vetting process for prospective candidates.

Mr. Speaker, the Ontario Public Appointments Secretariat is a prime example of how the appointments process can be strengthened to ensure that only the most qualified men and women in our society, that have the highest personal and professional integrity, serve on public agencies, boards, and commissions and in other posts. I believe that a thing such as the independent appointments commission would go to greatly strengthening the Accountability Act.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have very high hopes for this Premier. Unfortunately, he started off with patronage appointments to some very key roles – and that's a problem – the appointments of Mr. Hill and Mr. Merrifield, very good people. Good people like that should go through a competitive process, a vigorous process. Who knows? They might have gotten the job anyway. But the process is the key to how we arrive at these decisions to put very important people in very important positions, where the future of our province and our society will be decided.

Mr. Speaker, let's not forget that the Prime Minister of the country and Mr. Prentice were in cabinet in 2006 federally when they supported the public appointments commission. However, they didn't follow through. The Liberals are suggesting that the Premier has an opportunity now. He's the boss. He's the Premier. He can actually make this happen right now in Alberta before we depart for Christmas.

Mr. Speaker, another thing that the Liberals feel is very important in accountability, especially with the amount of money that is spent in Alberta, is the question: are Albertans getting the results they deserve? We feel that Alberta needs an independent budget officer. This will be another Liberal amendment to make a good idea even better. An independent budget officer will be of tremendous benefit to taxpayers, to Albertans, and, frankly, to all MLAs in all political parties.

Mr. Speaker, we'd also like to see staffing rules for senior and executive level positions in significant agencies, boards, and commissions. The rules governing the process for staffing these senior positions are currently set out in a directive and are not written into law. Again, we want to bring this out into the public, not back behind closed doors, where with the stroke of a pen these decisions are made. Currently the rules are only guidelines, and it's up to the cabinet ministers' discretion whether to follow the process. The Liberals will propose an amendment to this as well that will see the particulars of this directive written into law so

that the ministers are actually obliged to follow certain rules when making appointments to agencies, boards, and commissions.

Mr. Speaker, I want to speak to the cooling-off period. I believe the intent is very good. We should have a cooling-off period. But there's a loophole. The cooling-off period is largely meaningless because there's a loophole. The Ethics Commissioner can exercise that loophole and waive the cooling-off period. You know, we've already had a former MLA immediately appointed, Evan Berger, a good man. But the cooling-off period was waived, and the Ethics Commissioner at the time said: hey, it's all in the family. I think we just need to close the loophole. Don't put the Ethics Commissioner in a situation with the government where the Ethics Commissioner has to say no to the government. Just put this into law, and close the loophole.

Mr. Speaker, you know, we should maybe consider extending the cooling-off period to 24 months. My colleague the hon. member from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre supported that recommendation when this was previously discussed, and I support that as well. If the intent of Alberta's conflict-of-interest rules is to actually prevent conflicts, then the statutory cooling-off periods for elected officials, political staff, and senior civil servants should be honoured, full stop, one hundred per cent of the time, with no exceptions. As I said, to put the Ethics Commissioner in the position to pick winners and losers is not right.

Mr. Speaker, another thing that the Liberals would do differently or do better to improve the Accountability Act is requests for investigation of conflicts of interest. The province's Conflicts of Interest Act review recommended that section 24(6) of the Conflicts of Interest Act be repealed. That section states, "Where a matter has been referred to the Ethics Commissioner under subsection (1), (3) or (4), neither the Legislative Assembly nor a committee of the Assembly shall inquire into the matter." I, too, support repealing that section of the Conflicts of Interest Act and will be proposing an amendment to that effect.

Mr. Speaker, we had, oh, gosh, \$1.25 billion in sole-source, untendered contracts in health care alone in 2012-2013. This Accountability Act, as I said, pertains to just a fraction, 1 per cent, of the whole budget. When the government claims it's in dire financial circumstances, we're suggesting that this apply all across government. The Liberals feel, and rightly so, like many Albertans do, that elimination of sole-source contracts in all but the most extreme circumstances be the practice and that it should be enshrined in legislation.

Now, the current Premier is trying to score political points by eliminating sole-source contracts but not through law. He's trying to do it through Treasury Board directive. Really, this is nothing more than Alberta honouring the terms of trade agreements like TILMA. Mr. Speaker, Albertans will accept no less.

There is a direct correlation between the level of government openness and transparency and the health of our democratic institutions, and the only way for Albertans to really know if government contracts are providing good value for money is if their particulars are made public, tendered out, and put on a website for all to see. In that way, we shouldn't have to rely on a FOIP process to get the information. Every business in Alberta should have an equal chance of prequalifying to be on the province's vendor list. This should not be a case where businesses with close ties to cabinet or the PC Party are the first amongst equals.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, also, the Liberals feel that a very important thing that the Premier promised he would do he hasn't done in the

Accountability Act. We feel it's time to return to consolidated budget formats. That should be in the Accountability Act. The Auditor General himself has said that these aren't budgetary practices that are easy to report on.

Mr. Speaker, the other couple of things that we really need – I think I have just a couple of minutes here. Open data: let's have more government data publicly available for all Albertans to see. Government spends the money of the people. The people are entitled to find out how their money is being spent, where it's being spent, and what the accountability measures are. We need to have meaningful accountability.

Whistle-blower legislation was passed. Frankly, it makes whistle-blowing tougher than ever. We need real, meaningful whistle-blowing legislation. That should also be in this act, and it's conspicuously absent.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to see legislated accountability in health care. When I was an independent member, every other opposition party agreed at that time to legislate health care wait times. We're spending 74 per cent more today with Alberta Health Services than we were seven years ago. The population is only up 15 per cent, and we're a younger province.

The ministry will no longer report on the 56 measures – Mr. Speaker, you were minister of health at the time – publicly at the 90th percentile on a quarterly basis. They won't report that anymore. Instead, it's 16 measures at the median twice a year. That's a problem: the number one spending issue, 45 per cent of government spending, and the government will not report.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Liberals support the current bill, but we support it with amendments to make it the bill that Albertans deserve.

I thank you for the opportunity to participate in this debate. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Seeing no one, let us move to the leader of the ND opposition.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak for the first time on Bill 2, the Alberta Accountability Act. Now, I will say that I find this act somewhat ironic and certainly somewhat symbolic of the record of this government under its new management over the course of the last, I was reminded today, 90 days, I believe. You know, there was much hoopla made out of the fact that everything was going to be different with the new leader. It was like there had been some fairy dust sprinkled over the other 59 members of this caucus, and they suddenly changed into brand new people and were completely disconnected from the record of which they had been a part prior to the selection of the current Premier.

As part of that narrative which they are so desperately attempting to communicate to Albertans, which, I would suggest, is only very cautiously and marginally being processed, let alone accepted, they were going to clear the decks and actually hose down the government with Mr. Clean and make it fresh and sparkling and lemon scented. It was going to be like one of those amazing commercials, you know, where the kitchen suddenly gets really clean after it's been a real mess. That's what was going to happen under this incredibly inspiring new piece of legislation. That's what we were promised.

Like other things that I have observed, more recently over the last 30, 45 days or so, sometimes the delivery is a little underwhelming in relation to the hoopla associated with the promise. I have to say that this act is probably one of the best

examples of the underdelivery problem that, I would suggest, the new management is struggling with right now.

Let me just say that this bill does not by any means secure or guarantee a new level of trustworthiness, openness, transparency, or accountability. Quite the opposite. Now, I will grant you that, you know, this government had a very large mountain to climb, I mean, because there were so many different things and elements that, really, this government needed to address in order to successfully hose themselves down with Mr. Clean. There was just so much stuff to clean up. It wasn't just one kitchen; it was like a block full of frat houses that needed to be hosed down and cleaned up.

You know, it was a bit of a legislative challenge to actually come up with a comprehensive answer to all the malfeasance that Albertans have been subjected to over the course of the last – oh, I don't know. I'm going to pick a number. I'm going to say six years because that's how long I've been elected. I know it actually goes much farther back than that, but I'm just going to pull "six" out of my hat and go with that. Certainly, it was a very steep hill to climb, and I understand that maybe they have not yet reached base camp on this. Fair enough. They're trying, and that's great, but it truly doesn't get it to where it needs to go.

What do we have in this bill? Essentially, we have a few legislative changes that for the most part amount to slightly better than window dressing, the actual legislative changes. I say this because I spent many months reviewing the conflicts-of-interest legislation in committee, and I spent many months reviewing the lobbyists legislation in committee, and I spent many months reviewing the election finances legislation. There's a lot of stuff that needs to be fixed, Mr. Speaker.

You know, there are actually reports out there, that are 200 or 300 pages long, filled with recommendations that would actually make this government accountable. This government picked one or two or three or four off of those 300 pages and then threw itself a party. So the cooling-off period has moved from six months to 12 months. Well, you know, there's low-hanging fruit, and then there's fruit that's actually been laying in the yard for a couple of years, and that's kind of what we're at right now because pretty much the rest of the country has moved to that 12 months already. So these guys throwing themselves a party for moving from six months to 12 months is, again, part of that overpromising, underdelivering kind of routine that we're seeing from them.

Definitely, without question, I agree with the previous speakers that they represent teeny-weeny incremental changes and improvements, those small sort of window-dressing legislative changes that were made. You know, sort of imagine an incremental approach to improving accountabilities much like these folks wanted to take an incremental approach to implementing human rights. Same kind of thing.

Anyway, there were a few improvements made that have already been outlined. Of course, probably the biggest pieces of this that the Premier dined out on were the issues of sole-source contracting and severances. Those were probably the ones that he spent the most time dining out on with the media and with potential supporters. The problem is, though, that they're not in here as pieces of legislation; they are in here as directives to the Treasury Board. I'm not entirely sure, but I think that, basically, what that means is that when we had the nicely arranged little conversation with the media yesterday, where it was explained that these Treasury Board directives would be made, quite honestly it is absolutely possible for them to have already undone them and not told us. That's how much clarity and certainty exists with these directives.

To promise legislation on something and then replace it with a Treasury Board directive, I mean, is classic bait and switch, folks. It's really classic. I'm not even, you know, being particularly inflammatory. If you looked up "bait and switch" in the dictionary, they would give an example of exactly this. And those were the two main components of the so-called accountability legislation. So we have a bit of a problem.

3:50

The other thing, of course, that I want to say is that I do find it ironic that the two flagship pieces of legislation that this Premier is bringing in are pieces of legislation undoing or attempting to undo the history of his caucus. Again, I would suggest that Albertans might be prepared to consider a different solution to that problem, but we'll get to that later.

So we have this bill that really underdelivers. What are some of the things that we're not dealing with in Bill 2? Well, we're not dealing with the provisions in the election finances act that allow a \$450,000 cheque to be written to this PC government immediately prior to the election when the writer of that cheque is in the midst of lobbying for hundreds of millions of dollars from this government. Call me crazy, but I think Albertans think that's the kind of accountability piece that they would like to see addressed.

Some Hon. Members: Crazy.

Ms Notley: Thanks.

My Wildrose colleagues suggest that I am being absolutely demanding and crazy in suggesting that we might want to put an end to those \$450,000 E minus seven cheques to the government by people in the midst of lobbying for hundreds of millions of dollars of grant money. So there's an example.

Another example is the degree to which members of the government caucus, who clearly have enhanced access to senior public officials and decision-makers in the bureaucracy, are able to lobby specifically for issues that directly impact their businesses. To me, that's kind of your classic, textbook case of conflict of interest, yet somehow that situation was reviewed and deemed okely-dokely under the current legislation. I would suggest that maybe what we ought to do is fix the legislation so that we don't have those kinds of decisions made in the future because it's . . . [interjections] Look at that. Yeah. It's kind of like *The Simpsons* as well. It's sort of like a Mr. Burns move, really, some of the decision-making that's going on over there. Yes, if someone over there wants to start petting their cat, I think probably that was what was happening while this legislation was being drafted. Anyway. So there's that. You know, we'd like to see that kind of thing removed.

We would also like to see the situation where we have the foremost, most important environmental regulatory agency in the province, which is making major decisions about the future of this province – we would like the people who are appointed to lead that to be subject to very rigorous conflict-of-interest legislation. Why would we want that? Well, because this government has chosen to appoint people who are leaders from within the very industry that is supposed to be regulated. Again, kind of textbook. If you looked up "regulatory capture," there would be a picture of the AER and its current chair beside the definition. Again, that's the kind of conflict of interest that should be closely monitored. Is it? Nope. Is the conflict-of-interest commissioner able to investigate this? Nope. Does this person report to the conflict-of-interest commissioner? Nope. That's the kind of thing that true accountability would have brought into play but has not.

There are other examples that I'd like to talk about, but I will probably spend some time getting into more of the things that should be included in this by way of talking about why this piece of legislation – while it's all great that we have it named, what we really want to do is actually provide for accountability. The way to do that, Mr. Speaker, is to ensure that a committee that has the true parameters to look at all the pieces of legislation that govern accountability is able to do that. The way this is currently drafted, it's so limited. We're probably going to be told we're not able to actually have the expansive conversation in Committee of the Whole that is required to turn this into a true accountability bill. So what we need to do instead is refer this matter to an all-party committee so that we can look more expansively at those parts of legislation that would at least get us to the base camp of the mountain that needs to be climbed by this government in its effort to ascend to minimal levels of trust, integrity, and accountability to Albertans.

I would like, then, as a result, to propose an amendment, Mr. Speaker, and if you would like, I will hand my amendment over to the pages and wait for it to be distributed.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We'll allow the pages to distribute the amendment. Would they bring one to me immediately as well?

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, if you like, you can read it into the record if it's not too long and then proceed with your debate.

Is that acceptable to all members?

It's not too long, so why don't you read it into the record and proceed onward with your debate on it? We have approval to proceed in that manner.

Ms Notley: I think I actually inadvertently gave out all the copies.

The Speaker: I'm sorry. We have pages who are distributing the copies right now, so carry on with your discussion on the amendment.

Ms Notley: Thank you so much. What I would like to do is move that the motion for second reading of Bill 2, Alberta Accountability Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 2, Alberta Accountability Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

In support of my amendment, Mr. Speaker, as I already started to touch on, the fact of the matter is that there are a number of issues that need to be addressed in order to secure for Albertans true faith in the accountability and trustworthiness of their government. Unfortunately, because the subjects touched on with this bill are so narrowly defined, there are a number of issues which we can't get to.

Now, I've spoken about a couple of them, but I'd like to talk about just a couple more. Albertans were quite concerned fairly recently to observe the practice of a member of cabinet using public dollars in the course of a by-election campaign to queue-jump a project, in contravention of sort of the clearly understood public criteria for that project, as part of an election campaign. That, of course, in my view, amounts to a very serious breach of public duty and ministerial responsibility and could be argued to be a conflict of interest. We'll see. I do understand that's under investigation.

Nonetheless, regardless of the outcome of the investigation in that particular case one way to be sure that it doesn't happen again

is to amend the legislation to ensure that that kind of thing cannot happen. The best way to do that is to amend our Election Act in a way similar to what's been done in, say, Manitoba to basically ban the by-election bonus practice. So that's yet another example.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Bilous: On 29(2)(a). Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am curious to hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's last couple of points. She had begun to describe some of the changes that she would have liked to have seen in this act, and I'm very curious to hear her thoughts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for giving me that opportunity. As I said, there are several things which may not be ruled in order as appropriate amendments to this legislation but could be talked about in committee were this amendment to be passed by this Assembly. I've talked about trying to avoid the by-election bonus.

4:00

Another one is one that I refer to as the PC Party clause. I believe it's the current Attorney General that will recall the debate that we've had in the past, where the limitation periods for financial transgressions under the Election Act were conveniently amended by this government to ensure that one could not go very far back to review or investigate what would otherwise be illegal donations under the Election Act by public bodies to any political party. But, of course, our concern was specifically with the governing political party because one worries about the negative impact that has on the integrity of governance as a whole.

What happened was that this PC government – I can't remember now if it was 2012 or 2013, but amendments were made to the election finances act to essentially prohibit or limit the period of time that investigations could happen. Of course, there had been public conversations about the fact that some of these inappropriate donations appeared to or had been alleged to have been made outside of the limitation period that the government had conveniently imposed upon the Chief Electoral Officer, so the Chief Electoral Officer was banned from engaging in a comprehensive investigation of that. Now, that, to me, again goes to the heart of the issue of government accountability, yet we are not able to deal with it.

So, clearly, we would like to amend that part of the Election Act because that would get us to genuine accountability. Because the accountability bill that's being brought forward right now doesn't include any amendments to the Election Act, I am concerned that we will be unable to make amendments that would bring in those changes.

Same kind of thing is in relation to what I refer to as the building Alberta clause, and that just relates to the kinds of issues that we've been discussing for the last week and a half, where, you know, we know that our infrastructure is now probably the single biggest crisis, or the second-biggest crisis after the oil crisis, I suppose, facing this province right now because no one has been investing in infrastructure for a decade. So now communities are desperately in need of infrastructure, and it is integrally linked to the quality of public service that is provided. Now we have this question of: how is infrastructure and funding decision-making done? What we need is to make sure that there is

absolute integrity, transparency, clarity, and objectivity injected into that process. We have a clear history of that being the exact opposite here in Alberta, so what we need is to ensure that we actually inject that accountability in.

So we would like to see amendments made to legislation that would deal with that issue, once again probably outside the scope of this very, very, very narrow so-called accountability bill. That's another reason why we would urge, our caucus would urge, members of this Assembly to support our motion to have this so-called accountability bill referred to a committee, where we could talk more expansively about the many, many pieces of legislation that need to be brought into this discussion if we are going to truly bring about any semblance of accountability to this 43-year-old government, which, just by the way, didn't land here 90 days ago, has actually been here quite some time.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Twenty seconds remaining in 29(2)(a).

If not, then we will label this amendment R1. Everyone is now able to speak for up to 15 minutes should they wish, and then 29(2)(a) will be available.

Are there any other speakers to amendment R1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak in favour of this amendment that my hon. colleague the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona just put forward. First of all, I'm glad to have the opportunity to speak. This is the first time that I'm speaking to Bill 2, the Alberta Accountability Act. There are quite a few things that I want to share with members of the Assembly on this bill, but because this is my first time rising to speak to the amendment, which is going to refer this back to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future – I think that the amendment makes a lot of sense.

I mean, you know, quite frankly, there are a lot of issues that this bill doesn't deal with. In its current state it's woefully inadequate. Now, you know, my surprise, Mr. Speaker, was that, again, this bill was touted as the centrepiece of this fall sitting for the PC government, and it falls very short in dealing with a myriad of issues that would actually bring transparency and accountability to all members of the House.

In keeping my speaking to the amendment, I'll just go through some of the reasons as to why I feel that this should be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future. Like I said, it is a baby step in the right direction, but it doesn't go far enough. I'll save the bulk of my comments on the bill for after this amendment. You know, there are certain areas that should have been included in this bill, as the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona had said as well. The cooling-off periods should be a lot longer when you look at other jurisdictions. Increasing it from what it is currently to 12 months doesn't quite go far enough, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to see the Conflicts of Interest Act amended so that it applies to people employed by government agencies. You know, I can think of two that I think should fall under the purview of the Conflicts of Interest Act, and those are the Alberta Energy Regulator and Alberta Health Services. I think Albertans would very much like to know. In the spirit of transparency they would like to see legislation that compels the government to publicly disclose criteria for determining public infrastructure priorities, investments, whether it's in the form of a list, but something that's very, very clear that Albertans can see. That way if there is a change on that list, the government is a lot more beholden to Albertans as far as having to explain why projects are shifted

around as opposed to where we are currently, which is in the dark, Mr. Speaker. That's something that I would have liked to have seen in this bill, and I think there was a real opportunity when the bill was being written.

I'd like to see, Mr. Speaker, the Chief Electoral Officer with the ability to investigate improper donations – and we're talking about political election donations – because at the moment there are extremely short timelines with which the Chief Electoral Officer is able to investigate any, you know, alleged improper donations. I think we need to give him or her a broader scope and the ability to investigate with a larger timeline.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to see, as well, changes to this act as far as, you know, promises that are made during elections, especially by-elections, which could be perceived as trying to garner support or votes from constituents. Using one's position to jump the queue to go to the top of the list in order to secure much-needed infrastructure or resources, I think, quite frankly, is wrong and should be disallowed. That's something that the Alberta NDP has spoken on for a number of years so far as disallowing queue-jumping. That's one other area that this bill fails to address, which I wish it really would.

4:10

Now, there is an opportunity, of course, when we move into Committee of the Whole to make some amendments to this bill. Similar to my colleagues in the other opposition parties, the Alberta NDP will be bringing forward amendments to this bill as well. You know, Mr. Speaker, what may make more sense here is to just send this bill to committee, which would ensure that we write it and we get it done correctly the first time. The Member for Airdrie already was hoping for new legislation down the road that is an amendment to this act. I think we have a real opportunity to just get it right as opposed to having to bring forward legislation to correct past mistakes.

Interestingly, Mr. Speaker, one of the other centrepiece bills happens to undo the first bill of this current sitting government. Maybe the face has changed as far as who's leading the government, but ironically it was the same group minus three who brought forward a bill that's now being repealed. So it's interesting to see mistakes being made, advice being ignored, and we end up back in the same position. This amendment would save us the time and hassle of going through that, and I will strongly encourage all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to amendment R1?

I see no others. Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 2 lost]

The Speaker: We are back to the main debate at second reading on Bill 2. Let's see who we have. We're now into the ping-pong, so to speak, starting with a government member, then the Official Opposition, then a Liberal member, and then an ND member if there are any other speakers.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It seems the cat has all of my colleagues' tongues. I rise to speak to Bill 2 and to outline some of my comments on the reading of this.

Now, again, this bill does amend various acts that are intended to strengthen accountability and transparency. You know, one of the things that I find fascinating ever since I got elected is the names of the bills. Sometimes up is down and black is white, and it's almost the opposite of what is written in the bill.

This bill, as I mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, falls shorter than what I would have liked to have seen in an accountability act. A lot of the changes are fairly minor with what is needed to truly strengthen accountability and will have, in my opinion, very little impact or effect. Some of the challenges are, again, that instead of this bill making firm commitments to the changes that are going to be made to legislation, the government is asking for us to once again trust them as daddy knows best. Now, unfortunately, we have all been here and in the situation of, "Trust us, trust us, trust us," and then, whoops, things finally come to light and are taken to an extreme.

To give some examples here, there were severance payments of over \$1.3 million – and I'm talking about within the last eight months – to the political staff of she who must not be named, some of whom worked only for a few short months before getting a very lavish severance. I've got a few statistics here just in case some of the members either disagree that it's not lavish or, you know – this is something that Albertans really couldn't get their heads around, someone who works as a political staffer for several months and then receives severance packages in the hundreds of thousands. She who must not be named, her former chief of staff took home over \$300,000 in severance, Mr. Speaker, plus an extra \$50,000 of earnings in lieu of benefits and vacation pay of over \$38,000. She who must not be named, her principal secretary and former federal Conservative MP ended up walking out with almost \$200,000 in severance. She who must not be named, her former communications director received over \$100,000 in severance.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I mean, nobody is arguing that severance shouldn't exist in positions that are quite volatile; the issue, that I've heard overwhelmingly from my constituents and Albertans, is when these amounts are completely out of touch with the reality of Albertans. There is no Albertan that I've spoken to or known who, you know, in the span of six months working in a job can earn a severance package or payout of over \$100,000. It seems a little absurd to me. Let me tell you that there was an opportunity to deal with that and ensure that that doesn't happen in the future, and unfortunately this bill falls short of dealing with it.

One of the interesting things is that, you know, two changes made in this bill are being done through Treasury Board directives as opposed to through legislation. One of the challenges that I have is that details need to be included and done through legislation, where we can have an open and honest debate, where all members of different political parties can weigh in with their constituents' perspective and also their political parties' perspective. But as soon as we take details out of legislation and put them into either regulations or directives, now decisions will be made behind closed doors. There isn't an opportunity for genuine public input, and that, if anything, obscures information and goes in the opposite direction of accountability and transparency, quite frankly.

Something that I appreciate in this bill is that high-level political staff will now be subject to the same conflict-of-interest principles that MLAs currently are. Now, one of the questions that I have, Mr. Speaker, is: what kind of enforcement is going to be existing in order to ensure that these staff now adhere to these conflict-of-interest principles? There are examples in the past where I've been confused as to how the laws have been interpreted by former ethics commissioners. I'm not calling into

question the judgment of our current Ethics Commissioner, but there were decisions in the past that made me and Albertans scratch our heads. I'm talking about, you know, an MLA who was involved in policy decisions around builders' liens, that was deemed not to be in a conflict of interest just because the builders' liens affect the general public and a broad group of those involved in the construction industry as opposed to the member himself or those very close to him.

I can tell you that when this was being discussed and was, you know, at the top of the minds of many Albertans, there were real questions as to how the legislation was interpreted, how it was carried out, and how what appeared to be a very direct and simple conflict of interest, which was the impression that most Albertans that I've spoken with were under, wasn't interpreted that way, and therefore there was little recourse. You know, that's one of the areas that I was confused around.

4:20

Now, I do appreciate that some language around blind trusts and investment management for securities held by members has been clarified. I think it's a good change. I think it's a fairly minor one, but as I've said from day one, since I've been elected, I have no issues with, you know, giving the government kudos when they make a good decision that I feel benefits all Albertans. I mean, the interesting part is that that hasn't been very often, so I'm happy to say that that was one that I agreed with.

Other minor improvements. Again, as I said, the disclosure forms that political staffers will file and the fact that there'll be an administrative penalty for late filings, I think, are good. The extension of cooling-off periods for former ministers, deputy ministers, senior officials, and the Premier's administrative staff from six to 12 months is a positive step. Again, I would have liked to have seen that extended a little bit longer, to two years. Official staff members now cannot accept contracts from their former departments or act as lobbyists or be a part of organizations or businesses with direct dealings with their departments, and I think that's a positive step as well, Mr. Speaker.

Something that the Alberta NDP brought forward as a recommendation, that I see is in this legislation – we brought it forward in our minority report for the special committee – is that now MLA disclosure statements may be posted to the website of the Ethics Commissioner. Now, we're still not a hundred per cent there because they're not obligated to be posted, but at least they may be, and that's appreciated, when the government takes our recommendations.

Let's see here, Mr. Speaker. What else can I comment on in this bill?

One thing that I would have liked to have seen is a recommendation that was brought forward from the review committee last year, the idea that the Ethics Commissioner should be able to initiate investigations into alleged breaches where he or she has reasonable grounds to believe that a contravention of the act has occurred. I mean, the reason for this is that the Ethics Commissioner is, you know, theoretically the person with the most information about an MLA or staff activities through disclosure statements, and he or she is also the person with the most knowledge and understanding of the conflict-of-interest legislation and standards, so he or she is better placed to determine whether something needs investigating as opposed to just the general public. That's something that would have been nice to have included in this bill.

Again, the changes to section 25 are still quite limited, quite narrow, so the Ethics Commissioner is still limited in launching, again, his or her own investigations where he or she believes that

members' staffers breached conditions. The act as well, in my opinion, should allow for anonymous tips to trigger investigations, Mr. Speaker. The recommendation, obviously, wasn't built into this, but by disallowing it or not bringing it into the bill, likely the government has deliberately made it more difficult and less likely for people to report suspected contraventions to the Ethics Commissioner.

Again, I think that it's especially true, Mr. Speaker, for those who would have the most knowledge of possible contraventions, which are those working in the public service, who might be rightly concerned about their employment security if reported. Again, this brings me back to a piece of legislation we debated last year, which was the whistle-blower protection, which was extremely watered down and really not going to protect the very folks who can provide the best oversight and feedback. So that's something that, again, should have been included in this bill, and it would have given it much more teeth.

As far as some of the changes to the Lobbyists Act, the way that it's currently written, Mr. Speaker, is a little bit of a concern. For example, legislation previously required public servant positions and their term of office to be included – oh, I'm speaking of a return, and now it only applies to public servants who've held their positions within the last two years. That brings questions to mind. I don't know if two years is sufficient. It means that if more than two years have passed, in other words, any connections to the government as a paid consultant or a lobbyist may not be known. Again, we're looking at imposing very short timelines and decreasing the ability to investigate and to look into lobbyists and ensure that that is being reported publicly.

You know, Mr. Speaker, this bill has quite a few changes, again, some not as significant as we would have liked. We will be bringing forward amendments, so at the moment I will likely be supporting this and hope and urge the minister and all members of the Assembly to seriously consider amendments coming forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

I see no one. Are there any other speakers at second? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak to this important bill, Bill 2, Alberta Accountability Act, to the principles of the bill. Who could question the value of accountability, which goes hand in hand with transparency, which are two terms that we hear over and over and over again from every new administration in Alberta since I became elected 10 years ago? Clearly, there is a need for rebuilding trust in this province, a key issue for this government, after 43 years and a progressive loss of trust and accountability, as we've seen, well, certainly in the last few years more powerfully than ever.

Albertans, first and foremost, want to believe that government is there to act in their interest and not only their interest but in the long-term interest, not the short-term, financial bottom-line interest, on everything. But the decisions, the processes that we follow, the access to information, the ability for citizens to hold a government accountable for its decisions, whether it be on spending or policy decisions, whether it be the funding that goes to nonprofit societies or charitable organizations or to publicly funded institutions or, indeed, to subsidize the oil industry: all of these have a show of return on investment for citizens and taxpayers, and that's been sorely lacking.

We welcome the opportunity to again raise issues of public accountability, conflicts of interest, the appointments process, which increasingly has been called into question, not least because

a man who has championed that cause in coming into the leadership of the PC Party has already appointed half a dozen people without the same respect for due process and, in some cases, even elections. There's lots of skepticism, lots of cynicism in politics today, and I think there's a serious need to again address the issue. Words are one thing; actions have to follow the words. I think that people are watching carefully to see that this government actually is not only under new management but that they are actually going to provide the kind of openness and responsiveness and adherence to basic principles of honesty and integrity and due process that most citizens respect and most corporations respect. We've got a long way to go.

4:30

This bill proposes to amend the Conflicts of Interest Act, the Lobbyists Act, and the Public Service Act and undo the legacy of the last 20 years, where increasingly people have lost a sense of both direction for this government and respect in terms of their interests being represented. Not that any individual over there would violate some of these principles in their own personal lives, but collectively it seems that behind closed doors, when political interests and financial interests actually come to the fore and a small group of men and women make the decisions, it consistently seems to happen that political advantage and financial advantage seem to be the norm in Alberta.

Albertans, understandably, are fed up, Mr. Speaker. There's a consistent message that I get that if people are still engaged in any way in the political process – if they are still engaged – there is a tremendous skepticism and a tremendous sense, in some cases, of despair that we're going to see any improvements in the quality of political decision-making, long-term planning, any kind of vision that reflects the values of our children and our grandchildren and, as the First Nations would say, seven generations from now, as opposed to short-term personal political interests that continue to dominate, as we've experienced.

The key changes, as the bill proposes, would extend the cooling-off period for elected officials, political staff, and senior civil servants who leave government to a full year from six months. Presently the Conflicts of Interest Act specifically prohibits former ministers from accepting employment or soliciting or accepting a contract or benefit from a department of the public service or a provincial agency with which the former minister had significant dealings during the former minister's last year of service as a minister for a period of 12 months after ceasing to be a member of Executive Council. The Conflicts of Interest Act places similar restrictions on former political staff members for a period of six months, which is progress, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy ministers and other senior civil servants identified in the regulations are also presently subject to a six-month cooling-off period pursuant to the Public Service Act. Politicians and political staff must now wait a full year after leaving government before taking on lobbyist work, and breaking this rule has a fine associated with it of \$50,000. High-ranking political staffers must now disclose financial conflicts of interest, and these will be published online. Late filers could be fined up to \$500.

The bill introduces rules to enforce the distinction between government consultants and registered lobbyists. A single person can no longer work as a consultant informing government at the same time as he's working as a lobbyist attempting to influence government. What a shock, Mr. Speaker, that we're dealing with this in 2014, that somebody can't be a consultant and a lobbyist at the same time. Wow.

Rules concerning gifts and benefits are more detailed, and noncommercial travel, say a trip to Fort McMurray on an oil executive's jet, is now subject to tougher rules and must be disclosed within 30 days.

Also, the power of the Ethics Commissioner has been significantly expanded. At the same time we're concerned that the power of the Ethics Commissioner to exempt ministers from the cooling-off period has been in place and has been used by this government in the case of Evan Berger from southern Alberta. The former agriculture minister, after he was not elected, was then appointed to a similar role in agriculture. Appalling commentary on the current rules and the Ethics Commissioner at the time.

So some of these look like positives, and there's no question that we can support these.

One of the things it doesn't do despite earlier intimations from the Premier is that the bill does not amend the Financial Administration Act, which requires the province's finances to be presented in a clear, consolidated format, or require biannual report cards on the province's savings.

The other big issue, I guess, that we've been raising consistently in the House is the issue of an independent commission to manage public appointments in Alberta. This does seem like a no-brainer, and I'm certainly puzzled, personally, why this would not be embraced by a Premier who wants to distance himself from charges of cronyism and favouritism and failure to honour his commitment to merit over Tory connections. But it doesn't appear that that's going to fly with this government.

In Ontario the Public Appointments Secretariat independently manages the recruitment and vetting process for candidates seeking appointments to agencies, boards, and commissions. It was set up 23 years ago, incidentally, under Bob Rae's NDP government. It's interesting that this government can't see 23 years later that that is a very reasonable and responsible decision, to distance itself from the charges of favouritism and cronyism which continue to plague this government.

The Premier was a key member of the federal Conservative government that brought in the public appointments commission in 2006, a body that was supposed to be the centrepiece of Stephen Harper's much-touted accountability policy, and the mandate was virtually the same as the Ontario Public Appointments Secretariat. In theory the public appointments commission was supposed to oversee the hiring process for hundreds of federal boards and agencies. It could do so here with great benefit to both this PC government and to the public. All of us, I think, could feel better about appointments if it was an independent commission.

In announcing the Alberta Accountability Act, the Premier said that his cabinet will appoint people on boards and agencies strictly on merit and not on political or personal ties. However, without any independent vetting of prospective candidates the Premier will still be able to appoint people according to his own biases and narrow definition of merit. We've seen examples of this already with the appointments of Ron Hoffman and former Conservative MPs Jay Hill and Rob Merrifield. So it's clear that the Premier will not hesitate to appoint political friends and colleagues to positions that he chooses.

Somehow these are different, according to the Premier. They "were carefully selected as the most qualified people for the position," to quote his news conference on September 24, 2014. Notwithstanding the Premier's assurances the only real way to ensure that public appointments are based strictly on merit is to take them out of the governing party's hands. It's a no-brainer; have an independent commission manage the recruitment and vetting process for prospective candidates. Again, it's unlikely to

happen, Mr. Speaker, and raises serious questions about how serious this government is in relation to changing the channel on accountability and transparency.

We on this side of the House would also like to see an independent budget officer modelled after the federal parliamentary budget office. This would provide more confidence and more objective, I think, reporting and accountability.

We certainly support the cooling-off period for elected officials and political staff and senior civil servants. What we would like to see are some penalties for those who flout the new rules. We would also insist on the closure of the loophole which allows a cooling-off period to be waived by the Ethics Commissioner.

The elimination of sole-source contracts is welcome. It's incredible, again, that we're dealing with the issue of sole-source contracts in 2014 as a continued thorn in this government's side. We would repeat calls for the government to disclose particulars of all contracts valued at \$10,000 or greater. Particularly, I find it egregious that P3s are not made public. These are an increasing vehicle for this government to hide its debt and to give the impression that we are further down the line in terms of infrastructure than we are. It's troubling to me that despite these kinds of favourable arrangements, studies continue to show they benefit far more the corporations than they do the long-term public interest. Despite that, we still can't get access to these contracts. I guess I would wonder if that should not also be part of this accountability act.

4:40

There is a prohibition against stacking of smaller contracts, and we certainly support that and condemn in no uncertain terms the past practices of stacking the smaller contracts.

This side believes and we've said since 1993 that government appointments should be advertised, interviewed, and decided on through impartial bodies such as the personnel administration office and the Public Service Commissioner. That we said in 1993. There's no question that much of what this government talks about is excellent public policy, and they won't find any objection to it here. What we would like them to do is to do it fully the first time, show a real commitment to having the best, strongest independent decision-making around finances and appointments of anywhere in this country, not just the claims but the reality.

In October 2014 the Auditor General made it clear that the government's own procurement rules and those established under the province's various trade agreements – the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, for example; the agreement on international trade; the New West Partnership; and the agreement on government procurement – were not followed in the awarding of contracts to Navigator, for example. Of course, the excuse was that this was an emergency.

We clearly also agree that there is a need to return to a consolidated budget format. We endorsed that in 2014 in a policy resolution and are pleased to see that. It's of note that past Treasury Board presidents in the PC Party also supported that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, hon. members, if anyone wishes to take advantage of it.

If not, are there any other speakers at second?

I see none, so the hon. member to close debate.

Mr. Denis: I would just like to thank each one of the members for their contribution, and I would move that we close debate.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 2 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 11 Savings Management Repeal Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll keep my comments brief. You know, I really just wanted to mention the fact that, well, Albertans need to be reminded that this was a bill – I believe it was the centrepiece of this current government under a different leader – that was the centrepiece of this government, and now it's being repealed, which I find very, very interesting.

We are in support of the repeal, so we are in support of this bill, as we were opposed to this government's Bill 1, the Savings Management Act, which had those very contentious and untested social impact bonds, and we spoke at length as far as our concern. The bill was introduced in March of 2014 and came into force on April 1, and it's kind of ironic that eight months later here we are discussing it yet again. Only this time it's being completely yanked.

The concern, very quickly, Madam Chair, was the fact that the bonds were profit-driven, government-funded business deals. They were about, you know, providing investment dollars, not about public services. Many people had spoken against this concept. Now, let's see here. To quote Ricardo Acuña, who is the executive director of the Parkland Institute, his comments about social impact bonds: the reality is that these schemes will only serve to further pad the bank accounts of wealthy investors while turning the very concept of public services on its head and eliminating funding for a broad range of projects and activities.

Madam Chair, one of our biggest concerns was that this was effectively a way for the government to yank or hold back dollars for services that the government should be providing. You know, our social programs are very, very crucial – many Albertans rely on them – and this untested method of using social impact bonds was the cause of a major concern.

Basically, Madam Chair, when we look at the value of our public programs and services, they need to be properly and adequately funded. So the theme of today and especially this month, looking at the price of a barrel of oil and how much it's dropped, really should spur this government on to having conversations about other ways to ensure that we have a steady revenue stream and that everything from schools and hospitals to roads and municipalities will and should have stable, predictable funding. But as long as a large percentage of government revenue comes from the volatile prices of our natural resources, it basically means that, you know, whether it's a hip replacement for grandma or a classroom with an appropriate number of students as opposed to 40 or 50 in a classroom, we are dependent on the price of a barrel of oil, which seems quite ridiculous.

Again, I'm happy to see that this bill is going to repeal the Savings Management Act, but I do find it interesting that not eight months ago there were a number of MLAs on the other side that vehemently spoke in favour of Bill 1 and how fantastic it was. I believe there was unanimous support on the PC side for this bill. I don't think there was any member that was opposed to it. I know

our caucus, the Alberta NDP caucus, was opposed to it, and I believe there were other members of the House as well. I find it very, very fascinating, Madam Chair, that eight months later we're here, and suddenly everyone has changed their tune. Now it's, "Yeah, that was a bad idea; that was a bad idea," but eight months ago it seemed like a brilliant idea for some.

4:50

I think it's important that Albertans are reminded that there are many examples of bills that have been brought forward hastily, poorly written, and without adequate and proper consultation, which then have to get yanked or paused or repealed, Madam Chair. I mean, a great example of this was Bill 10 last week, that has been put on hold because it falls into that category of hastily written, inadequate, and improper consultations. And here we are repealing Bill 1 from the spring.

I will take my seat, Madam Chair. I'm glad to see that this bill has come through. I hope that members opposite are learning lessons with pieces of legislation that shouldn't be brought forward to begin with so that they don't waste the time of the Assembly and we don't have to sit here and repeal bill after bill. Like I said, I find it quite ironic that we're here.

Well, there you go. I just found my numbers. I guess our oil revenues contribute about 25 per cent of our revenues. You know, as long as we are heavily reliant on that to fund our day-to-day and our programming, those services and programs will always be in flux or on the brink of being underfunded. I mean, should something happen, then the funding gets yanked out from under them. There's a list of education programming cuts and human services cuts in 2013 that affected thousands of Albertans, and Albertans are still reeling from a lot of those cuts.

You know, it's quite frustrating. I often get asked, Madam Chair, by Albertans who look and recognize the fact that Alberta is the wealthiest not just province in the country, but we're one of the wealthiest jurisdictions in North America, yet we can't adequately fund our schools, our roads, our hospitals, our bridges. Our municipalities all have skyrocketing infrastructure debt, which is basically kicking the can down the road and placing a burden on future generations. That, I find, is very disingenuous and completely unnecessary.

If we actually addressed the issues facing the province today with an open mind and a frank discussion, we should have the amenities, the services, and the dollars to ensure that our facilities are well maintained and that we have the programs being offered while simultaneously building up our heritage savings account and not drawing the interest out of it every year to pay for operational purposes. Those dollars should be left for the long term. We should be looking at truly diversifying our economy beyond, you know, the rip-and-chip mentality, Madam Chair. As my colleagues have often spoken about, we are strong advocates of value-added, of upgrading our product here in the province, keeping the quality of long-term jobs here, and ensuring that we have the dollars to provide the services and amenities that Albertans rely upon.

With that, Madam Chair, I will take my seat. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any others who wish to comment or question? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. This is my first opportunity to rise to speak to Bill 11, the Savings Management Repeal Act. This act continues a theme of this session. I might call

it the do-over session. It's just one big do-over. Everything that these guys were absolutely, fully committed to, they were passionate about, they were going to change the world eight months ago, well, now we're going to have a do-over. We're reversing, you know, reversing our plans. Bill 1: do-over. Bill 2: let's prevent ourselves from being super unaccountable, for lack of a more inflammatory term, and because we kind of have been in the past, so this is our signal of a do-over. Then we have Bill 11, which is do-over 3.0. That's what this one is, so there you go.

It's really tempting to do the whole I told you so thing because on most of these do-overs, of course, we did in fact tell you so, and this is one of them. When this awe-inspiringly aspirational piece of life-changing legislation was introduced with much fanfare last spring – Bill 1, was it? – I believe in March 2014, the world was going to be a much better place thanks to it. Now, of course, we are repealing it.

In principle we are in favour of repealing it because at the time we had some fairly serious concerns about it. One of the things that we were most concerned about, of course, was its authorization of this new experiment called social impact bonds, which we were deeply suspicious of and deeply concerned would ultimately result in some very serious wastes of money along with the commercialization and marketization of, generally, people's suffering throughout the province. So there were a lot of reasons why we were truly not in favour of it, and we are certainly glad that this is something that we are now backing away from.

As my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has already noted, savings and financial management, you know, is not as complicated as everybody might suggest or as this legislation's predecessor would have suggested. It's just about having more revenue than expenditure and having the commitment in the value of the public service, in the public interest to ensure that you generate adequate revenue even when it involves asking your well-heeled friends and insiders to forgo a fourth condo in Hawaii and instead pay a fair level of income tax.

That's really what leadership comes down to, and most other jurisdictions have managed to demonstrate that leadership. Here, this government has been coasting on a windfall over which they really had no responsibility. Now we're in a position where we seem to have a big gap between our spending and our revenue. So this bill was designed to do a bunch of things in theory to address that, although we never believed that that's actually what this bill would have achieved — not the bill that we are discussing, but the bill that this bill is repealing is what I'm referring to — and instead was getting into lots of exciting new ways to generally subvert the most direct path towards the provision of good public service with a whole bunch of money-making opportunities for, you guessed it, friends and insiders.

It's good that we're backing away from it, but I would also suggest that as we do that, we should also pair it with a simple, honest debate. I won't use the "conversation" word because it's still on my blacklist of words, but a simple, honest dialogue, shall we say, a forum, with Albertans about: "What are the services we want? What are the services we're prepared to pay for? Do we think the folks that are really, really doing super, super well in this province, maybe, they might want to start paying their fair share instead of capitalizing on the free ride?" You know, whether or not we're prepared to have that discussion with Albertans. I think that we would then not be compelled to play all these games: you know, which account we're putting which money into at which point.

5:00

In any event, we are not going to spend a lot of time on this except to say that we do support, for the most part, the repeal. We would like to see the government commit to responsible savings. The government has found a new statistic on Norway which, I think, does not take into account all the money that they've saved or that's in a separate fund. Nonetheless, you know, there are examples out there of responsible financial management when one is in the position of being a steward over an unprecedented amount of windfall in nonrenewable resource revenue, and there are the examples set by this province, and those are two separate things.

I would suggest that, going forward, what we need to do is look to those jurisdictions which have more successfully converted that nonrenewable resource into a long-standing asset for not only this generation but generations to come and do so in a way that responsibly balances the budget while maintaining the integrity of public services that support equality of opportunity and fairness in prosperity and all those kinds of good things that we in our caucus think are important to Albertans.

With that, I will take my seat and look forward to further debate on this issue. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any others who would like to comment or question? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm speaking to Bill 11, the Savings Management Repeal Act. This caucus didn't support the Savings Management Act for a number of reasons when it was passed less than a year ago, so we can't say that we object to its repealing now. However, it does raise the opportunity to ask for some consistency, I guess, in the responses across the floor.

During the 2014 PC leadership race our current Premier agreed with Ted Morton about the need to entrench into law a savings formula for the heritage fund so that it can't be changed at the whim of a future government, and he committed to putting 50 per cent of all future government surplus into a debt retirement fund and the other 50 per cent into the heritage fund. Neither of those is found in Bill 11, unfortunately, so it does raise some interesting questions about the opportunity that's missed here if we don't honour our commitment to the heritage savings fund and look at a long-term, nonrenewable resource revenue savings plan for our future.

Again, I can't help but comment on the enthusiasm with which the original Savings Management Act was embraced under the former Premier, her flagship bill in the spring legislative session. There's an irony here and, I guess, again, a question of trust that's being raised when a government within the space of 12 months can unanimously support a bill and then unanimously will now be seen to repeal the bill. It does not give the impression of vision, a plan, leadership. It may be under new management, but it's clearly lacking in the kind of leadership that I think Albertans are wanting to see.

A luminary, the former Finance minister, in supporting this initial Savings Management Act 12 months ago, was quoted as saying:

Albertans have told me they would like to do more with our savings. [This management act] allows us to take a portion of our savings, which we are committed to growing each and every year, and do something meaningful for Albertans.

It highlights, again, the historic abdication of responsibility to future generations when since 1977 \$216 billion was brought into

the heritage fund, and less than 6 per cent of that – less than 6 per cent of that – has been saved, pretty much the same heritage fund that Peter Lougheed left in 1982. In fact, in 1987 this PC government stopped making any deposits at all into the heritage fund.

The Calgary Chamber of Commerce calculated in 2011 that had Alberta continued to save 37 per cent of resource revenue, as was the case under Peter Lougheed, the heritage fund would now be worth \$128 billion. What a gift to present to future generations if there had been some leadership here. The government at the time, again in promoting the Savings Management Act, touted that this would ensure that we had the kind of investment in trades and technology and apprenticeships that would help build the skilled workforce that Alberta needs. Somehow that has gone by the wayside. The agriculture and food innovation endowment fund, which had merit in terms of investing in diversification and competitiveness, was also not seen as a priority for this administration.

Again, it just simply raises questions for many people in Alberta, including this side of the House, on just where this government is going and, if there's an election and this government should decide on a new leader, whether we're going to change directions yet again, Madam Chair.

Yes, we will be supporting this repeal act, but it raises serious questions about leadership today in this government and in this province. It's an appeal, I guess, to ask this government to be more thoughtful about its planning, about its consultation, about developing a longer term vision for Alberta, something that people can count on, something that we can have some confidence in and that can give us all a reason to believe that there is a longer term investment in our future, that we're protecting future generations, that we happen to know where we're going, and that we're not going to be chopping and changing every year around new priorities relating to political interests.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 11 in committee?

Are you ready for the question on Bill 11, Savings Management Repeal Act?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 11 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 9

Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to table the first of four Wildrose amendments to Bill 9. I have the requisite copies here.

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause for a moment while we get the amendment distributed. Just give us a minute.

Mr. Rowe: I'm sorry. I didn't hear you.

The Deputy Chair: Just wait a minute until we get some of the copies of the amendment distributed.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you.

5:10

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, while it is being passed out, I'll just let you know that this will be known as amendment A1.

Hon. member, you can proceed.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Madam Chair. This amendment seeks to clarify the difference between rules and bylaws. Bylaws are voted on by the owners and are the binding laws within the condo whereas rules can be made by the board for smaller things which are considered more or less nonessential. This bill in its current state leaves room for boards to establish rules that are overreaching and should require ownership to pass them in the form of a bylaw. This amendment helps clarify the boundaries between rules and bylaws.

I would ask for the co-operation of the members to pass this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members who wish to speak on amendment A1? The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. We've had a chance to look at this amendment, and we actually think this is a good amendment. It's an amendment that helps offer some clarity, and it's an amendment that will help strengthen Bill 9. I stand here to say that I support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on the amendment.

Mr. Bilous: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in favour of this amendment. I think it's important to have clarity when we're looking at the ability for condo boards to write their bylaws, which deals with the issue of governance, and also to clarify procedures that are used.

I also want to thank the Minister of Service Alberta for accepting this amendment. Again, as I've always said, I will give credit where credit is due, and I very much appreciate it when the government accepts amendments that improve and strengthen a bill based on merit and discounting all political partisanship.

With that, I will take my seat and support this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on amendment A1?

Seeing none, shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 9, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014, in committee? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment that I'd like to move on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

The Deputy Chair: Just give us a minute while we distribute the amendment, please. This amendment will be known as A2.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Chair. Shall I read the amendment into *Hansard*?

The Deputy Chair: Yes. Go ahead and read the amendment.

Mr. Bilous: I'm moving on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Calder that Bill 9, the Condominium Property Act, 2014, be amended in section 45 by adding the following after the proposed section 67(1)(a)(iii.1):

- (iii.2) the conduct of a person that has entered into a management agreement with a corporation if that conduct is oppressive or unfairly prejudicial to the corporation, a member of the board, or an owner,

Quite simply, Madam Chair, what this does is that it adds property managers to the people whose conduct is discussed in the act and who can be disciplined for inappropriate conduct under the act.

Now, Madam Chair, this is important because many condo boards and corporations employ people to look after the premises on their behalf. Because there's no regulation of these people currently, this is an interim step to try to provide those who live in condos some type of recourse should these people behave in a way that is oppressive or that otherwise harms the enjoyment of their property.

I will take my seat and urge all members of the Assembly to support this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members who wish to comment on amendment A2?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Going back to Bill 9, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014, are there any other members who wish to comment or who have amendments for this bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a second amendment to table. I have the requisite number here, and I will sit down until we get them distributed.

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause for a moment while the amendment is distributed. This amendment will be known as amendment A3.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Madam Chair. This amendment helps to alleviate some of the concerns held by many condo owners that the condo corporation is held responsible for the negligence and damages of one owner. My amendment adds protection for responsible owners and allows them to recoup their costs more quickly. One example of where this amendment will help is when a frozen water pipe bursts. As the example was explained to me, if one resident leaves her window open and the pipes burst, damaging many other units, the condo corporation, a.k.a. the other owners, by default are responsible for the damages. This amendment would put in legislation the board's right to seek costs

associated from the negligent individual. Quite simply, good owners shouldn't be paying for bad owners.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to comment? The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has some amendments coming in, and they're not quite ready yet. Having regard to that, I'm just going to carefully examine this particular amendment, because this member has been playing quite good ball with us.

Now, I speak as someone, Madam Chair, who owns three condos, and before anybody starts talking about this, they have been disclosed to the Ethics Commissioner.

5:20

The one issue I have with this particular amendment, Madam Chair, is that this could create a preference of one person's debt or another. So if you have a condo board who wants to seek contributions from a negligent owner, it seems to me that if that owner was owing other people money, had other judgments against them, that that same judgment would not have the same force or effect as this particular item. This member's amendment may be very well intentioned, but at the same time I'm concerned that it may create a preference of one debt over another. If you have a judgment against a particular person – the Latin term is *pari passu* – they would rank the same as one or the other.

So I'm not interested in supporting this particular item, but I would refer it to the Minister of Service Alberta.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll speak very briefly to the bill, but I do want to thank the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for rising and offering the amendment. You know, although the spirit of this amendment, I think, is very well intentioned and speaks to some real issues, it's the opinion of our department that we do actually have coverage for these issues within the act that are sufficient.

For those reasons, I will not be supporting this amendment. But I do appreciate the spirit, and I thank the member for bringing it forward.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

Mr. Rowe: Thank you. Just for clarification here, the way it was explained to me is that in most cases – in fact, I can't think of any that wouldn't be – damages like these would be covered by the overall insurance company or their package for the whole condominium project. There would be a deductible on that, and all this amendment is seeking is restitution for the cost to the condo association of those deductibles. It's not like they're expecting the negligent owner to pay for all of the damage for the whole building; it's just the deductible.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a question to the mover of this amendment. It provides a tool to the condo board to recoup, as you said, the insurance deductibles for, say, a broken frozen pipe. My question is: will that come from the person who,

say, left the window open? Who is paying the deductible? Who is the money coming from?

Mr. Rowe: Well, apparently, it's coming from the association, the whole condo board's funds. We're saying that it shouldn't do that. All responsible owners shouldn't be paying the total bill for the negligent owner. The negligent owner should have to pick up the deductible.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any others who wish to comment? [interjection] The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Please speak through the chair.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you to the mover of the motion my question is: what is the process that the mover of the motion anticipates for establishing the issue of fault and the issue of negligence on the part of the alleged wrongdoer? I can see a scenario where the condo board says, "This is your fault," and the alleged wrongdoer says, "No, no. This happened because of the systemic problem, and it happened to first become obvious in my unit, but it's actually related to other systemic issues." So I can just imagine there would be a need for a dispute resolution mechanism before this authority could be exercised. I'm just curious as to what is the anticipated dispute mechanism for before this authority is exercised.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Let's keep the noise level down a bit, please. It's getting a little high.

Mr. Rowe: Well, this issue, while it seems straightforward, I think, is a perfect example of the complexity of this whole bill and the reason that we wanted to take it back to committee. That was refused.

Now, I'm not a lawyer. That's a problem with this bill; it is immensely complicated. There are several lawyers that have worked on this bill for days, the short days that we've had to work on the bill. I wish I had a clear answer for that. It may be able to be dealt with in regulations that will follow, some mechanism like that. But I still go back to the fact that all owners shouldn't be paying for the bad owners.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any others who wish to comment or question on amendment A3?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Back to the bill in Committee of the Whole, Bill 9, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I have another amendment that I would like to move.

The Deputy Chair: We have another amendment that will be distributed. We'll just pause for a moment while that amendment is passed out. This will be known as amendment A4.

Please continue, hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'll read this for the record. I am moving that Bill 9, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014, be amended as follows; (a) section 6 in the

proposed section 13 is amended by adding the following after subsection (2):

- (3) Notwithstanding any other provision in this Act, if a delay in occupancy of a unit is more than 90 days beyond the occupancy date set out in the purchase agreement, the purchaser may rescind the purchase agreement without penalty and the developer shall, within 15 days from the developer's receipt of a written notice of the rescission from the purchaser, return to the purchaser all of the money paid in respect of the purchase of the unit.

And (b) section 55(a) is amended by striking out the proposed clause (c.6).

Madam Chair, this amendment is designed to strengthen the protection for condominium owners. Basically, this is a change from Bill 13, the previous incarnation of Bill 9, which is not in the interest of consumers. There's a change respecting Bill 13, section 13.1. Basically, what this is is that from time to time there are delays when a unit will be ready for occupancy. Sometimes these delays may be months or years.

Now, currently the options available to a purchaser are set out in the purchase contract. These contracts are drafted by developers and often tend to be slanted in favour of a developer. Industry practice is that it is the sole discretion of the developer to return the deposit money or retain the money should the project have delays. Our amendment takes the remedy for these delays out of the regulatory powers granted to the Lieutenant Governor in Council in the act as it currently exists and places it into the legislation with clear rules. You know, I feel very much, Madam Chair, that this provides a much stronger, more robust consumer protection, especially for those who experience occupancy delays, and it is much stronger than what the current legislation provides. At the end of the day, this is about trying to ensure that condominium owners are protected as much as possible.

5:30

Yes, I acknowledge that sometimes there are unforeseeable delays in the construction and building of a new complex. However, you know, I think of examples of families that are planning to move and a delay is suddenly a year or longer than a year. Say, obviously, they find a place that is available. What tools do they have at their disposal to get their money back from the developer? Yes, there are some out there that are very co-operative with purchasers in getting the money back. Unfortunately, again, in order to ensure that individuals and purchasers are protected and aren't taken advantage of, we need to see this spelled out in legislation. I don't think it's good enough to say that this is in regulations and that the Lieutenant Governor in Council can make these changes or will ensure that purchasers are protected.

I urge the hon. minister and members on the other side to ask any questions, if they have any, but to seriously consider this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to support this amendment, and it really strikes me as being a critical and important amendment. First of all, just to back up a little bit, almost all Albertans, frankly, probably 75 per cent of Albertans, will tell you that the biggest investment they will make in their life is in their home. That's the first thing. Now, amongst that group a growing and growing number of Albertans are making that investment into condominiums because it's the most affordable way, and with any luck someday we may actually move toward a

more dense urban development strategy so that people are more likely to live in condominiums.

That being said, this is an issue that will only grow in importance over time. It is critically important to the people, the consumers, who invest in them, and it is a growing area of concern for all Albertans as they move forward. That being said, this legislation is fundamentally important, and we are very concerned about ensuring that Albertans who are the consumers of this increasingly popular and fundamentally important product, for lack of a better word, are protected. So the concerns that we are raising today through these many amendments all reflect a desire on our part to ensure that consumers, regular Albertans who make the biggest investment of their lifetime, are protected in the process of doing that.

Condominium development is not a complication-free process. When it comes to one condominium owner or even the collection of condominium owners in relation to the often exceptionally strongly articulated rights of the developer, there is the potential for problems.

Now, one of the problems that this amendment attempts to address, of course, is the problem with delays. People, again, will save up. They will have finally paid off their student loan and will be actively saving up in order to put a deposit onto a condominium. They put their deposit on, they balance how long they can pay rent before they start paying interest on that deposit and all that kind of stuff. Then the actual construction of the condominium is delayed. Of course, that happens increasingly in Alberta these days as, you know, development is approved and money is collected and then the follow through is decreasingly well regulated.

So we have average Albertans putting a lot of money on the line, and then that money sits there while at the same time they don't actually have a roof over their heads. They're still paying rent, they're still paying a mortgage somewhere else, or, heaven forbid, they're still living at home with their parents. That's a problem. Alternatively, there are seniors who are downsizing, and they've given up their homes in other capacities.

When you have that problem, you cannot afford to leave that money on deposit for an extended period of time if you are not provided with the *quid pro quo*, which is a roof over your head. Now, that's what, of course, Bill 13, the previous iteration of Bill 9, was attempting to address when it outlined a dispute resolution mechanism and the right, I believe, of buyers to get a refund if there is a delay of more than 90 days. That was what was in Bill 13, nice and clear in legislation: let's deal with that; yippee, that's great. Then suddenly further consultation happens, and suddenly that particular right of the consumer disappears from legislation and now will potentially be addressed in regulation. But, of course, as we all know, regulations can change. As we all know, regulations most commonly change when this government is subjected to intense lobbying. As we all know, intense lobbying is more likely going to be done on the part of the big developers than it is on the part of the individual condominium purchaser. That's where we are now, Madam Chair.

We've seen a dilution of condominium purchaser and owner rights between Bill 13, when it was introduced, I believe, last spring, and now, this fall, in the form of Bill 9. Why are we seeing consumer rights being diluted? To me, this is not an example of success for regular working Albertans. This is a success for friends and insiders who happen to have very effective lobbyists.

Now, the government will say: "Oh, don't worry. Trust us. It's in regulation, and you can trust us to do the right thing in regulation." But, you know, if we could trust them to do the right thing in regulation, why are they reluctant to put it in legislation?

You know, just watching the process of this bill and watching the pattern of the change would give a reasonable person reasonable grounds upon which to base some suspicions and some concerns about the rights of these consumers in the case that they have made a deposit on a condominium yet the condominium is not completed within a reasonable period of time and they have no place to live. That is the likely conclusion that a reasonable, objective, nonpartisan, noninflammatory person like myself would actually conclude. Indeed, many consumers have reached that conclusion. They are nervous about the fact that something which was helpful to them and protective of them was included in legislation, and now it's moving its slippery little way into regulation.

Our amendment would undo that change. Our amendment would restore that consumer right, that condominium purchaser right, the right of the regular working Albertan who's struggling to save up for their home, which tends to be smaller than big houses and less expensive but still important to them. This would restore their right to have their dispute with their developer properly managed through legislation as a result of them ultimately having a legislative right to get a refund after 90 days of delay. That gives them bargaining power. Let's face it; Joe Average Condominium Purchaser needs a little bit of bargaining power when they're up against a major developer. I mean, that's why we're here right now. We have example after example after example of an uneven level of bargaining power. The original plan in Bill 13 was an attempt to give a little bit of equality to that bargaining power, and now it's gone, so we are worried. Now we're trying to put it back in so that we can be less worried and so that the people purchasing their condominiums can also be less worried.

5:40

I urge members of this Assembly to stand up for the little guy. I know it kind of goes against your happy place. It's a little awkward for you, but I suggest that you give it a shot. [interjection] It's a totally reasonable observation, hon. member.

Nevertheless, my request to you is that you consider re-injecting this provision, which assists condominium purchasers and individual Albertans with their negotiating process in the event that the commercial relationship or the consumer relationship between them and the developer, from whom they are purchasing the condominium, starts to break down. This helps right the balance a little bit. I urge members to consider supporting this amendment on behalf of those condominium owners.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to comment on amendment A4? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak in support of the amendment. Again, I think the member has spoken fairly eloquently about the balance of power here and the need to in many cases address some of the vulnerability of some. I think about my own daughter and son-in-law, who had to struggle at the end, both in terms of some information that they found out about the condominium and its condition and also their ability to pay as a result of some changes in their finances.

I do have some difficulty in accepting an amendment that would go beyond six months, however, and return completely without penalty the full value of the condominium to the purchaser. But I do see some validity in extending the period of time upon which the purchaser has the full reimbursement of the costs of the

condominium. I would, in favour of trying to move forward on this, hope that the government would support this as, I guess, a strong commitment to consumers, to purchasers, many of whom, as has been said, are in a vulnerable position and lack in some cases either the expertise or the legal support, when things start to change, to ensure that their interests are protected and that their large financial commitment is protected to some extent if it's beyond that three-month period even by a few days.

I would certainly like to see this supported and the time period of protection for the consumer extended. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would just ask the members on the other side to remember a few days ago, when we first spoke about Bill 9 in the House. A member from Fort McMurray mentioned a major project in Fort McMurray that turned out to be nothing but a disaster. If you recall, I believe that I mentioned that those residents were given one hour to get as much of their personal belongings as they could gather and get out of the building because there was a fear of the building actually collapsing. I was on the Safety Codes Council board of directors at that time, and I got a first-hand look at the report of that building. That building should never have been occupied from day one.

Now, you can imagine – and I don't know if this happened or not. It was a brand new building, less than a year old. Were all of those units sold? Probably not. Did people put deposits down on those apartments or condos? Probably so, and they were waiting to move into them. What happened to those deposits? The developer declared bankruptcy and abandoned the project. This is the kind of bill that will protect condo buyers and their deposits. Think about that for a minute before you vote on this amendment. This is a very important amendment that does exactly what the condo act is supposed to do, and that's protect the condo purchasers and owners. Please think about that before you vote.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll try to be brief. I have great regard for the comments I just heard, but I have to say that the example given of Fort McMurray isn't so much an example of a project not getting done. Honestly, in that case I'd say that the building inspectors have some culpability there that's undeniable, and whoever is responsible for them has some culpability, more so than the timing of the construction.

I will also say, Madam Chair, in looking at this amendment with "90 days," I once had a home built for myself, and it was more than 90 days late for a bunch of reasons. There may be a period of time where an amendment like this might be appropriate, but respectfully 90 days is too short. If anybody is in the habit of building things or knows somebody that's in the habit of building things, there are so many elements about construction that are beyond the control of those that build, municipal approvals not being the least of them, with financing approvals also being a big part.

Not only that, Madam Chair, but it's really important, I think, that one of the things we need to consider is that we want to encourage more housing to be built. Alberta is a province that in many areas is short of housing. We want to encourage those

people that build housing to build housing because it's needed. In fact, the more housing that gets built, the more affordable, generally, on average, it is simply by the law of supply and demand, so you do want to encourage those people that are building housing to build housing.

One of the habits of people that build housing and the way that business sometimes happens, particularly with large condominium projects, is that they get financing based on how many deposits, on how many units they get up front before the construction starts. That's before the construction starts. Then, of course, before the construction starts is a long way before construction finishes, particularly on a large project. Dialling it in within 90 days is not always reasonable. Consequently, if you put this in, I would think there may be cases when it would be harder for those that build homes to put the financing in place knowing that one of the conditions of the financing, the deposits, may actually cause the financing to fall through on the back end, thereby unwittingly – and I will say that I know the hon. member's intentions are good – actually cause the effect of having less housing and, consequently, less affordable housing in Alberta.

To the hon. member. I would suggest that we don't support this. I understand the intentions are good. I just think the math of 90 days, with all the other realities, doesn't work.

The argument could even be made that the financing isn't the individual purchaser's problem. I suppose you could make that argument, but the reality is that financing is an element of housing getting built.

I think this House would do a great disservice by passing this particular amendment and, by extension, inadvertently making it harder for housing to get built in Alberta, which is something that we need very, very badly.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to address some of the comments made by the hon. minister. You know, first of all, this amendment is providing protection for the consumer or the purchaser. I find it extremely far reaching to say that if this amendment comes in, we're going to have a stoppage in building of housing and that developers are suddenly going to jump out of the game. What this is doing is ensuring that developers are responsible for the agreement that they sign on the time allotted to build and develop a unit.

5:50

I completely understand that there are delays and that delays happen, but again, you know, when delays are extremely long and prolonged, why is it the sole responsibility of the purchaser to have to find an interim place to live, to go through headaches and hassles with no recourse to the developer, who signed a contract stating that the unit will be available for occupancy on a specific date? What this does, Madam Chair, is that it provides for and puts more responsibility on the developer to adhere to their own timelines. I mean, what we're writing about here is not asking too much, that the developer actually builds the units when they say they're going to build them. There is still a buffer.

You know, I think it's quite absurd that a purchaser has very little recourse. If a developer delays for months and months and they can't get their units, what onus does that put on the people that were planning to move in on a specific date? Maybe they're selling a previous home, maybe they're moving across the

country, or they have a job lined up. Now they're suddenly frantically scrambling to find another unit. Let's say that they don't want to rent. Let's say that they decide they want to purchase a different unit. Well, good luck getting your dollars back because, again, the contracts are often written with a bit of a developer bias, in favour of the developer, as opposed to, you know, being completely balanced or in favour of the consumer.

What we're doing here: two things. We're providing stronger consumer protection, which is what our laws and our bills should do, protect the condo owners. I want to remind all members of the House that condominiums account for 20 per cent of the homes sold annually, and 1 in 3 homes in Edmonton and Calgary is a condo. This act needs to be written in the best possible way. It needs to be inclusive of many of the critiques or amendments that the opposition has put forward. You know – and I'll speak to this more a little bit later – I'm still quite floored at the speed with which we're pushing this bill through, considering the number of Albertans it affects.

But I digress. Getting back to this, it gives consumers a tool. I don't think that you're suddenly going to have the floodgates open up, where as soon as a delay of more than 90 days occurs, everyone is backing out of their agreements. But at the moment there is very little recourse for a purchaser. I can appreciate the hon. minister's point that, well, all of the onus or responsibility can't be put in the hands of the developer because there are unforeseeable circumstances that arise and delays in projects. Maybe it's material delays that the developer has no control over. But it's equally unfair to place all of that responsibility onto the purchaser or the consumer or an Albertan who signed an agreement saying that they will get occupancy of a unit on a specific date, where months and months pass, and they have no recourse even if they say: "Forget it. I don't want this unit anymore. I'm going to find another unit." What we're essentially saying to Albertans is: "Well, too bad. I'm sorry, but you just lost your down payment. It's your fault; you have to pay for the delays that were out of your control." Again, the developer didn't live up to their agreement.

What this does, Madam Chair, is that it encourages – I disagree with the minister. It doesn't discourage developers from building more units. You know what it does? It holds them accountable and encourages them to build on time and within a three-month window, and if they don't, then they may lose the sale of one of their units. Well, you know what? That sounds pretty fair to me when we're looking at balancing the protection of consumers and Albertans versus balancing the interests of developers. As it currently stands in the condominium act, this favours developers far more than it favours consumers and Albertans. If we want to ensure that they are protected, then this amendment needs to get passed. It is extremely reasonable.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on amendment A4?

Ms Notley: Yes, on A4. I just wanted to have a chance to add to the comments by my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, which is simply this. There's no question that unforeseen circumstances – a shortage in supply, building on a leaking gas well that nobody noticed was there, for instance, or any one of a number of other unforeseeable circumstances – are a bad thing. But then the question becomes: who bears the brunt of this, and who gets the financing to deal with this bad thing? You're either telling the purchaser, "You know what? You need to go out and get financing now to find an alternative place to live" or "Dial back your groceries a bit, maybe to just two meals a day rather than three." So either your purchaser is doing that, or your developer is finding alternative financing and going back to the bank to say: oops; we've got a problem here. I don't know. When I'm talking to banks, frankly, the ones most likely to get the financing are the developers, not the purchaser who's dialing back their grocery purchases.

I think that, again, what we need to do is make sure that the purchaser's rights are protected. Listening to the minister talk about the kinds of concerns that drive the deliberation of this cabinet makes me very concerned about the kinds of protections that we will ultimately see produced through the cabinet's regulation-making process. I am not convinced that we are going to land on the side of the grocery-buying purchaser. We're going to say: "No. They are the ones that get to shoulder the additional financing costs because, you know, it's too much to ask the developer to."

Now, I appreciate that sometimes it gets really bad and that there is some jeopardy to the project, but then one wonders, too: well, if the project is in jeopardy because it's 180 days delayed, are we really convinced that this developer is building a product which is going to stand the test of time over the course of the next few years, when other issues come up and all that kind of stuff? You know, there needs to be some balancing here, and I'm a little worried that, as usual with this government, the balancing is coming down not on the side of the purchaser or of the regular Albertan.

I certainly support the comments of my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any others who wish to comment on amendment A4?

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Seeing the time, we will stand recessed until 7:30 this evening.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, December 9, 2014

Issue 15e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 9, 2014

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 9 Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to stand and present my third amendment, and I have the necessary papers here. We'll take a second and get them distributed. Third and final.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A5.

Can we keep the noise level down, please? Thank you.

Hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, would you like to continue?

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for that admonishment.

This amendment seeks to address some of the condo and individual unit issues. The first part of this amendment gives owners a voice in the changes to the appearance of their property as it affects their property values and unit.

I would like to take this opportunity to read a copy of the Canadian Condominium Institute's news release on this point, written by their counsel, Hugh Willis.

Section 38(4)(a) presently states that an item is not a capital improvement if it is "the contemporary equivalent of an obsolete property." This is problematic wording and may be unduly restrictive. For example, aluminum slider windows are still available and used for some specific applications, but are not commonly used because they are not energy efficient. Instead, vinyl slider windows are usually used. Under the present wording of Bill 9, the replacement of old aluminum slider windows with the contemporary equivalent (vinyl sliders) may be considered a capital improvement because aluminum sliders are, by most definitions, not obsolete. We recommend that s. 38(4)(a) be revised to allow for the replacement of any item with a similar item in accordance with common construction standards.

The second part of this amendment allows the condo board to access the reserve fund to pay for projects that they are ordered by law to comply with. These would include issues with occupancy standards such as mobility access to use reserve funds for the cost of that project rather than a special assessment, which is a much longer and much more formal process. This accounts for the CCI recommendation that the reserve fund study and report should be classified as a recurring administrative expense in the budget and paid for from the operating funds.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on amendment A5? The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Khan: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I do again want to thank the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Two Hills . . .

An Hon. Member: Three Hills.

Mr. Khan: Did I say Two Hills? Three Hills. Forgive me.

An Hon. Member: You shortchanged him a hill.

Mr. Khan: Shortchanged him a hill. You write good material.

Mr. Anglin: You lost a hill.

Mr. Khan: Lost a hill.

Through the chair – and I'll be quick – I think the intent is well said, well stated. Again, I want to thank the minister for bringing forward some constructive ideas and amendments that are echoed from CCI north. I've talked to the president of CCI north. We're grateful for their engagement and their stakeholder consultations so far, and we made a commitment to CCI to continue engaging them as we move forward in the consultation process for the regulations.

Specific to this amendment, Madam Chair, what I want to be able to tell you is that the act currently allows condominium corporations to use reserve funds for a broad, broad variety of purposes. The proposed amendments to section 38 are problematic because they remove the reference to managed property in section 38(1)(c). By removing this reference, corporations which make use of managed property may be left unable to actually use the reserve fund for the intended purposes.

So for those reasons I can't support this amendment, but again I want to thank the hon. member for bringing it forward. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any others who wish to speak on amendment A5? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that. I just want to say very briefly that certainly I support this amendment. Generally, we welcome Bill 9. I think that it's a necessary improvement from what we saw the last time, and I recognize the Service Alberta minister's work to improve I guess it was Bill 13 before, right? I just wanted to make that clear.

Also, we recognize some of the outreach that you did around the province, but the key to this whole issue was around – maybe it's just one group, but it's the group that ultimately is the owners of condos themselves. So, you know, we just found a number of issues that they wanted to bring forward, and working in co-operation with the Wildrose, we had a number of amendments that we developed together. Certainly, this is one of them that is important. It should be recognized, and you should recognize as well the utility of making sure that you look to consult with everybody before a bill comes forward.

So I certainly support this amendment from the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and I hope everybody else does, too. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you hon. member.

Are there any others who wish to speak to amendment A5? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Madam Chair. I would like to stand in support of this. It's essentially an amendment, although it is much more complex than that, that tries to ensure that condo associations have to bring any repairs to condominiums up to the

standard at which it was in terms of value. Clearly, if we're going to act in the interests of owners primarily, we have to try to protect the value of the property, and condo associations or managers who make changes that would devalue the property would not serve the interests of the owners. So I would stand in support of this amendment.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on amendment A5? Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Now we'll go back to the bill, Bill 9, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have another one of those amendments that I was talking about, so let's bring it forward.

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause for a moment while we have the amendment passed out. Can we have the five copies brought to the table, please? This amendment will be known as amendment A6.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, if you'd like to proceed.

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Thank you. I think one of the things that's been working well for condominium boards and organizations over the last 40 years is voting at general meetings, and the proposed revision to the act, we believe, inserts some needless complexity and maybe even litigation into what is usually a pretty straightforward process.

7:40

Our amendment to the legislation, this amendment that you have before you here now, is an attempt to fix one particular area, which is electronic voting although, again, we feel as though the legislation really should be delayed in order to consult properly with owners to see what kind of voting process they would like in legislation moving forward. We recommend that electronic voting not be permitted at general meetings at this time. The purchase cost of equipment and programs is not significant, especially when you consider that most condominium corporations only have one general meeting a year. The actual vote counting at a general meeting does not take a lot of time, especially since most votes are conducted on a show-of-hands basis. If the owners cannot attend a meeting in person but do want to participate, they can already attend by proxy and vote by proxy.

In the consultation analysis report dated June 2013 question 16 asked about electronic voting at board meetings. It did not ask owners if they thought electronic voting should be permitted at general meetings; nevertheless, many of the comments made by respondents set out their objections to and concerns about electronic voting at these meetings.

Including electronic voting, Madam Chair, at general meetings, I believe, may lead to situations where there is no effective discussion or debate on motions, where the owners may not be able to raise any of their concerns or issues, and where the owners are not able to fully participate in the governance of their communities. Okay? It may lead to complicated situations where people may not be having actual physical general meetings at all. That's another problem that we should consider here, too.

My humble but compelling amendment, that I bring forward on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I think fixes

that problem. You know, we all want to fix problems here, don't we?

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any others who wish to speak on amendment A6? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, I'd like to stand in support of this. It's clear that we don't even have the technology to have confidence in electoral procedures in Alberta. An advanced society, and they're still questioning the validity of electronic voting, and to expect a condo association to be able to pull together a reliable, valid, and, I guess, trustworthy electoral system that's not based on paper and personal identification and X marks the spot is hard to fathom.

It's one of the many issues, I guess, that people across the province are raising to us about pushing ahead with a bill that is so complex and has so many dimensions to it. I hope that this, if nothing else, is a cautionary tale to the government to slow down in pushing this very large and complex legislation through when there are so many concerns from both owners and tenants of condos that this could be a problem. This is just one example of a number that we've tried to bring forward, and it's trying to extend a cautionary note to the government to slow down, allow some time for full discussion.

Many of the folks across the floor may not know about the Ontario consultation that went into their condominium amendment act. It took eight months. The two sides, the developers and the owners, were at odds, and over the course of eight months they had to come together repeatedly and hammer out some agreements on all these different decisions that have to be made about assets and liabilities, risks and benefits. Ultimately they hammered out a bill that all of them could accept in eight months.

The fact that we're pushing this through in less than a week raises, I think, serious questions about why we're not taking more time, including more consultations, and ensuring that we get it right the first time and not have to come back to it again next year or deal with all kinds of conflicts, court cases, inconsistencies that people from our constituencies are saying are simply problematic and should be given some time to sort through. This is just one example.

I will be supporting this amendment. It raises a flag. It provides an opportunity for government to pause and consider a full public consultation, industry consultation that would allow this to be the best possible legislation that it can be.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on amendment A6?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We will go back to the bill, Bill 9, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Madam Chair. I have a couple of amendments to suggest to strengthen the bill, to add clarity, to add confidence to what should be – it's a critical economic and social and the largest investment, of course, that any person can make. I'll table this now. I guess you need the original.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. We'll just pause till we get some handed out, please.

Hon. member, I think you can proceed on amendment A7.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. This is an amendment to the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014, itself, that Bill 9, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014, be amended in section 35 in the proposed section 44 by adding the following after subsection (2):

- (3) The corporation must make every reasonable effort to assist an owner, purchaser or mortgagee or the solicitor of an owner, purchaser or mortgagee, or a person authorized in writing by any of those persons, with a request made pursuant to subsection (1) and to respond to each request openly, accurately and completely.

In some sense this is obvious, Madam Chair, but as we found in government, access to information is sometimes a problem. It's sometimes deliberately blocked. It's sometimes inadvertently difficult to get access to information. Our sense is that owners and purchasers need to have ready access to information that may be held by the owner, by the developer. It really is a duty to assist. This is a duty-to-assist clause. Certain persons like an owner can request documents from the board, and this clause, just like in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, will require the board to assist with the request, not block the request, not provide undue resistance to access to information.

For example, in the FOIP progress reports we receive performance reports, and the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner will give us updates about where in the process the request for information is. Is it reasonable or unreasonable? Is it private? Is it open for discussion and access? The amendment will make it easier for the requester to obtain documents that would be helpful for the purchaser to make appropriate decisions and make the organization itself more transparent. As I summarize it, it's a duty to assist. It's an explicit duty to assist when people need access to information.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who would like to comment on amendment A7? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

7:50

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Madam Chair. I certainly appreciate the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View bringing this up. It's really important to have communication between the developer and the purchasers. We see so many new condos being built all over in my constituency and around Edmonton, Calgary, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, and there have been a lot of problems – right? – not just right away but within the first five years of the building of these places. There's one just right over here. It's not a happy photo opportunity, but it's very appropriate; you can literally see the Legislature and within a block see a leaky condo. These are all over the place, like mushrooms sprouting up on the prairies, and not a happy situation for so many people. I have older couples wanting to not have their bungalows anymore and buying condos in the immediate area and then finding that they have a \$30,000 bill to add to their mortgage within three or four years of their condo being built and purchased.

Anyway, my point is that communication is really important, as is access to the full disclosure of information. Some of these developers are changing their names as well like the leaves on the trees in the fall, which is not good. They reappear as someone else, another company. I'm sure that many other members have the same problem in their own constituencies. Until we make a

law here to chase down some of these poor developers and then have full access to their information and their books and so forth, I don't think we're doing our jobs. So, certainly, this is a step in the right direction.

Thanks a lot, MLA for Calgary-Mountain View.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on amendment A7?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

The Deputy Chair: That amendment is defeated, and we're back to the bill, Bill 9, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Madam Chair. I'd like to move another amendment to again try to protect purchasers, the public.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. We'll pause for a moment while we get some of those distributed.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. This actually is a housekeeping amendment. I think anybody would recognize that this would be helpful to an absent owner or tenant or board.

The amendment reads that Bill 9, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014, be amended in section 47 in the proposed section 69.3 by renumbering it as subsection 69.3(1) and adding the following, that when there is some kind of conflict,

- (2) On application to the Tribunal, an interested party has the right to appear in person or by agent or counsel.

It's simply to enable, whether it's a tenant, an owner, or a board, to name a representative to appear at the tribunal and act for them in terms of negotiating or arguing or contending some kind of dispute. It would allow people that are absent for whatever reason – sickness, travel, whatever – to have an agent appear on their behalf. It's a housekeeping edit, and I hope the members of the House will accept that.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate where this member is coming from. That being said, it is a well-known common-law right that an individual can appear through counsel, with his or her counsel or without his or her counsel, the counsel appearing on his or her behalf. So I would suggest that this is already referenced in the document just by prescription, and I think that putting this through would be redundant, respectfully.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any others who would like to comment on amendment A8?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A8 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We're back on Bill 9, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014. Are there any other members who wish to comment, question, or have amendments?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 9 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. At this point I would move that the committee rise and report on bills 9 and 11.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: I would like to recognize the Member for Calgary-East to read the report.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 11. The committee also reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 9. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 7

Chartered Professional Accountants Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As we know, the bill is the result of bringing together three accounting groups – the CGAs, the CMAs, and the CAs – who have all requested that they be joined together into one group. We've done a lot of consultation. They're all in agreement. I'd just like to encourage my colleagues here in the House to support this bill.

I'd also like to thank the staff in JSTL and also the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for having chaired a committee that travelled the province getting input on this.

With that and in the interest of moving things along, Madam Speaker, I'll just suggest respectfully to my colleagues that they support this very good idea.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. minister, you're moving third reading?

Mr. McIver: I am moving third reading, yes. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak in third reading on Bill 7, Chartered Professional Accountants Act?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a third time]

8:00

Bill 8

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014

The Acting Speaker: To move third reading, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 8, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014.

Just to recap, this act amends several justice-related acts, including the Court of Queen's Bench Act, the Estate Administration Act, the Family Law Act, the Limitations Act, the Notaries and Commissioners Act, the Oaths of Office Act, the Perpetuities Act, the Provincial Court Act, the Wills and Succession Act, and does some minor housekeeping changes to several other acts.

Madam Speaker, this bill was developed with input from Alberta's judiciary, from the legal community, and from members of the public, and there was support for these amendments amongst those stakeholders. It reflects the work that we're doing here in the government to ensure that we increase access to justice for Albertans and improve our justice system for everyone's benefit.

I want to thank everyone in the Legislature for their participation in this debate, and I ask for your support in moving third reading of Bill 8.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to comment in third reading on Bill 8, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014?

Seeing none, I'll call the question. [interjections]

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a third time]

Mr. Denis: Madam Speaker, it appears to be past the bedtime of the Member for Lesser Slave Lake. As such, I would move that this House stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 8:03 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, December 10, 2014

Issue 15a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 10, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Dear Lord, today, as we mark the international declaration of Human Rights Day, let us be mindful and respectful that human rights belong equally to all and that many have died in attempting to achieve and/or to protect those rights as a fundamental component of the freedoms we enjoy. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a prestigious group of Albertans joining Citizens for a Civil Society and its flagship project, Daughters Day, in celebration of Human Rights Day, December 10. These Albertans have dedicated their lives to building a more inclusive and welcoming society, inspired by our common aspirations and democratic traditions that make human rights a way of life for all Albertans. As I say their names, I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Seated in the Speaker's gallery: Mita Das, president of Citizens for a Civil Society; Jack O'Neill, a recipient of the Order of Canada and former chief commissioner of the Alberta Human Rights Commission; Mary O'Neill, a former MLA for St. Albert; Elexis Schloss, a recipient of the Order of Canada, an advocate for the homeless, and a philanthropist; Muriel Stanley Venne, a recipient of the Order of Canada and the president and founder of the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today marks the 66th anniversary of the universal declaration of human rights being adopted by the United Nations, and it is certainly a rare occasion that the House sits on December 10 and has an opportunity to recognize this important day. To share in this celebration, there are several prominent Albertans in attendance in the Speaker's gallery and the members' gallery. It is an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly six Albertans who have dedicated their lives to achieving the spirit of the universal declaration of human rights for all people: Alexis Antonakis, a volunteer with Jewish Family Services; Than Aung, a volunteer with the Burmese Cultural Society; Sonia Bitar, a former citizenship judge and volunteer with Changing Together; Jagdish Bhatia, a businessman; Tara Bhatia, a mentor; and Shreela Chakrabarty, a filmmaker. Please rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly several prominent Albertans in attendance in the members' gallery who are here with the Citizens for a Civil Society and its flagship

project, Daughters Day. Citizens for a Civil Society is a registered nonprofit organization in Alberta that promotes and supports human rights and dignity. Daughters Day celebrates the lives, contributions, and achievements of all daughters.

Sixty-six years ago the United Nations adopted the universal declaration of human rights, the principles of which are enshrined in law through the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Alberta Human Rights Act, and the Alberta Bill of Rights. December 10 is a day worthy of recognition in this Assembly, and to that end these Albertans, who have dedicated their lives to building a more inclusive and welcoming society, are here with us today. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise as I call their names to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: Lan Chan-Marples, a facilitator and volunteer with Chinese community services and the Canadian Multicultural Education Foundation; Earl Choldin, a human rights advocate; Satya Brata Das, cofounder of Daughters Day and the founder and principal of Cambridge Strategies Inc.; David Evans, a journalist; Soraya Hafez, a volunteer with the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Edmonton; and Charan Khehra, cofounder and chairperson of Daughters Day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is also my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some additional guests from Citizens for a Civil Society, an Alberta nonprofit organization that, as you've heard, promotes and supports human rights and dignity. My guests are here today as well to celebrate the 66th anniversary of the adoption and proclamation of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights. These Albertans have dedicated their lives to building a more inclusive and welcoming society, inspired by our common aspiration and democratic traditions that make human rights a way of life for all Albertans.

Seated in the members' gallery are Cynthia Lazarenko, a volunteer with Seniors United Now; Danielle Monroe, a volunteer with ACT Alberta, a group that prevents human trafficking; Philomina Okeke, a professor of women and gender studies; Jitendra Shah, vice-president of CIBC Wood Gundy and president of the Mahatma Gandhi foundation for peace; Lori Sigurdson, manager, professional affairs, with the Alberta College of Social Workers; Rose Marie Tremblay, consultant and volunteer with Edmonton Social Planning Council; and Paula Kerman, photographer, writer, and social advocate. I would now like to ask all of my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let us move on to school groups. The Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two community members from l'école publique Gabrielle-Roy, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, a K to 12 francophone public school. They are here to bring awareness to the need for a playground for the school, that has had 50 per cent growth in the last five years. They're seated today in the members' gallery, and as I read their names, if they could please stand: Mme Diana Stralberg, playground committee chair, and M. Jean-Daniel Tremblay, principal of the school. I would now ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I believe you have a group here from Mount Pleasant elementary to introduce.

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's actually really a pleasure for me to rise and introduce this group because I speak to this grade 6 class usually every year. Every time I go and visit with them, they're brilliant kids and often have incredible observations to offer on politics and other issues. I always invite them to come and observe question period, so I'm very excited that they've been able to come today and that we're still here and they'll be able to observe question period. I would ask that all the students and the teachers from Mount Pleasant rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you two individuals I know, Kevin Feth and his son William. It's William's first time here for question period today, I understand. William is a student at Harry Ainlay high school here in Edmonton. Kevin I've known for several years. He is a partner with Field Law in Edmonton but also the president of the Law Society of Alberta. Kevin's term as president will be concluding in the next couple of months, and I wanted to thank Kevin, in particular, but also his family for the sacrifices that he's made serving our profession. Please join me in giving them both the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly two very bright and capable people who work very hard for Albertans every day in the Ministry of Service Alberta. I'd like now to ask Scott Seymour and Marisol Mora, who are seated in the members' gallery, to rise. Scott Seymour is newly married, and he and his wife live in Sherwood Park. Scott shares his hometown of Grovedale, a little hamlet south of Grande Prairie, with the hon. Minister of Transportation. Scott, the duke says hi.

Secondly, we have Marisol Mora. In addition to her public service, she is pursuing a management degree at the University of Lethbridge. She commutes from Lake Isle and is planning to go home to Costa Rica for Christmas to visit her family. Very lucky.

I'd ask the House to give them the traditional warm welcome. Thank you very much.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the Minister of Infrastructure.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a wonderful young lady, Wendy Collins. I met Wendy at a community town hall in the summer, and she was studying for her political science degree. She expressed an interest in working in the Legislature. Lo and behold, Wendy has been a valuable member of the Liberal opposition caucus team helping us do our job in the Legislature. Wendy is also working towards a PhD in psychology in addition to her interest in political science. If that isn't enough, today is Wendy's birthday. On this very special day on behalf of the Alberta Liberals and, I'm sure, all of the members in the Assembly I would like to wish Wendy a very happy

birthday and ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure, followed by the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've got two sets of introductions. First of all, I'd like to introduce a member of the family who, I would say, my wife thinks best resembles my behaviour, my three-and-a-half-year-old nephew, Jovan Sidhu. Jovan is a very enthusiastic member of my family, and I can see from his work ethic and his very charming nature that he is likely to be a future MLA, a member of this Assembly. I'll ask Jovan to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I guess I should introduce Jovan's parents: Sankalp Sonny Sidhu, and Nisha Sidhu. Sankalp is a very unusual name in all cultures, including my own. In fact, he is the only person in North America with the name Sankalp. So I would like to congratulate him for that as well today as he rises in the Assembly. Joining Sankalp and Nisha are their business partners Dany Fillion and Brian Marsin. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by the Associate Minister of Asia Pacific Relations.

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you two board members from NADC that are here doing their work this week: Pat O'Neill and Eva Urlacher. Pat, who is from St. Paul, has been a board member for seven years, and his daughter works for the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour here in the Legislature. Eva has been a board member for six years and has done a tremendous amount of work in the Bonnyville-Cold Lake area and is a great asset to the board. They're in the members' gallery. Could they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Asia Pacific Relations.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you the fifth cohort of the global academic leadership development program with the University of Alberta. This exciting program, sponsored by the China Scholarship Council, selects university administrators from institutions across China to study at the U of A for three months. Our first five cohorts have hosted over 150 administrators from over 40 Chinese institutions. The 30 Chinese senior administrators here today are from 16 universities across China. They have been here since September and will leave on December 19, after completing a 12-week university leadership development program exposing them to Canadian university administration practices. They are joined by Miss Cen Huang, assistant vice-president, and Mr. Wei Liu, program administrator with the University of Alberta's international program. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

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

Human Rights

Mr. Wilson: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, 66 years ago the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the universal declaration of human rights. It was born out of the ashes of some of the most horrific crimes humanity has ever seen and stands as a document testifying to the most noble of ambitions: ensuring and maintaining the most basic of human rights for all people, groups from all nations, from all backgrounds. While the world since 1950 is still marked by horrific crimes against humanity and by nations still torn by war, I am proud to be part of a province and a country that continues the necessary work to achieve universal recognition of basic human rights across the world.

Here in Alberta we are lucky to have nonprofit groups like Citizens for a Civil Society to promote human rights and dignity along with community organizations like Daughters Day, who are committed to ending discrimination, violence, and human rights abuses against all women. With their incredible contributions here in Alberta a growing volume of citizens are gathering together, working towards achieving a more inclusive and welcoming society inspired by our common aspirations and strong democratic traditions.

On the national and international stage we can all be proud of the initiatives taken by our federal government. Our Prime Minister continues to work toward saving the lives of the world's most vulnerable women and children through the maternal health initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the work that Canada is doing on the front lines to protect innocent women, children, and vulnerable peoples from the most inexplicable and horrific crimes by groups such as ISIL.

Mr. Speaker, let's take today to remember the unspeakable injustices that are committed against individuals and all of humanity while celebrating the achievements we have made and looking forward to the work that must still be done.

Thank you.

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

Human Rights in Alberta

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is international Human Rights Day, and this year's theme is Human Rights 365, encompassing the idea that every day is human rights day. But LGBTQ youth in Alberta face a fight for their basic human rights every day, and now this PC government doesn't have the respect to be honest about why at this point they're not protecting these rights.

The universal declaration of human rights was proclaimed 66 years ago today, yet unfortunately our Premier's understanding of human rights has not kept up. Let's be clear. There is no right to discriminate, not for governments, not for school boards, not for anyone. The Premier is hiding behind an outdated interpretation of our Constitution to get out of having to take a real position on LGBTQ rights. There is no right to discriminate. There is simply an acknowledgement that Catholic school boards may retain the religious character of their schools. No court has ever found that these rights extend to creating what is essentially a separate but equal, 1950s-style group of second-class citizens.

GSAs are separate, voluntary, extracurricular groups. In no way do they infringe on anyone else's rights or interfere with the school's religious character. The Premier's best defence is a case which draws from precedent set in jurisdictions with a different

system and that, more importantly, is almost 30 years old, when Charter rights were in their infancy. The law evolves, as does our province, even if this PC government won't.

Alberta's Catholic school boards themselves have said that they will not challenge a law protecting GSAs. There are no excuses left to avoid joining the 21st century. Alberta's LGBTQ youth have a right to a safe, inclusive education, a right to nondiscrimination, a right to dignity and respect. Today, on international Human Rights Day, this Premier needs to stop dodging the real issue and stand up for LGBTQ students in Alberta.

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

Human Rights Day

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. December 10 is international Human Rights Day. Today we mark the anniversary of the signing of the universal declaration of human rights by the United Nations member states in 1948. Signing this important document meant that for the first time in history the universal protection of fundamental human rights was set out, providing a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations.

The slogan for this year's Human Rights Day is Human Rights 365. The United Nations has launched the campaign to promote the importance of human rights not only today, on Human Rights Day, but 365 days of the year. The campaign

celebrates the fundamental proposition in the Universal Declaration that each one of us, everywhere, at all times is entitled to the full range of human rights, that human rights belong equally to each of us and bind us together as a global community with the same ideals and values.

1:50

The Alberta Human Rights Act and the Alberta Bill of Rights are important pieces of legislation that help guarantee that all Albertans have the dignity and respect they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, in the 66 years since the universal declaration was signed, many advances have been made both here at home and around the globe to uphold the rights of women, minority communities, people with disabilities, the LGBTQ community, indigenous people, and many others. However, we are too often reminded that much work remains to be done to ensure that all human beings, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, where they are born and live, are afforded and protected by the same inalienable rights.

Mr. Speaker, a list of events being held across the province as well as more information about international Human Rights Day and the many ways Albertans can get involved is available on the Human Rights Commission website, albertahumanrights.ab.ca.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us be reminded that we have 35 seconds each regardless of whether we're posing a question or trying to answer one.

Let's start with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, in the spring I asked the Premier's predecessor how she would balance the budget if oil dropped to \$90. During the by-election we talked about the impact of \$80 oil.

When session started, just four weeks ago, I asked the Premier what he would do about \$70 oil. Today oil is kissing \$60. The impact on our resource revenues will be substantial. The trickle-down impact on our economy could be severe. Is the Premier prepared to take steps to rightsize this government's spending while protecting core front-line services?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question. Certainly, oil prices today, WTI prices, were in the range of \$60.30 per barrel. I'm aware of the significance of this to our province's finances. But I think it's important to note that while there are as many opinions about oil prices as there are bank analysts, I would encourage the hon. member to consider what Moody's had to say today in the peer comparison that they published pointing out that the strengths that we have in our province are a strong balance sheet, our tax competitiveness, and our fiscal discipline, which we intend to maintain.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, a few days ago during question period I expressed hope that the Premier was right when he predicted that oil would range between \$65 and \$75 for the balance of the fiscal year. The last few days have dashed those hopes. We are starting to see the economic impact of a very low-price environment. Yesterday the Finance minister stood here and said that our economy was "still growing." Well, I'm afraid that if it is still growing, it won't be for long. Will the Premier reassure Albertans by telling us what options are under consideration to deal with this problem?

Mr. Prentice: Well, quite specifically, Mr. Speaker, the alternative that is under consideration is that we will maintain financial discipline in this province, as simple as that. We intend to do that. If you read the Moody's report which was published today, which I referred to, they indicate that that, in fact, is what Alberta needs to do. That is what financial agencies and raters expect our province to do in these circumstances. They point out, they highlight that our tax competitiveness and the strength of our balance sheet, which provides us with both long- and short-term financial assets and therefore liquidity, are exactly what we need to maintain.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, in the economic downturn of 2008 the provincial government prolonged the impact of a low-price environment by bringing in the new royalty framework. As a result, we didn't bounce back as quickly as we should have, and it took six major changes before they finally got it right. Will the Premier assure Albertans and our energy sector that his ministers aren't considering any policies that will make things worse?

Mr. Prentice: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, the circumstances that we are entering in are new. They're untested. It is going to take prudence and discipline on the part of the government in administering Alberta's finances. But we are in a strong position. While we are all concerned about this, I think it is important that we note that Albertans are tough and resilient. Our economy is tough and resilient. The Moody's report, again, projects that even in the circumstances that we are currently in, Alberta will experience growth in the next year, growth that leads this country. We continue to be disciplined, and we need to do exactly that.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions.

Energy Company Licensee Liability Rating Program

Ms Smith: Perhaps an example, Mr. Speaker. Speaking of places where poor government policy can make an economic downturn worse, yesterday we asked about the licensee liability rating program. While the goal of LLR is laudable, it was poorly crafted and earlier this year put many junior oil companies at risk of insolvency during a high-price environment. Its consequences will now be more severe during a low-price environment. Will the Premier put a pause on this program and re-evaluate the approach?

Mr. Prentice: We will certainly evaluate any measures which any department of this government proposes to take, Mr. Speaker, that will have an impact on jobs and investment in our energy industry over the course of this low-price cycle that we are in. We must all be mindful that we need to maintain our competitiveness through this. At the same time I want to be absolutely clear that no one should underestimate the strength and the resilience of the energy industry in this province. This price trough that we're in is not about our competitiveness or about our long-term future, both of which are strong.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, when we pushed the government hard on the issue of the LLR earlier this year, they modified the program, with a management regime that stretched out payments for smaller companies. That was good, but in the new very low-price environment more is needed. The program as structured may lead to the end of hundreds of small and medium-sized energy companies. This will increase the financial obligations and stresses on the remaining medium and large oil companies. Will the Premier agree to review the LLR program to ensure that it doesn't harm our economy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I indicated in my answer that I had heard the concern from the small operators. I thank the hon. member for recognition of the goals of the program and the fact that a financial program is assisting the payments. I met with the small operators and identified the concern. I promised to meet with them again. I informed my department and the regulator that we would be meeting very soon. They're doing the background work. We will. It's not just that issue; we are deeply concerned about the competitiveness across the board, and I will meet with them. I guarantee you.

Ms Smith: I think meeting is a good first step, Mr. Speaker, and I do hope that we actually see some accommodation because if government policies reduce the capacity of the Alberta energy industry to bounce back from a low-price environment, we're all going to suffer.

This is a policy question, but it's also an intensely important personal question for hundreds of thousands of families who derive their income and prosperity from our energy industry. To the Premier: will he assure those Albertans and indeed all of us that the policies of his Energy ministry are not going to make things worse?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that nobody in this House is going to take this more personally than me and our Premier. I absolutely will meet with those operators, and I can assure their families that we will do everything we can. The competitiveness of our industry is absolutely critical to us. We understand the jobs and the wealth that they create, and we will absolutely work on this.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition. Third and final main set of questions.

Long-term Care

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I asked some questions about seniors yesterday and discovered that the Health minister, the Seniors minister, and Alberta Health Services weren't on the same page. Yesterday an AHS executive ludicrously suggested that we have an overcapacity of long-term care beds in this province. The Health minister said that it was a regional thing; some parts of Alberta have "too many beds." This was curious, of course, since in the by-elections the Health minister announced new seniors beds for every region of Alberta. Can the Health minister tell us which parts of Alberta have too many long-term care nursing beds?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was making a reference to the province as a whole. I think that we in the last little while are in the process of building more long-term care beds in areas that are in need of them, and we'll continue to do that. We value making sure that our people, seniors, and those in need of long-term care will have facilities where they need them.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, let me tell the nature of the problem. In 1993 we had about 13,000 long-term care nursing beds in this province; 21 years later we have 14,200 beds. In the meantime we have gone from a 2.5 million population to 4.3 million residents, and our population has gotten older, on average. No reasonable person can actually believe that there are too many long-term care nursing beds in Alberta. Why are AHS and this Health minister trying to redefine who needs a long-term care bed rather than just simply building enough beds?

2:00

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we will continue to do what's needed for the citizens of Alberta. But let's be clear. One of the policies this government has developed is for more attention to home care, trying to keep people in their homes. We're spending over half a billion dollars a year to make sure that we're able to keep people in their houses. We're working with them. We're encouraging people to stay in their houses. Our home-care program is doing that.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Health minister knows that if there isn't a long-term care nursing bed, then they stay in acute-care beds in hospitals. He's not solving the problem.

We also heard another dodge yesterday when the Seniors minister suggested that the Seniors' Advocate had the authority to call for investigations into improper seniors care. Now, the minister should know this isn't true, but let's take him at his word. Since almost every month we hear about shocking cases of seniors with festering bedsores or seniors with fungal infections or seniors left for days in soiled diapers, why has the Seniors' Advocate not launched any investigations?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Seniors' Advocate plays a very important role. There are a number of avenues open to constituents and seniors and indeed MLAs from this caucus, including working with local management on issues as well as going to the Seniors' Advocate, who does have the ability to call inspections and to help constituents navigate. They've also got the ability to call under protection for persons in care, which has a toll-free number. I'll

give it to you right now. It's 1.888.357.9339. As a matter of fact, people have an obligation and are compelled to call if they're aware of any abuse or lack of treatment for seniors.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

(continued)

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before the election the PCs promised every Albertan a new car, a school, a hospital, and a chicken in every pot, and after the election some unforeseen fiscal reality requires Albertans to do some belt-tightening. Every PC Premier gives us a new excuse: a price differential, a bitumen bubble, and now a price drop. No matter what you call it, this PC government always acts surprised whenever volatile resource revenue goes volatile. To the Premier: how is it that your PC government can't balance the books and save enough money in the good times and falls so desperately short in the bad times?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, there appears to be a question buried in the rhetoric of those comments. The long and short of it is that the world energy industry is currently in unexpected circumstances with oil prices, as I understand it, at 12-year lows. This is something that relates to what is taking place inside OPEC. It is something that every single oil producer in the world is grappling with right now. It is not unique to Alberta. Certainly, the Premier of Alberta cannot control energy prices. The key is to control what we can, and that is prudence in our fiscal finances.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the question is premised on the fact that the PCs have tied public services to the price of a barrel of oil.

At the last heritage savings trust fund meeting I asked the CEO of AIMCo about budgeting and planning for changing oil prices. He admitted that a year ago he warned that we should be preparing for \$70 a barrel when oil was at \$100, but that notion was not very well received according to him. The Alberta Liberals have been saying the same thing for years and urging the government to introduce a more stable revenue-stream structure based on taxation. Dr. de Bever says that he can't find an economist in the province who would disagree. To the Premier: why do you still refuse . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Premier, I hope you heard a question in there.

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak definitively to the advice that's been offered by the Liberals in terms of the public finances of the province, but I will refer to the fact that the most respected credit agency in the world, Moody's, today said that one of the strengths that we have is our balance sheet and the state of our public finances, that we have relied in the past on prudent forecasting, and that we have taken windfall natural resource revenue and used it to pay down debt, to continue to build infrastructure, and to build up financial reserves. That is exactly what we need to continue to do, not the sort of policies that my friend is advocating.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are the only ones who've paid down debt in this country, while the Conservatives have racked it up.

The Premier also told us that he'll be rolling up his sleeves over the Christmas break and wrestling this problem to the ground. While we certainly appreciate his commitment to hard work, no amount of cowboy economics is going to make this problem go away. Next year babies will still be born, children will go to school, the sick will need hospitals, and seniors will get old. To the Premier: the only thing that seems to be in question is if your government will give regular, hard-working Albertans a tax cut and ask the wealthy to pay their fair share. Will you reintroduce progressive income tax or not?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to administer the finances of the province in a fiscally responsible way. I point out that my friend is critical . . . [interjection] My friend is critical of the state of Alberta's finances. I again refer to him . . . [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, there is a time and place where you will be recognized if you wish. Right in the middle of someone else's speech time is not it.

Let us move on to the hon. Premier to conclude.

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, if I might respond to that question, what we have in this province that makes us competitive and that will allow us to weather this tough circumstance is our tax competitiveness, the fact that we have the lowest taxes in the country, that they are fair, and that they're fairly administered, that we have built up financial assets that no one else in Canada has at this point and which put no one else in a position to be able to weather what is about to happen. That is exactly what we're going to continue to do.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Emergency Room Capacity Issues

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Doctors at the U of A hospital are reporting the most severe patient backlog since 2010. The emergency room is so full that doctors are treating patients in the corner of the waiting room. Experts say that the backlog is a risk to patient health and safety and requires urgent and immediate attention. To the Minister of Health: what specifically is your government going to do today to alleviate the unacceptable status at the U of A ER?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have great confidence in our emergency doctors. They do an incredible job. The nurses and their teams do tremendous work. We realize that there are challenges with an ever-growing population, but we have done some things for that. We're reducing the dependence on acute-care beds, opening up new long-term care beds. Actually, of the original 464 people, we've moved almost a third into long-term care beds. We've put in transition beds. We've made every effort at this point in time to try to help the system. We understand that there's an issue, and we'll continue to work with the physicians and the emergency doctors to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Notley: Well, it doesn't seem to be working, Mr. Speaker. U of A doctors say that less than 40 per cent of patients are being seen and discharged within acceptable timelines and that, instead, patients are waiting up to eight hours to see a doctor. This crisis in

the ER occurs repeatedly, and every time this government puts a Band-Aid on the problem, they then rip it off through their own incompetence. To the Minister of Health: when will this government take off its ideological blinders, start providing an actual increase in the number of long-term care spaces for patients trapped in our hospitals, and fix this ER backlog?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, several months ago we started that process, and under the leadership of the Seniors minister we're continuing that process. We're building more and more beds, long-term care beds, supportive beds, and trying to move people into those facilities. It doesn't happen overnight. As I said a few seconds ago, we have moved almost one-third of our original goal of 460 within the first year into those beds. We'll continue to do that. All of our teams are working very, very hard to be successful, and we understand the challenges.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, speaking of long-term care, when it comes to long-term care, this government is sitting by while Covenant Health saves money and reduces patient care hours on the backs of both patients and loyal, long-serving front-line workers. To the Minister of Health. Covenant's so-called reorganization is awe-inspiring in the level of chaos it is creating right now, and it will undoubtedly contribute to the number of vulnerable and ill patients who end up in ERs unnecessarily. To the minister: why in heaven's name are you letting them get away with this?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, Covenant Health is an incredibly well-respected organization that runs several facilities in Edmonton, and we are a great supporter of theirs. The fact of the matter is that they're a private operator, and they decided to make some changes. They have to meet all the standards set out by the province of Alberta. We will ensure that they do that. They've made a modest reduction of I think about five staff in their three facilities, where they have 650 employees. They'll continue to deliver service. That is a group of people, Covenant Health, that's passionate about people and will continue to deliver what's needed to Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

2:10 Energy Industry Competitiveness

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The energy industry is the backbone of the Alberta economy. It impacts job growth, retail sales, and home values. But with oil prices in decline the industry is rightly concerned about the future. Right now major energy producers are cutting their capital budgets, cancelling investments, and bracing for uncertain times. To the Energy minister: what new policy changes are you making to ensure that drilling doesn't stop and our producers have the confidence they need to continue to invest in this current climate?

Mr. Oberle: Well, I thank the hon. member for the question, Mr. Speaker. Let's be clear that the current situation is driven by the international price of oil, not by the government policy environment. The energy companies are doing what they're going to expect our government to do, which is to manage their finances in a prudent and cautious manner. We fully expect them to do that. At the moment nobody has talked about curtailments in

production. We are talking constantly with the energy industry, and we will respond.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have some information, that I'll share with you, where some companies are cutting their budgets.

Given that a major pipeline project would go a long way to improving our competitive advantage but that most of these potential pipelines are years away from happening, if ever, Albertans want to know: what steps are you taking today to improve our competitive advantage and show the world that Alberta is still a responsible energy player and a good place to do business?

Mr. Oberle: Well, let me be clear to the hon. member that market access is number one in my mandate letter. The pipelines are going to happen, and they are not years away from happening. In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we're working on value-added initiatives right here at home. This will be done right.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, given that in 2008, when the economy was in recession and oil prices were suffering, this government panicked and made things much worse with poorly-thought-out policy changes, can the minister assure this House that he's actually talking to industry this time and won't make policy decisions regarding the carbon levy or royalties that will further harm the oil patch?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, my colleague, I think, is referring to the comments that were made yesterday in the House of Commons by the Prime Minister. Both the Prime Minister and I have been very clear that we intend to protect jobs and investment in the energy industry. Key to that is the question of our economic competitiveness. We will be environmental leaders, as we currently are. What we will not do as Albertans is unilaterally impose penalties and levies on the energy industry that will damage jobs and investment in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

School Construction Update

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans know that falling oil prices will impact government revenue. In fact, yesterday the Premier noted that if low oil prices persist over the next year, it could cost the Treasury as much as \$6 billion or \$7 billion. While revenues decline, population continues to increase, including more school-age children. In light of this, is the Minister of Infrastructure still confident that he can deliver on the 230 new schools promised?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we are confident. Because the Alberta population continues to grow, we project that there will be a 25 per cent increase by 2023 of school-age children. Every time our population increases by about a hundred thousand, 15,000 of those people are school-age children, and that means we need 28 new schools. So we have to project for our continued population growth to make sure that the quality of life that Albertans are expecting is there for them.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: There's no doubt these schools must be built, but Albertans want to know that we're actually making progress, so we want some details. The 230 promised schools are divided into three phases. In phases 1 and 2 there are 160 schools. Will the minister tell us how many schools in these phases are completed, under construction, in tender, or in some other phase?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can report progress from the last time we discussed schools in this Assembly. In phase 1, 31 are complete, three of them are close to completion, and one, because of the Calgary floods, is in the planning stage. In phase 2 one is complete, 20 are under construction, 28 will be out of tender within this month, and 73 will be going to tender within the early parts of next year.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: People appreciate this detail.

In phase 3 government promised another 75 new or modernized schools, but only planning dollars were allocated. Why did the government do this, and when can we expect to see progress on these phase 3 schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we heard from our stakeholders across this province is that the planning-and-design period can take upwards of one year, so in an attempt to shave off that time and to get children into new classrooms as soon as possible, we allocated planning dollars earlier so that people can begin the planning and the design of new schools so that, hopefully, we can get children into classrooms much quicker than before.

Long-term Care (continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, last year the government spent \$910 million on health services in long-term care, or more accurately that's the amount of money that they think was spent on health care. Long-term care operators receive funding based on the care plan they develop for residents, yet incredibly the Auditor General says that nobody bothered to check if those care plans are actually being implemented so that the seniors can get the basic care they so richly deserve. To the minister: when you spend almost a billion dollars a year on health services in long-term care, checking to see if those health care services are actually being delivered seems like a no-brainer.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are some people who don't have plans, but for the most part the Auditor General acknowledged that there are many, many who have health care plans. They're important plans. The health care plan allows the LTC facility to look at the kind of care the individual needs but also, which is vitally important, at whether or not we put the person in the right level of care. That's something that we've had a bit of a challenge with. I hope we'll continue to do that. We are doing that. We'll continue to do that under the auspices of Alberta Health Services and with the co-operation of the various facilities.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. Given that in response to the Auditor General's report AHS said that they're ready to implement a

system to monitor whether facilities actually hire the number and ratio of staff that they are funded to provide and that they would publish quarterly reports beginning in the fall of 2014, Minister, fall ends in 11 days, and the report is nowhere to be seen. Where is it?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, when reports become available and they're finished, we will put them on the website for people to review.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. I'll look forward to that, Minister.

Given that oil prices are plummeting, the government talks about belt-tightening, and there are still seniors that aren't getting two baths a week even though you promised you'd do that, can the minister explain to me why I'm reading in the morning newspaper that a senior AHS executive wants to spend upwards of \$25,000 to study Calgarians' feelings on e-cigarettes? Minister, that's ridiculous. How many baths would that be?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Health Services should not be going out and doing those kinds of things at this point in time. These are difficult times, and we will talk to them about the kind of investments they're making.

Postsecondary Institution Accessibility in Calgary

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, all my questions are for the minister of advanced education. Over the past five years the number of turned-away students in the city of Calgary to our postsecondary institutions has increased by over 200 per cent. The comparable figure for Edmonton and the rest of the province is 93 per cent. Can the minister explain why so many students in the city of Calgary are being turned away from postsecondary education when they are qualified for entrance?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for the question and for being such a strong advocate for our postsecondary system. In this case we'd make sure that we are comparing institutions fairly. Acceptance rates vary across the institutions, across Campus Alberta. In this case an institutional comparison simply doesn't make sense because we have various policies and we have various programs at each institution. Like all members in the Assembly, we want Campus Alberta to be the best postsecondary system in all of Canada. I will take the member's concerns into account as we go forward.

Dr. Brown: Will the minister do something to lower the number of turnaways in the city of Calgary, and will he ensure that people can attend an institution closer to home, where they can get their education at a lower and more reasonable cost?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:20

Mr. Scott: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Our government is working hand in hand with our institutions so that we have the best system for learners and for taxpayers, a system that is accessible for students and sustainable for institutions and for taxpayers. The University of Calgary, like the rest of Campus Alberta, is working on an institutional plan for the year ahead. I'll be sitting down with all our Campus Alberta partners to make sure

that they have a plan that makes sense and that is responsive for Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Final supplemental? Thank you.

Let us move on to Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Covenant Health Staffing Changes

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government and Health minister continue to make wasteful decisions with predictable results, low morale in staff and intermittent crises from emergency rooms to long-term care. Dr. Bill Sevcik, whose letter I will table later, this week described staff frustration, increased legal liability, and intolerable risk to patients, largely due to the failed long-term care and home-care policies in this government. Now Covenant Health is laying off 600 LPNs at the Edmonton General site. To the minister: with ER Dr. Sevcik appealing for very practical improvements, increases in ER nurses today and reinstating triage physicians . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Health to respond.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health Services is doing all they can in working with ER doctors, with Covenant Health, with various other facilities in the province to deliver the kind of health care that they're able to do, and we're in support of what they do. They are challenged, we admit, but will continue to do things, whether it's creating transition beds, whether it's creating more long-term care spaces, whether it's working with the doctors to find new ways to transition some of the staff, some of the people in the emergency departments. We're working very hard to do it. It is a difficult task, and we'll continue.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, given repeated warnings from the Auditor General about the state of long-term care in Alberta by what logic does this minister expect the layoff of 600 front-line workers by Covenant to improve safety and care of vulnerable seniors and reduce visits to ERs? By what logic, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated before, Covenant Health is a private operator. As a private operator they make decisions within the context of the rules that Alberta Health Services and the Alberta government set in ensuring that proper patient care is taken. We will make sure they do that. In these difficult times they do what they can to make sure. Covenant Health, I'm sure, is always only interested in patient care and patient health.

Dr. Swann: You, sir, are responsible for the health of Albertans, not Covenant Health, which is publicly funded, by the way.

Given that Covenant Health duplicates the role of Alberta Health Services and collectively costs \$57 million a year from the public purse, will you show some leadership and bring Covenant Health under Alberta Health Services and free up those dollars for front-line care? Fifty-seven million dollars a year.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health Services has an agreement with Covenant Health. The government has agreements. We'll abide by our agreements. We will work with the people we

need to work with to make sure things are done as efficiently as possible, and we'll continue to do that.

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

Supports for Refugees

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal Bill C-43 will allow the provinces to impose minimum residency requirements for refugee claimants to access social assistance. This means that this PC government could leave refugee claimants without any income at all if they follow this directive. To the Minister of Human Services: will you assure Albertans that refugees fleeing oppression and violence will not be left destitute by this government, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill C-43 is being discussed at another level of government, the federal government. I want to assure the House that our commitment to providing support for refugees remains exactly the same.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that many refugee claimants are ineligible for work permits and given that even these claimants who are eligible to work in Alberta need some source of income just to get settled and to get their feet on the ground, to the same minister – we need to get a clear answer – will you honour our human rights conventions regardless of the outcome of Bill C-43?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, as I said previously, this bill is currently in discussion, and I want to assure this hon. member and all members of the House that we will continue to support refugees that come to Alberta. Our commitment remains exactly the same.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that when the federal government cut refugee claimants' payments for their health care, we did not see any action on that at all from this government and given that regardless of Bill C-43 this government can still do the right thing, is this PC government going to follow its federal cousins in this race to the bottom of cutting off refugee claimants from income supports? People need to know. Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To me, it's incredibly offensive, the fearmongering that's going on. I will say it again. Our commitment to supporting refugees remains exactly the same.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Registered Nurses' Scope of Practice

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is home to 36,000 registered nurses, who've been trying to convince the government for over five years to grant them limited prescribing authority. These are some of the most skilled and dedicated health professionals in the province, who would be able to provide first-line treatment for common conditions where antibiotics or other

schedule 1 drugs would be required. Making these regulatory changes would allow better access to care and would mean less burden on local rural health centres and emergency departments. To the Health minister. Other health professionals have been empowered with expanded scopes of practice. Why not Alberta's highly skilled registered nurses?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we much appreciate the question by the hon. member. As a matter of fact, I was meeting on that last night, and it's going through the process. Unfortunately, it's a two-sided coin. The nurses are not as quick, we're not that quick, and the system has not moved nearly as fast as we would like to see it move. We're in the process of trying to encourage everybody to move along the line so we can get the nurses to do the kinds of things that they've asked for in the bill. We're in strong support of this.

Mr. Fox: Given that many of the rural communities across the province have RNs working in emergency departments, often without physicians and nurse practitioners present at all times, and given that rural and remote emergency departments often require registered nurses to act immediately to treat life-threatening patient conditions, why won't the government provide limited prescribing powers to these highly trained nurses so that delays can be prevented and lives can be saved?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, this is a process. It goes through legislation. It has to go through approval. A variety of people have to review it, not just the government but nurses and other individuals who are part of the process. Unfortunately, it takes too long. I would like to see this whole procedure go very quickly. I was quite surprised that it's been, I think, since 2011 that we've been working on this one. There is a need for the nurses to be able to prescribe the necessary medication in rural areas, but right now we haven't got that completed. We look forward to moving quickly. I do thank you for the question.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, the nurses have been working on this with the government for over five years now. Given that the government has rewritten regulations related to the scopes of practice for Alberta's 12,000 LPNs, 4,500 pharmacists, and even the dozen or so physician assistants – really, all good moves, by the way – at the same time the government has ignored the 36,000 registered nurses across this province, who could be utilized more effectively. To reiterate, it's been five years they've been working on this. Will the minister commit to working with CARNA to complete the regulation-drafting process by the spring of 2015?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would encourage the member to call CARNA up and tell them to move through the process as quick as they can. We'll move as quick as we can. We'll get this approved. It's an important step. We would encourage everybody to make a phone call, to get it done. We'll move quickly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Neonicotinoid Pesticides

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 25 the Ontario government announced a move to limit the use of neonicotinoid pesticides. Several recent studies have tried to link the use of neonics as the single causal source in the decline of bee populations. Some of you may know that Falher is known as the honey capital of Canada, so this issue hits close to home for my constituents and all of the other beekeepers in Alberta. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: is the Alberta government considering similar things?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. He's a great advocate for bees and honey – I know that first-hand – a very important segment of the agriculture industry in Alberta but often overlooked. We have been following this issue very closely. We have no plan to restrict the use of neonics. As a matter of fact, we've been working very closely with the federal government, and our department has developed an analytical method to look at whether or not there are residues visible, and we're not finding much evidence of that in Alberta.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

2:30

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister, then: can you explain how common neonics use is in Alberta and what they are used for?

Mr. Olson: Well, it is a pesticide, and it's applied to seeds for the purpose of keeping down pests that affect the plant. It's interesting, though, that in Alberta we apply it differently. We use different equipment than in Ontario. In Ontario it's primarily used on corn and soybeans. Those are not the crops that we're using neonics on in Alberta. As I've said, we have not found evidence of a problem here. Any residues that we've found have been at very low levels.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to the same minister: can you tell me what the government is doing to prevent bee deaths?

Mr. Olson: Well, this is an interesting issue as well because bee deaths are happening and in great numbers, actually, in other parts of the country and the continent. As a matter of fact, Alberta is the only place in North America where populations have actually doubled. Since 1989 we've had a doubling, from 142,000 colonies to 282,000. At the same time, though, the winterkill rate has decreased by half, from 40 per cent down to 20 per cent. That's due to good management practices, assisted by our department.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Calgary-Currie.

Home Renovation Consumer Protection

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The state of Alberta's home reno market, as recent events have shown, is an utter mess, going relatively unchecked by this government. We have seen contractors abuse the system with the lack of control. Examples

have shown that contractors who receive payments for work not yet done can file for bankruptcy, leaving the consumer with the bulk paid for unfinished work or no work done at all. Can the Minister of Service Alberta tell us what actions he has taken to address these issues for the protection of our Alberta homeowners?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for that very good question. As a former electrical contractor the member knows that the majority of contractors in the province of Alberta are hard-working, honest, capable businessmen. With that said, he does speak to an alarming issue. We have a couple of issues before us that we are investigating. As such, at Service Alberta we're always looking to improve, and I have directed our staff to look at what we can do to strengthen consumer protection when it comes to contracting issues.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you for that, Minister.

Given that for many Albertans the cost of home reno represents a significant investment, to the minister: how and why are irresponsible contractors allowed to take inordinate sums of money for prepayment, shut down, and open a new business in another name just to do it all over again?

Mr. Khan: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out to the hon. member – and I believe he is aware and I believe all members of this House are aware – that Alberta is one of the very few jurisdictions in North America where we do have some consumer protection legislation in regard to contractors. Now, he also does raise a very good point in that contractors are remodelling and doing home renovations with very large sums attached. As such, that's part of our continual improvement agenda with Service Alberta. We're going to take a look at some of our surety bonds and make sure that we're getting the right protection for consumers.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in recent years fraud and deception have been unfortunate factors in this industry – we do recognize that there are many, many good contractors out there – and given that in some cases not only are consumers duped out of their deposits and reno's but some are finding liens placed on their homes for services and supplies of subcontractors, why does there exist no protection for homeowners for unpaid bills by the contractor?

Mr. Khan: Again, I want to thank the hon. member for the question. The hon. member does speak to an issue in regard to good and healthy consumer protection activity. Consumers should not be paying 50 per cent up front, Mr. Speaker. I think they know that. We can help consumers by getting that message out. He speaks to some issues around liens. Again, these are activities that I've instructed my department to start doing some work on to see if we can strengthen our consumer protections when it comes to contractors and some of these very important issues that the member talks about.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

Sexual Violence Victims

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sexual violence affects people of all walks of life. We are all vulnerable to being victims of this crime. Unfortunately, this issue often makes people

uncomfortable and is rarely discussed in public. Recent events have placed the spotlight back onto sexual violence. My first question is to the Minister of Human Services. Given that only 8 per cent of victims are reporting cases of sexual violence, how can we even begin to help those who suffer the traumatic effects of this crime?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sexual violence thrives in silence, and we know it's very hard for many people to come forward. We have 11 sexual assault centres and agencies across Alberta that can help victims. We also have some child protection centres doing incredible work, like the Zebra Child Protection Centre in Edmonton, the Sheldon Kennedy centre in Calgary, and, of course, the Caribou Child and Youth Centre in Grande Prairie. A multidisciplinary approach to solve the problems. As well, last May in Calgary a child sexual abuse forum was held to help inform the development of a child sexual . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Cusanelli: Mr. Speaker, my next question is to the Minister of Justice. What is your ministry doing to assist victims of sexual violence, and what do victims of sexual violence need to know that could help them navigate Alberta's legal system?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank this member for putting her attention to this important issue. I want it to be clear to all victims that your rights are put first, and help is available. There are 75 police-based victim services programs and 40 community-based programs spread across this province. I've met with several of them, and more than 2,800 highly trained professionals are ready to provide this information and crisis response. When victims come to any of these programs for help, they have to be treated with respect, dignity, and compassion.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you. Again to the same minister: what tools are provided to law enforcement to support victims who report these crimes in their pursuit of justice?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, our law enforcement offices are often the first point of response, and as such they have a responsibility to treat every incident of sexual violence with sensitivity and diligence. I have met with many of these officers across the province, and I would say that they do just that. My ministry is partnered with law enforcement agencies in many capacities to ensure the appropriate response to violent crimes. Again, it's always about putting the victim first. They didn't ask to be put in this position.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by Calgary-Fort.

Tourism Levy Utilization

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tourism is a \$7.8 billion sector employing over 135,000 Albertans. The Alberta tourism levy was created to help promote and develop Alberta as a destination of choice. Stakeholders in my constituency of Banff-

Cochrane have raised concerns about allocation of these funds and want to ensure they are used for the intended purpose. To the Minister of Culture and Tourism: can the minister explain what initiatives the Alberta tourism levy supports?

The Speaker: The hon. minister responsible for tourism.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The tourism levy was developed in 2005 after extensive consultation with stakeholders and looking at what other countries and provinces do. It is a self-sustainable fund, meaning that there are no government funds that go into it, and it goes towards promoting and enhancing Alberta as a destination of choice and increasing our share of the market. I'm going to bring your attention to the Remember to Breathe campaign that Travel Alberta put out. That's the kind of work it goes into.

Mr. Casey: To the same minister: can the minister explain why the allocation of these funds changed from the 80 per cent to Travel Alberta and 20 per cent to the ministry agreed upon by the government and industry in 2005 to a recent 70-30 split between Travel Alberta and the ministry in 2013?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The tourism levy responds to the industry's requests for sustainable funding. In 2013, when there was a tough budget, there was a reallocation of funds, but all of the funds are staying within the tourism industry, and some of it is going over to the development of new products.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that funding to Travel Alberta is critical to the future of tourism in Alberta, can the minister offer any assurance that the 70-30 split in the tourism levy will not change for the 2015 budget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are working on our budget plan, and we don't know exactly what that's going to look like, but we do know, as our Premier has been quite clear on, that with falling oil prices, it's going to be a tight budget. My goal is to make sure that the full proceeds of that levy stay within the tourism industry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by Red Deer South.

2:40

Homelessness Initiatives

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are two major shelters for the homeless in Calgary in my constituency, the Calgary drop-in centre and the Salvation Army Centre of Hope. Now, the risk of being homeless is facing harsh circumstances, particularly in the winter. Unfortunately, surviving this winter weather and trying to find the next meal is really important for some Albertans. To the Minister of Human Services: what is being done to support some of the most vulnerable Albertans who are homeless, particularly during the winter months?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. First of all, the housing first

approach that we have has provided \$83 million in funding this last year. We know that once an individual is in a stable home, we can start dealing with addiction and mental health issues as well. Part of the success is that our community partners across the province have great housing first programs. Among those is the scattered-site assertive community treatment program. There is one in Calgary called the Alex Pathways to Housing, and that has helped those who frequently use the health and justice system.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I learned that homelessness is no longer just an urban issue. What measures does your ministry take to help those people in rural communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this government helps vulnerable Albertans, urban and rural, wherever they are. We know that there are many homeless individuals in rural communities. We also know that the seven cities are working together to deal with this problem. The hidden homeless, some of the youth who are couch surfing, is what we're dealing with as well. That's why we're working with youth, especially in the area of youth homelessness. Some of the projects that we want to do are in Cochrane, Camrose, Peace River, Lloydminster, and Brooks.

Mr. Cao: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: living homeless, on the street or in an emergency shelter, is no place for young Albertans to grow up, so what plans do you have to keep the youth out of these situations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned previously, the \$3 million we're going to be investing in the youth homelessness across Alberta means that those youth will be able to have access to programs. Also, we always look at the families as a first approach, trying to get the youth to go back to their families. If they can't, of course, we try to assist the families and then keep them in homes on a temporary basis and then move to the housing first model.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. One hundred questions and replies were heard today.

Thirty seconds from now we will call upon the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Impaired Driving

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas everywhere we go. I was going to sing that, but – it's a wonderful time to spend with family and friends and raise a glass or two of holiday cheer. Sadly, it's also a time of year when we need to step up our efforts to curb impaired driving. Every year police services across our province, the country, and around the world are out in full force reminding people that if they're going to

drink to plan ahead. It's as simple as calling a cab, taking public transit, phoning a friend, or designating a driver.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, it's a message that continues to fall on deaf ears. Health Canada estimates that more than 1,500 Canadians die and 74,000 Canadians are injured as a result of impaired driving every year. In fact, in 2013 80 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes in Alberta, and 396 people suffered major injuries. What's more, on average 8,600 people are convicted of impaired driving in our province each year. To put that into perspective, it's twice as many people as will fit in my new stadium in my constituency of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. Frankly, that's completely unacceptable.

Impaired drivers impose an enormous cost on our society. The consequences have a devastating impact on families, the health care and legal systems, and the general public. In other words, Mr. Speaker, we all pay the price. Drivers who decide to get behind the wheel after having one too many face not only the possibility of killing themselves, their friends, or someone else; they also face very serious legal, financial, and social ramifications.

As police so often remind us, if you drink and drive, your luck will run out, and you will get caught. Even worse, you may be involved in a severe collision that harms someone you love. It's a sober reminder before we head out to enjoy a wonderful evening: who are you willing to lose?

Mr. Speaker, I urge Albertans across the province to truly make this a season of joy by making the right decision, to not drink and drive. It's that easy.

Hospice Care

Mr. Young: They say that there are two things one cannot avoid, death and taxes. While we have not completely avoided taxes in Alberta, they are very reasonable, and with our public health efforts, the quality of life that we all have in Alberta, and a health care system that is the envy of many, indeed, Mr. Speaker, we are very fortunate. Nonetheless, death does come to us all.

Ideally, each of us and our loved ones will pass away in a place that we want to, with our family and friends and with the medical supports that we need. End-of-life care, or palliative care, can be provided in hospitals, in one's home, through hospice outreach, or in residential hospice. Hospice care is a type of care and a philosophy of care that focuses on the palliation of chronically ill, terminally ill, or seriously ill patients' pain symptoms and attending to their emotional and spiritual needs.

In my constituency Pilgrims Hospice provides end-of-life support and outreach. I would like to commend the board of directors, staff, volunteers, and families who collectively provide these services as Albertans' life journeys come to an end.

Community- and family-based hospice care provides terminally ill patients the supports they need in a dignified and compassionate manner. Typical supports include complex pain management, addressing psychosocial and spiritual distress for patients and family members, and end-of-life decision-making.

Located in the quiet community of Crestwood, Pilgrims Hospice is a family-centred organization in Edmonton-Riverview that provides end-of-life care in a supportive environment. Mr. Speaker, Pilgrims Hospice places an emphasis on the person's quality of life, developing respectful relationships with those who seek its services. Most of all, Pilgrims Hospice provides critically ill individuals the opportunity to live their last days in a calm, peaceful, and fulfilling way.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Heritage Savings Trust Fund Comparability

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to address a concern many have spoken about that requires clarification. I'd like to clear up some misconceptions regarding jurisdictional comparisons between Alberta and Norway. People have pointed to Norway as a model for how the Alberta government should treat its oil revenue. They compare Norway's global fund . . . [interjection] I'm sorry. I'm respectful when you do a member's statement. I expect the same.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there is a long-standing tradition that we don't interrupt folks when they're giving their private members' statements, and in particular we don't do points of order either. Let us abide by that on all sides of the House.

Hon. member, please continue.

Mr. Lemke: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

People have pointed to Norway as a model for how the Alberta government should treat its oil revenue. They compare Norway's global fund and our heritage savings trust fund. They like to illustrate the amount in each to try to make the case that Alberta's fund is being mismanaged. It makes as much sense as comparing Alberta to the United States, Germany, or Nigeria. Like those, Norway is a sovereign country while Alberta is a province within a country. In fact, Alberta occupies only 6.6 per cent of Canada's land mass. We share revenue with the rest of the country through royalties and transfer payments. Norwegians pay 25 per cent in sales tax. Alberta has no sales tax, a low personal tax, and a low corporate tax.

Why has the government of Alberta adopted this strategy? It's simple: to attract business and growth to expand our economy. Is it working? Clearly, it is, Mr. Speaker. The proof is in the hundreds of thousands who have moved here and the investment that is being brought to Alberta. People are coming to Alberta because of the opportunity. Our challenge is to continue to provide the best health care, education, and quality of life possible, and that is truly a legacy we can all be proud of.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: Calgary-North West, do you have a petition there? Okay. Why don't you proceed, and then we'll go to Calgary-Buffalo.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the requisite five copies of a petition signed by more than 3,500 residents of Scenic Acres in Calgary-North West. They are concerned about the proposed francophone school . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, is this a petition or a tabling?

Ms Jansen: It's a petition.

The Speaker: It's a petition? Okay. I thought I heard you say something else. Carry on.

Ms Jansen: They're concerned about the proposed francophone school for their community, that it hasn't received proper assessment, and they'd like the project halted until an alternative land option is reassessed.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions I'd like to present. The first one has a couple of hundred signatures, and they are urging the Alberta Legislative Assembly to "consider a financial increase of the Monthly Core Benefits to the Barriers to Full Employment . . . Medical Benefits with Alberta Works."

The second one is in regard to the DRP process. They're petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to "re-evaluate the Disaster Recovery Program and how it has affected Albertans since its introduction following the flood of 2013, and to ensure flood victims are compensated for their losses." There are approximately a thousand signatures on that petition.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other petitions? Lesser Slave Lake, did you have one? Okay. Please.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, I am tabling a petition from the constituents of Lesser Slave Lake requesting that "the High Prairie Medical Clinic be allowed to lease adequate clinic space in the separate Interprofessional Clinic building at the new High Prairie Health Complex site."

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Calgary-North West, followed by the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If you'll indulge me, I have two tablings today. The first is the appropriate number of copies of a letter sent to the Premier by Carmen McConnell, a mother of three whose oldest son is gay. In this letter she very eloquently stresses the needs for GSAs in all schools. She explains how any antibullying support would have been extremely helpful to her son, who at times suffered from self-hate to the point of cutting himself. I hope the Premier listens to her words very carefully.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of an article from the *International Business Times* from December 8, 2014. The article includes a quote from Pope Francis stating that the Catholic Church needs to help parents stand by their gay children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-North West, did you also have a tabling? No? Okay. I show you listed here as having a tabling as well.

Let's move on, then, to the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege and pleasure to rise today to table the requisite number of copies of a letter from Mme Diana Stralberg, playground committee chair for a school in my constituency, l'école publique Gabrielle-Roy, appealing for support for their playground redevelopment project.

Our school population is highly diverse, representing at least 12 francophone countries [from] around the world, and over half of [the] students are from recent immigrant families. About 90% of students ride the school bus from other neighbourhoods.

Thus, the playground is the only place that they get to play during their noon hour. They need to raise money and came today to tell

the Assembly about that. I have the tabling for you, and I'm sure everybody will get an opportunity to read that in due course.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is from Dr. Bill Sevcik, emergency room director at the University hospital, outlining his deep concerns about staff frustration, increased legal liability, and intolerable risk to patients as a result of the overcrowding and the lack of long-term care and home care.

The second is a tabling on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark in relation to his question to the Premier on the impact of the oil price tumble and the so-called price trough.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hehr: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of a letter sent to the Premier by yours truly noting a recent report showing that inequality in Alberta is rising. In particular, one group of people appear to be falling behind even further. It's women. In fact, Alberta has one of the largest gender wage gaps in Canada. Women make approximately 57 per cent of what men make in this country. One of the recommendations I make in this letter is that we introduce pay equity legislation like most other provinces in Canada.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Campbell, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, return to order of the Assembly MR3, asked for by Mr. Hehr on April 14, 2014, copies of government studies or proposals related to the establishment of flood or disaster insurance in Alberta that were prepared between June 1, 2013, and January 1, 2014.

On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Klimchuk, Minister of Human Services, responses to questions raised by Mrs. Towle, the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake; Dr. Swann, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View; Ms. Notley, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona; and Mrs. Jablonski, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, on April 9, 2014, Ministry of Human Services 2014 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, there are no points of order today, so we can move on.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 11

Savings Management Repeal Act

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to rise on behalf of the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to move third reading of Bill 11.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our caucus will be supporting this bill. This is obviously something that we actually have been fighting for. Certainly, when it came up as Bill 1, this was an attempt by the former administration to carve out sections of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund for, frankly, I'm sure, well-meant use. Nonetheless, the temptation would be to put them into these funds that could essentially be used to give out grants to various organizations at the will of the government. That, obviously, is not the point of the heritage trust fund. That's not the reason that we have that fund. This is clearly a bill that was designed to put an end to that brainwave. We're very glad to see that that has been put to bed, so we will be supporting this bill.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, similarly, the Alberta New Democrats will be supporting Bill 11. It's a long and winding road sometimes that we travel, to see the time and effort that we spent to fight this last year, and then, lo and behold, it's been pulled.

You know, we certainly did oppose the introduction of the Savings Management Act because of the ground that it was laying for the concept of social impact bonds, and we really have a strong problem with that. It squeezes and fragments the public sector. Social impact bonds are investments where private investors can fund projects and programs delivered by nonprofit or charitable agencies. This is sort of the way they've gone in the past in other places around the world. The project meets measurable goals. Then they pay back investors. This is the way it's played out in places like Britain, and it's been quite appalling. So this is a nice step back from doing this.

3:00

Rather than committing to social spending every year, this government has a tendency to sort of lash about between different pet concepts and making cuts. Under the grave pronouncements of the government here in these last few days with the price of oil, I also know that they have their slashing look in their eyes as well. You know, it's very unfortunate to see that taking place.

This act was only introduced in March 2014 and came into force on April Fool's Day in 2014, which is interesting, and eight months later here we are repealing the bill. We know that social programs are too important to risk on a new and untested method for funding social services. The bill removes the groundwork for that, so we're definitely back on some better footing. Our real concern, however, Mr. Speaker, remains that the consistent funding of Alberta's programs and services is always on shaky ground at best.

In 2012, for example, we were promised a balanced budget with no new taxes or service cuts. Certainly, there is a revenue situation that we have to deal with here, but, you know, if we make long-standing plans to save over time, then this would be a time when we could access those savings and balance out the vagaries of the international price of oil that we have to deal with.

While now the Premier here in the province has changed, what does remain clear is that regardless of who is the leader of the PC government, it has to start to make long-term plans for the future. We should be addressing our serious revenue problem. We all know that the drop in the oil prices will have an effect on programs and infrastructure. Currently 25 per cent of our revenue comes from oil, so this really leaves us vulnerable, as we see here

today, with the price down to I think 60-some dollars here today. It's interesting to watch the national markets decline as well. We've created an overdependence on this industry right across the whole country, it seems.

It's certainly, I guess, something that we can look at and vote for. We've come to a consensus that that's what we should be doing on Bill 11.

The only other thing I wanted to mention is that the importance of leaving the capacity for us to save in our heritage trust fund I think is imperative. We know that if you do that in a codified sort of manner and do not just leave it up to the Treasury Board or political considerations or external economic considerations, then you are much more likely over time to have a considerable fund that you can rely on when times might get tough.

It's important to remember that we haven't hit the actual tough times. We heard it last year from this government as well. It's one of their favourite things to do, to cry, you know, that the sky is falling, always. Now we are in a situation where things are definitely more substantively being restricted in terms of energy prices, but it's important to keep an even hand and to remember what the government exists for in the first place. I mean, we're not an oil producer. We're a government, and we are existing to ensure that we provide essential services that our population requires. We happen to be an oil-producing province, but the distinction is very, very important to make. Of course, we would be responsible for providing essential health care, education, and infrastructure regardless of what our main industries are in this province. I think we need to take a long look at that. It's a great opportunity to do that, quite frankly, with a dip in the price of oil right now.

I know we have to make some adjustments, and this is a very good adjustment, the repeal of the Savings Management Act. We certainly will be supporting this, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks for the opportunity to say a couple of words.

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

I see no one. Are there any other speakers to third reading of Bill 11? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll keep my comments short. I just want to remind members of the House that this is another fantastic example of a really poor piece of legislation brought in by this PC government and which had to be repealed eight months later. We spoke quite passionately against this bill. Its first incarnation was Bill 1, actually, the very centrepiece of this government in the sitting when we came back. Most members on the other side were on that side and part of the government, and many, interestingly, spoke in favour of Bill 1 and how great it was going to be. Yet we see now that, like many other bills that have been repealed – and there's quite a list of them – this is one that is being repealed.

Now, I can say that we are quite happy with the fact that this bill will repeal Bill 1. Like I had mentioned, Mr. Speaker, we were opposed to it when it was first tabled in this House. I just wanted to remind Albertans that with many pieces of legislation, when they're done hastily, when they're done without adequate consultation, when they're done without input from the opposition, we find ourselves in this situation.

A bill that pops to mind from a previous sitting is Bill 28, that threatened to haul mayors off to jail. We argued vehemently against that incarnation of Bill 28. Six months later there was an amendment act to it, and again it was amended and repealed. I found it very fascinating that many of the amendments in that bill in its second incarnation were amendments that the Alberta NDP

had put forward when the bill was first tabled. You know, what I would like to see is more co-operation and work done between all parties, where the government accepts amendments and is open to dialogue from all different parties and points of view, which, in my opinion, would mean much better legislation for all Albertans instead of what we tend to see in this House, which is an unwillingness to accept most amendments by opposition parties.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, glad to see that this bill is coming through the House and repealing Bill 1. We will be supporting it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

I see no one. Are there any other speakers to third reading of Bill 11?

The hon. member to close debate.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. members of the two opposition parties for their comments. I say that while we may differ on some facts of history, at least we agree on the intent and the apparent support for this bill.

I move that we call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 11 read a third time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed with the next item of business, could we have unanimous consent to revert briefly to tablings?

[Unanimous consent granted]

3:10

Tabling Returns and Reports (*reversion*)

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice, please proceed.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the members for their indulgence. I neglected to table a couple of items here that I had just put under my desk in the Routine. I have five copies of the annual accountability report of the Law Society of Alberta.

I have five copies of the Alberta Human Rights Commission's annual report.

And I have five copies of the Alberta Law Foundation's financial statements. I will pass five copies of them all to the page.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Government Bills and Orders **Third Reading** (*continued*)

Bill 9

Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014

The Speaker: Hon. members, we can proceed onward now with the presentation and movement at third reading of Bill 9 by the hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to the amendments in Bill 9, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014. The amendments will modernize the legislation, establish a framework for a condominium dispute tribunal, strengthen government enforcement powers, and create the authority necessary to enact required regulations.

Mr. Speaker, during second reading and Committee of the Whole there has been concern that there has not been enough consultation or that consultation did not engage the right stakeholders and that these amendments are being rushed through. This government is committed to ensuring Albertans have the highest level of protection and that changes to Alberta's condominium legislation reflect the input of our stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, I want to lay out the consultation work that was carried out by the government on Bill 9. In 2009 the government formed a 16-member working committee to look at issues affecting the industry. The membership of this committee included the north and south chapters of the Canadian Condominium Institute, the Alberta Real Estate Association, the Association of Condominium Managers of Alberta, the Canadian Home Builders' Association – Alberta, and other members representing developers, owners, and the legal community.

In 2013, based on input from the working committee, Service Alberta developed the Let's Talk Condos consultation survey. This survey covered a number of topics, including dispute resolution, purchase cancellation rights, insurance requirements, disclosure to buyers, board governance, and standards of practice for condominium managers. We received over 4,000 responses from the public to the survey, and a majority were from condominium owners. Owners were a very important part of our dialogue, especially as this is consumer protection legislation.

Mr. Speaker, once we had analyzed the responses from the survey, the government set out to form a number of task teams to continue working on issues such as reserve funds, governance, condominium managers, insurance, new condominium developments, and dispute resolution. The membership of these task teams was composed of many of the organizations I named previously as well as input from owners and the legal community.

All this hard work culminated in the introduction of Bill 13 in this House towards the end of the spring 2014 sitting. Over the summer we allowed time for all stakeholders to review the legislation and solicited their feedback so that we could continue to improve the bill. The result of that feedback is Bill 9, which is a refined but substantially similar draft based on the comments we received from stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, please be assured that we have listened to Albertans and that we will continue to listen as we move forward in implementing these changes. We were happy to work with the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills to pass an additional amendment, and I want to extend my thanks for his interest in this bill. In the coming months we will gather additional input from our stakeholders as we develop regulations.

In closing at third reading, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to note that the majority of Albertans who have contacted us have urged us to move forward with this bill overwhelmingly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and with that, I move third reading.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Mr. Rowe: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to actually support this bill now. [some applause] I know we find that amazing, but something is better than nothing. I always say.

There are gaps, I feel, in this bill that perhaps should have been addressed. I do want to congratulate the minister and Service Alberta for doing the consultations prior to writing the bill. That was a huge step, but I feel there's another step missing, and that was consultation after the bill was drafted. I think we could have avoided a lot of the amendments that went on and so on, but overall, as I said, I think something is better than nothing. We look

forward to the regulations and to seeing how that's going to affect the bill and carry it even further.

What we're looking for here is consumer protection. While there were consultations being done, I don't feel there was enough with the actual people who were affected the most, and that is the condo owners themselves. But that's history now. Let's carry on. Let's make sure that the regulations address some of these issues and go forward.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you, and I will support the bill.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) will be available after this speaker.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and speak to third reading of the condominium act, Bill 9. I do have some comments that I'll make in regard to some of the comments made by the hon. member who moved this bill. You know, I appreciate that there was some consultation done by this government over the past year and a half. I attended some of the consultations or the public forums that were hosted. I can tell you, though, that there are numerous groups who do have reservations about the bill as it's currently written and the fact that there are areas that are omitted in the bill that would have actually given much stronger consumer protection. I get that the government likes to say it over and over again, but saying it doesn't make it so if it's not in the legislation. So I will go through and talk about my different concerns.

The first one is, again, the fact that there are groups that would like to have been consulted on what the government decided to include or not include. What I mean by that is that, yes, there might have been some initial conversations with different organizations and individuals, yet those same entities have no idea what's going to be included and what's not. The frustration is, again, that when a bill is tabled by this PC government, they can't wait to get the heck out of this House. So bills move at a breakneck speed through different readings, which severely limits the ability of and the role that the opposition plays in drafting amendments designed at improving a bill.

I think that members of the House need to be reminded that the purpose of Committee of the Whole and amendments is to draft amendments with all Albertans' best intentions in mind. Now, I infer that this government believes that they're the only ones with the best ideas. Well, I'm sorry to say that other parties, other members consult with other organizations as well.

Largely, one of the voices of concern is the Canadian Condominium Institute north Alberta chapter, which has a significant number of members and represents, first and foremost, individual condo owners. That's their clientele. That's who they speak with and on behalf of. Again, you know, it's not lost on me that a meeting of condominium owners was struck on Sunday evening, and there were over 300 people that turned out at a last-minute meeting to discuss this bill. So despite the government saying, "Everybody loves this, and we've consulted everybody, and this is great," I don't think that's the reality for many people.

Like I said, some of the issues were on the follow-up in consultation, you know, but there are three areas that I'm just going to talk about, matters of insurance and clarity around that. There are a lot of questions surrounding insurance and how it works. Property manager accreditation: a concern with the fact that in legislation it will fall to the RECA as opposed to going to an independent, arm's-length third party. The last point is on document disclosure to owners, Mr. Speaker.

What we were looking for is to defer this bill into the spring to ensure that it includes everything that it should to maximize protection for condo owners and consumers. Many issues, Mr. Speaker, that should be dealt with in this legislation as far as what impacts condominium owners on a day-to-day basis aren't being dealt with in the legislation, and this was probably one of our largest concerns. They're being left to regulations.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, we don't believe that this is the appropriate way to deal with these important issues. Changes that impact people's homes should happen in the Legislative Assembly through, you know, our robust debate, through different points of view, and through adequate oversight. Again, much of the details are being left to regulations, which are dealt with behind closed doors. I appreciate that the minister and other ministers have said: well, it's more expedient that way. Well – you know what? – nobody said that democracy is the most expedient form of government, but we do live in a new Westminster-style democracy, and details that affect condominium owners should be discussed in the light of day, not behind closed doors in the cover of darkness. That, I think, is a very legitimate concern.

Regarding property insurance, you know, some of the most serious issues facing all condominium corporations in the province are property insurance issues, Mr. Speaker. Although, certainly, condo boards and owners and possibly the government can't do much about the rising premiums, our position is that the government could have addressed insurance issues, including – and here are some questions for the minister – what property must the corporation insure; and what must the unit owners insure if a unit suffers damage because of an insured peril; who should actually be responsible for overseeing the work of restoring the inside of the unit, the corporation or the owner; who should be responsible for paying the deductible portion of insured loss, and under what circumstances? These questions are not answered and dealt with in the legislation, and I don't think it's fair to condominium owners across this province that those answers will be dealt with through regulations at some point in the future.

Looking at as-built documents, under Bill 9 developers are only required to provide as-builts if they exist. It doesn't require them to produce them. The as-builts are construction drawings produced upon completion of a project or a particular job. They reflect all the changes that are made in the specifications and working drawings during the construction process and show the exact dimensions, geometry, and location of all elements of work completed under the contract. A finished building rarely corresponds exactly to the original plans in every detail, and this normally happens because of unforeseeable on-site complications and variations. Sometimes such discrepancies may occur accidentally and may be economically unfeasible to rectify. That's one of the purposes of as-built measurement, to record these variations.

Accurate as-built drawings are one of the most important elements of any postconstruction process, including any major repair or renovation. If these drawings are not provided to the corporation, decisions will have to be made on guesswork, or the corporation will have to spend many tens of thousands of dollars attempting to re-create plans showing the now hidden elements in the building, the walls, the roof, the foundations, and the ground such as pipe and duct routing and sizing, terminal unit locations, et cetera. Also, as-built drawings can be a valuable day-to-day tool for the board. For example, the accurate depiction of a shut-off valve location is critical in emergency situations.

An approach to an as-built drawing preparation is for the installation contractors to maintain a master set of manually marked up redline drawings as changes are made during construction and as all components of the installation are completed. The contractors are required to confirm that they installed per the original drawings or the records or to record the changes made. These changes are then incorporated into the final as-built documents.

There is an added cost to the developer to produce these documents, so some developers objected to the requirement to provide the documents to the condominium corporations. Our position is that the cost, even if passed on to the owners in the purchase price of the units, is money very well spent, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell you that for those three reasons, in addition to follow-up on consultation, I'm very reluctant to support this bill. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I'd actually like to introduce a motion on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

The Speaker: Hon. member, are you talking about an amendment that you wish to present?

Mr. Bilous: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I am moving an amendment that "Bill 9, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014, be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time this day six months hence."

The Speaker: Thank you. Could you please present it to the pages? The pages will then distribute it, and we will then debate it.

Would the House agree to allow the member to continue on while it's being distributed since he just read it into the record?

I believe it's been agreed – so why don't you continue on as the pages distribute that? – but first bring a copy to me and to the Clerk just to ensure that it's all in order, and then we'll proceed.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. members for allowing me to continue. If I manage my time correctly, this should all fit within my window of opportunity to speak.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize that amendments to the condominium act are much needed and long overdue – I do recognize that – and I do appreciate much of the effort that the minister and his ministry have made. Again, you know, I'd be remiss if I just passed this forward after hearing causes of concern from individual condo owners and organizations that represent individual condo owners.

You know, it's my position, Mr. Speaker, that when we pass a bill through this House, we not only get it done but we get it done correctly. The concern that I've been hearing from many people is that this is moving too quickly through the House, and a delay of merely a couple of months, until we sit again in the new year, would mean that we can ensure that we have more details in the legislation versus relying on regulations, and we can get more clarity around insurance.

The most costly thing for condo owners is that when something happens or is discovered or there is a fault in a building, then who pays for that? Who is liable? Again, if it's the fault of an individual owner, if it's the fault of not just the developer but it's the inspector who signs off on it – I mean, Mr. Speaker, there of course are some very good developers out there who do follow the letter of the law, but there are also developers that cut corners, and at the end of the day you have individual Albertans on the hook with special assessments. I've had stories that people tell me of special assessments of \$10,000, \$15,000, \$20,000, which in many ways is quite ridiculous, to expect a person to be able to cough up that much money, especially if it's something that could have been avoided.

For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I will urge all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of this amendment. Let's redraft this bill, get it right, and come back and debate this in the new year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available. The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview may find it somewhat shocking that I was listening rather intently to his comments, not with regard to the hoist amendment but specifically with regard to what he said a little bit earlier in his speech. If I could ask him a question about that, or do I need to stick directly to the hoist amendment?

The Speaker: Well, tie it to the hoist amendment because that's where he ended speaking.

Dr. Starke: Okay. Well, we'll tie it back, then. During the course of your speech, you mentioned about us following the new Westminster parliamentary tradition. I'm somewhat of a scholar of parliamentary tradition, and I guess I was always under the impression that we followed the Westminster tradition. As near as I know, New Westminster is a community in British Columbia. Perhaps this is a new NDP socialist idea that you want to bring in that would include delaying legislation by six months with unnecessary hoist resolutions. I'm just curious to know: is this part of the new Westminster parliamentary tradition that you're trying to introduce into our Assembly?

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, I think we're all aware that we follow the Westminster tradition, but hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, did you wish to put something on the record from your standpoint?

Mr. Bilous: No. I just wanted to thank the member for that riveting question. You know, clearly the member opposite has never made a mistake in his speech in his time.

Anyway, I would have appreciated an actual question regarding this bill, but I think all members of the House can grasp the reason for this hoist and my position behind it.

Thanks.

3:30

The Speaker: Are there others under 29(2)(a)?

If not, then speaking to the amendment, which will be called H1, I'll recognize Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Condominium Property Amendment Act which is before the House really is much-needed legislation. Although I will be supporting this hoist amendment, I would be remiss if I didn't point out that the Condominium Property Act that we have here in this province was a long time coming in the first place. I will point out that British Columbia actually had protection for condominium owners as far back as 1997. As a result of some leaky condos and some difficulty with condominiums and their construction practices, that province moved very quickly in that fashion and provided condo owners some protection in that province. In my view, it was much needed at the time.

You know, the wheels of justice move somewhat slower here in this province. It took us almost 15 years longer to introduce even basic protections for condominium owners in terms of actual protections to the property they were buying and protections for things like the building envelope and the like. We all know that

there was a rash of troubles throughout much of the building phase that was going on in this province, actually, from that time, 1997, all through till we had legislation going forward.

I, too, have heard groups not only in northern Alberta but other people in Calgary who are otherwise concerned that this bill does not contain the requisite amount of information to allow people to govern their lives accordingly and to understand what the rules are in regard to their property, in regard, specifically, to insurance claims, in regard to property managers' roles and responsibilities and, in fact, the roles of who pays what and when and the legal recourse which this bill provides largely because, if you compare the legislation, our government in its wisdom is moving virtually everything with substance into the regulatory process. Although easier to amend and easier to go forward on, I don't think it gives people the ample insurance that their consultation has been heard.

I will give the government credit. There appears to have been some consultation on this file, yet because it is not present in the bill, because this consultation is not reflected in what we're actually seeing before this honourable House, the people are wondering if they've actually been heard, whether the consultation was meaningful, whether it led to any tangible results. That is the confusion and the concern that is out there, not only in the north but down where I live, in Calgary. Our office has been flooded with numerous concerns in this regard, that they're not certain what protections this bill is going to provide.

So I think that's where we are. The citizens would like to see in this bill the rules and the regulations of how they can go forward. That's where we are. I think we'd like a more fulsome bill coming forward from the government, with this in place. People could then see that they have been heard, that it's actually reflected in the bill, that it's not going to happen behind closed doors and the like. So if this passes and if this government would actually do the work of putting actual rules into the bill, I think that would be somewhat helpful.

I am almost certain that this amendment is going to fail, but I will say that the government going forward should try to bring more clarity to their drafting principles, allow for the rules to be put into place so that people have an understanding that it is open and transparent, that it's not going to be changed on a whim through an order in council or otherwise change the game halfway through its being played.

In any event, those are my comments, Mr. Speaker, and my advice to the government going forward. We'll see where this goes.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I see no one.

Is there anyone else who wishes to speak to Bill 9? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: On the hoist – right? – Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On the hoist amendment. Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Certainly, I support this idea. It's been a very interesting few days, quite frankly. This is not something that I have within my responsibilities as critic, but I learned a lot over the last short while about concerns of consumers, the people who actually own these units. I have a number of quite large condominium units in my constituency as well, and like what I said yesterday about leaky condos, and so forth, it's a great problem. I just really always want to defer to making sure that the homeowners are the first priority and are consulted first, in the middle, and last as well.

I think this is a very rational idea, to defer this particular bill, and I thank everyone who has helped us to build a sound and reasonable argument on Bill 9. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see no one.

Are there any other speakers to amendment H1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll add my support to this amendment. I think we've had quite a lot of e-mail and contact from a wide range of people interested in seeing a better bill come forward. It's complex. There's a lot at stake. And if the government is actually listening to the many who have written and the many concerns that haven't actually been addressed in some of the elements of this bill, they will pause and allow a longer process, a longer consideration, a more legitimate consultation, build a sense of respect, I guess, with the citizens of Alberta and the organizations that are trying to represent condo buyers, condo owners and take the prudent path, the conservative path, and delay the haste with this bill, which hasn't had the time and thoughtful amendments that could make it the very best it could be.

I'll be supporting this amendment. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I see no one.

Is there anyone else who wishes to speak to amendment H1? The hon. Minister for Service Alberta.

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity. I wasn't going to say anything, but I feel obligated. You know, we have members of the opposition who are suggesting that this bill is in some way rushed. We have members suggesting that this bill is in some way a hasty bill, that it hasn't been given proper consideration. This bill in terms of being thoughtful, in terms of the thorough consultation process – consultations started in 2009. I guess that might be hasty for some people, five years of thorough consultation, but from my perspective it's ample.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, this consultation was started under Service Alberta when it was in the hands of the current Minister of Human Services. She did an exceptional job of bringing the consultative process forward. That was carried further by our current Minister of Infrastructure, who again did an outstanding job of engaging Albertans in this consultative process. Again that torch was passed to the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, who carried on this consultative process, an exceptional and thorough consultative process. Through that process the hon. Member for Sherwood Park toured this province. The hon. Member for Sherwood Park engaged – and I won't repeat the list, that has been mentioned a number of times, of bodies and agencies and owners who gave ample and thorough feedback into this legislation. We're grateful to the Member for Sherwood Park for her work and for her efforts across the province.

What we have before us, Mr. Speaker, is that there is one body – I'll grant that – an organization called CCI north, who has been involved in our consultation process from the beginning. They've come forward and, by and large, the people who are suggesting that this bill needs to be delayed, that this bill is not right, are affiliated or associated with CCI north. I've spoken to the president of CCI north and thanked him for his involvement. I've told him that Albertans have spoken. Albertans want this bill to be passed. I think that we've reached a point where, as grateful as I am to CCI north and their participation – one of the members spoke of a meeting that transpired this past Sunday. Again, it was

a very constructive meeting, and they brought forward some amendments. We welcome that participation. I think that some of the amendments which our opposition brought forward were reflected from that meeting, and I'll come back to that.

I want you to know, Mr. Speaker, that CCI north – interestingly enough, we've talked at length that we've seen this bill before. It was Bill 13 in the spring. This bill made it through first reading, and had session lasted a few more days, it's very likely that this bill would have passed in the spring of 2013. It's very interesting to note that at that time this bill, which is substantially similar – there are very few wrinkles that have been added since the spring. CCI north endorsed the bill at that time. They didn't come out at that time and say that this bill wasn't ready or that this bill needed further consultation. It's interesting that they're stating those facts now, but I've spoken, as I said, to the president, and I've welcomed his participation in further consultation, as we will with all of our stakeholders, as we move forward with regulations.

There's also this thought that somehow we haven't engaged owners, Mr. Speaker, and that couldn't be further from the truth. I'll point not just to the ample and thorough consultation process that my predecessors have led and that the Member for Sherwood Park has done a phenomenal job of participating and leading. I'll point the members opposite to our Let's Talk Condos consultation, where we had 4,000 submissions, primarily from owners who have participated and helped us form this legislation. If we've done five years of consultation, if we have 4,000 stakeholders who have reached out to us and offered us guidance, I don't know how that can be conceived or construed as anything but solid, heartfelt, important consultation. To suggest that we've been hasty, to suggest that this is rushed, that just doesn't make sense to me, and it doesn't make sense to the Albertans who are anxiously waiting for this very important legislation to move forward.

Mr. Speaker, you know, just really quickly I want to talk about the amendments. Some of the opposition have suggested that they're not in favour of us moving forward and working out a good number of the details and amendments. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for pointing out the obvious fact that we can be agile and we can be more responsive when it comes to working out details in regulation. The current condo act is getting close to 20 years old. What we know is that the environment for condos 20 years ago was completely different than it is now. What we know also is that where we are with condos in the next 10 years will be completely different from where we are now. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for acknowledging that working out the details in regulation will help us be agile, will help us be responsive to our condo owners, to our condo boards, and to the condo associations as they move forward. So thank you for those comments, Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Speaker, I just can't support delaying this any longer, and the reason I can't support this any longer is that Albertans have spoken, and it's all our obligation in this House to listen to Albertans. The overwhelming majority of Albertans are demanding that this bill move forward. I can't support this hoist amendment, and I look forward to moving forward and doing good and collaborative work for Albertans.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, again, you know, one of the members talked about how this government isn't being collaborative. We've talked about being under new management. I can't recall who it was, but they suggested that the government is not listening to amendments, that the government is not being responsive. Well, I want to remind that member that this government did work with the opposition. I want to thank the opposition. I want to again thank the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for his

collaborative efforts on moving an amendment that I believe was one of the things that folks from CCI were actually speaking about. So to suggest in any way, shape, or form that this government is rushing, to suggest in any way, shape, or form that this government is not trying to do the best work it possibly can with our opposition, and to suggest that this government doesn't hold the values and responsibilities of Albertans as one of our paramount principles – I just can't support that idea.

I want to thank you for this opportunity, and we look forward to passing this bill, Mr. Speaker. I cannot support this amendment.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Calgary-Buffalo, under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Hehr: I appreciate the minister's comments. Let's give him all the kudos he wants for consultation. I'll grant that it seems like there's been a lot of that. Nevertheless, I think the concern is that this consultation is not represented in your bill's drafting. The finished product doesn't recognize the rules and clarify what the responsibilities are in terms of insurance, in terms of property managers and how they carry on their business, and the like. The concern is primarily around the drafting of the bill and the fact that although you've consulted with many citizens and organizations, this has not been reflected in your bill. Can you address the concern that much of this information is absent from the bill and that you're moving into the regulatory process to do it on a more ad hoc basis instead of actually getting this information into the bill more substantively? We're hearing from stakeholders where they want it, in the bill.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Anyone else under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the hoist amendment?

I see none, so let us, then, vote on the hoist amendment.

[Motion on amendment to third reading of Bill 9 lost]

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 9 read a third time]

3:50 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: I'll call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 2 Alberta Accountability Act

The Chair: Are there any comments or amendments to be offered? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Chair. I'm rising to speak in Committee of the Whole, on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, some comments before we move on.

Bill 2 proposes amendments to three pieces of legislation: the Conflicts of Interest Act, the Public Service Act, and the Lobbyists Act. The Minister of Justice takes these matters very seriously and wanted to remind the House that twice he's been lauded by the CTF for his low expenses. The legislation is further supported by two Treasury Board directives, which will restrict severance and enhance procurement rules.

I listened with interest to the debate during second reading. I appreciate the comments from members who spoke to the legislation and its measures to increase accountability by elected

officials, political staff, and the public service. The hon. members for Edmonton-Strathcona and Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview raised several points about the bill, which I'm happy to address on his behalf.

The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona discussed amending the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, regarding large donations. I'd remind the hon. member that the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act already sets limits on political contributions.

She also spoke about the timelines for the Chief Electoral Officer to investigate allegedly improper donations. In Alberta standard limitation periods are two years. Limitation periods for administrative penalties and administrative penalties under the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act go beyond that. Those periods are set at three years. The Chief Electoral Officer can also make recommendations for amendments to elections legislation, and the purpose and effect of a statute of limitations is to encourage the timely resolution of disputes. Contravention should be pursued with reasonable diligence. The longer the limitation period the greater the chance that evidence has degraded or even been lost and that witnesses are unavailable. Pursuing prosecutions that have been long dormant is not reasonable and does not serve justice.

The hon. member also proposed four amendments to the Conflicts of Interest Act, including prohibiting members from using their position to lobby on an issue that directly impacts their financial interests; prohibiting member involvement in decisions that benefit political confidants; prohibiting the waiving of cooling-off periods for former political staff, members, and cabinet ministers; and applying the Conflicts of Interest Act to individuals employed by government agencies.

The Conflicts of Interest Act already states that a member has breached the act if he or she "takes part in a decision . . . knowing that the decision might further a private interest of the Member, a person directly associated with the Member or the Member's minor or adult child." In addition, that act states that a member breaches this act if he or she uses their influence or seeks to use their influence upon a government decision to further anyone's private interest.

Another point worth noting is that cooling-off periods apply to former ministers. They do not apply to former MLAs. The Ethics Commissioner's authority to waive or reduce cooling-off periods is appropriate. If a former minister competes on the same conditions as other applicants for a job, then the Ethics Commissioner can waive or reduce the cooling-off period so that the former minister may be hired for the job. If a contract is awarded through an impartial process that is open to a large number of people, the Ethics Commissioner can waive or reduce the cooling-off period so that the former minister can be awarded the contract.

There may also be situations in which there is no conflict of interest between the private interests of the former minister and the public interest. The Ethics Commissioner may waive or reduce the cooling-off period in such an instance. However, the former minister must comply with any conditions imposed by the Ethics Commissioner. The Ethics Commissioner is an officer of the Legislature, that is appointed upon the recommendation of the Legislative Assembly and is therefore in a position to act impartially in exercising her discretion.

The Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act requires public agencies to implement codes of conduct governing the conduct of its members and employees, and this includes the Alberta Energy Regulator. Alberta Health Services also has a code of conduct. These codes of conduct must include provisions requiring

members or employees to carry out their duties in an impartial manner, not to act in self-interest or to further private interests, and to disclose real and apparent conflicts of interest.

The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona also proposed amending the Election Act to prohibit MLAs from using government resources during elections or by-elections. We all know that government needs to continue to operate even during an election campaign, and ministers are required to continue their work while they are running for election or re-election. Bill 2 does not deal with election legislation. I would also remind the member that any actions in contravention of existing rules or statutes could result in an investigation.

My colleague also spoke about his desire for the passage of legislation to compel public disclosure of criteria for determining public infrastructure investment priorities; two, a list of public infrastructure priorities; and thirdly, explanations for any changes to that list should that occur. The government does publish lists of capital projects on several ministry websites. These approved projects represent areas of priority funding for government, and this government will deliver on the Premier's mandate to report to Albertans on the status of its approved capital projects on a semiannual report card. We believe in planning and investing in Alberta's infrastructure today and over the long term. That's why our government has committed to publishing a 25-year infrastructure plan, that will guide and support government direction and priorities around infrastructure needs.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View spoke about making appointments on merit. The Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act already sets out requirements for recruitment to public agencies. The Public Service Act requires hiring of the most suitable applicants, but wherever possible preference shall be given to in-service applicants. It also contains rules regarding when competitions are departmental, limited, or open.

The same hon. member also talked about having a budget officer who would report to the Legislature. I would remind that hon. member that we already have an independent Auditor General, who reports to the Legislature.

A few hon. members also spoke about moving Treasury Board directives into legislation. In the case of severance, we already have two board directives dealing with severance. Those directives are the termination and release of deputy ministers and other senior officials directive and the termination and release of employees directive. Thus, the Treasury Board has a history of dealing with these kinds of matters.

Severance is a matter that falls within the internal business of government, the kind of business that Treasury Board directives typically cover. In the case of the procurement and sole-sourcing directive, section 78(1) of the Financial Administration Act gives the Treasury Board the authority to regulate government and provincial agencies' contracting standards. Therefore, the Legislature has had the opportunity to specifically contemplate that the Treasury Board will give this type of direction.

Mr. Chair, in conclusion, I would remind the Assembly of a saying that the minister thinks fits Bill 2 very well, that sunlight is the best disinfectant. With Bill 2 we are making significant changes, and more information is being publicly disclosed. We are turning the corner as we enter a new era of accountability. We are changing how things are done in government. We are doing the work to ensure that high ethical and accountability measures are in place and to show Albertans that their faith and trust in us as their elected officials is deserved.

Before I sit down, I would move that we ask for one-minute bells.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has moved that should we have a division during the committee, we have one-minute bells. This requires unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Chair: I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Airdrie, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm just standing to propose a series of amendments. I'm sure other parties do have amendments as well, and I'll just get right to the point and circulate the first one.

4:00

The Chair: This will be A1, hon. member. Just a brief pause to get most of them circulated.

Proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: The amendment reads as follows. I move that Bill 2, Alberta Accountability Act, be amended in section 3(5) by adding the following after the proposed section 25.6(1):

(1.1) One or more of the codes of conduct and ethics made under subsection (1) must provide that a designated office holder, subject to any entitlements to termination pay under the Employment Standards Code, shall not accept, or enter into an agreement providing for, more than one severance payment from the Government or a Provincial agency in a 5 year period commencing from the receipt of the first severance payment.

Mr. Chair, this is a part of the law that I've been repeatedly trying to get into legislation for several years now. It's been the subject of two private members' bills and a private member's motion of mine along with another piece that I'll talk about later. The point of this is just to solve the problem of double-dipping that sometimes occurs.

What's happened in the past in a lot of cases is that an employee of, say, Alberta Health Services or a region will leave Alberta Health Services or the region and collect a severance, generally a very large severance. In the past, anyway, it's been a very large severance. Then they go in-house into government and work at the Department of Health or another department, work there for a year or two years or so, whatever, and then for whatever reason they're let go. Then they collect another severance, and it's a really large severance, and it happens in some cases within a couple of years, two, three years. Essentially, they're collecting two very large severances within a couple of years. When we're talking about large severances, some of these, in the past anyway, have been in the half-million dollar to a million dollar range, so we're not talking about small sums of money.

Now, this isn't going to save our \$7 billion fiscal hole that we're in by any stretch, but it does two things. First of all, it will save us some money as a government. I think that over several years it will save millions of dollars. It doesn't say that people can't move from one area or agency of government to another and not collect their first severance. If that happens, you know, they're allowed to do that. However, it guards against the double-dip, where essentially they go from one to another to another, maybe, and they can collect multiple severances.

I think it increases transparency. I think it's a bit of an obvious fix. It's something that we've seen, this double-dipping, in the past. I'm not going to name any names. They're well publicized. There have been several examples. We've brought them up multiple times in this Chamber. I think that this is a very clear way to solve this problem, and I think it's long overdue. I hope that the government will support it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader, speaking to the amendment.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to this amendment. I don't recall, actually, the hon. member forwarding amendments on this particular topic, but I certainly don't deny that it happened. I will say with respect to this amendment to this bill that I think you could call this even an oversight. I think that this amendment adds value, I think I agree with the member that it adds some transparency, and I'm going to urge all members of this House to support this amendment.

Mr. Hehr: I, too, think this is a reasonable amendment. We've seen in the past where we've had an individual or multiple individuals who have worked through a government department or agency receive a large severance only to find that in a relatively short period of time they go to work in another government department and continue on in that fashion. It shuffles along, and all of a sudden multiple severance packages are out there, so we're leading to a compensation that exceeds, in my view, what the reasonable person would consider as what is to be found in their employment relationship with essentially the same government.

I think this will go some way to ensuring that the government watches its hiring practices, that it writes its employment contracts in a reasonable fashion that reflects the true nature of work being done. If they're working for the government in one department, well, my goodness sake, they can go work in another department without collecting an obscene severance package every time they get shuffled.

I think this would put the government on notice and, in fact, allow us to move forward in writing clear employment contracts that reflect the kind and the spirit of work we wish to receive from valued public servants.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Are there other speakers to amendment A1?

Mr. Anderson: I'd like to thank the government minister. I know that we were in talks earlier with the Government House Leader, who presented this amendment to the Premier, who gave his support to it, and I want to recognize that. I think that it's a very good indication that there's an openness to improving transparency and accountability. Hopefully, we can see many such amendments to other legislation passed in the future.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there other speakers to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Now back to the bill. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to be able to rise in debate on Bill 2 in Committee of the Whole. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora in her initial comments responded to a number of the issues that we have raised and the concerns that we have with this piece of legislation.

Not to deal with all of them but a few of them, the notion that we need to restrict consequences to the governing party when it receives donations illegally from public bodies to only those illegal donations that have happened in the last two years because evidence, quote, unquote, deteriorates after two years is absurd. You know, typically that evidence is documented evidence, and

it's actually quite easy to trace. Certainly, when people engage in financial activity which is barred under other pieces of legislation, the restriction and the limitation period is not just two years, especially when it's criminal.

Quite frankly, I think that when the governing party receives financial electoral donations from publicly funded taxpayer organizations because they feel they have to, that is borderline criminal. The notion that we can't possibly prosecute it or investigate it if it happened more than two years ago is, quite frankly, disrespectful to Albertans, who have a higher standard, I think, just generally based on common sense and common decency, than that. So that's not a sound answer to our concern about this government's intensely self-serving decision to limit their liability under the election finances act for their party's own illegal activity which occurred more than two years ago.

4:10

The member indicated that we already have language in the Conflicts of Interest Act which prohibits a member from engaging in lobbying that impacts their own private interest above and beyond what is appropriate. Of course, the problem is that we really don't have that language because, unfortunately, the language that we do have has been interpreted to allow and to justify and to protect the activities of the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

While I acknowledge that any criminal investigation ultimately came to an end, the fact of the matter is that the spectre of having a member who has accelerated and enhanced access to senior public officials lobbying on an issue which has a direct relationship to his own personal business just flies in the face, again, of the regular person's understanding of what constitutes fairness and transparency and ethical behaviour. The fact that our current legislation allowed that to occur is a sign to me that our current legislation is inadequate. If we want to say to Albertans that we're cleaning things up, then that's what we should do. We shouldn't rely on poorly drafted legislation to allow people to swim through loopholes the size of Mack trucks.

With respect to the question of whether certain senior public officials are covered under conflict of interest legislation, the fact of the matter is that a code of conduct is not conflict-of-interest legislation, Mr. Chair. It is different. It is enforced differently, its consequences are different, the transparency of its enforcement is different, the reports around the investigation for a breach of code of conduct are different, it's not transparent, and it can be changed with the stroke of a pen. It is fundamentally different than having those senior officials accountable under the conflict-of-interest legislation. For the Member for Edmonton-Glenora to suggest that the two are the same is either intentionally disingenuous or, conversely, demonstrative of her not understanding what it is she's speaking about. It's one or the other; neither is good.

In terms of the question around government use of public resources during elections and whether that is appropriate, well, the member argues that government has to keep working during elections. Well, that's true. But you know what? Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and even their friends in Ottawa operate under election legislation which prohibits them from using public dollars during the course of an election to buy votes. The fact of the matter is that we don't have that kind of legislation in Alberta. But it does exist in other provinces, and that is what we have suggested in the past.

She's right: this act doesn't amend the Election Act. But if we were going to focus on true accountability and ensuring true ethical behaviour, it would. The simple failure of the government to address an incredibly important issue is not in and of itself a

justification for failing to address an incredibly important issue. So, again, that justification also holds very little water.

One of the other issues that the member raised was the question of whether it was appropriate to have the Ethics Commissioner have the right to waive the cooling-off period. Now, again, the fact of the matter is that the Ethics Commissioner has in the past waived the cooling-off period without there being a fully comprehensive and well-posted competition process for former members of this House. That is why we propose this amendment, and it is why Albertans expect to see it. It didn't look good, and it did not look like a particularly trustworthy behaviour when it occurred.

On that basis, Mr. Chair, I would like to propose an amendment to Bill 2. I will hand that over to the pages and wait for it to be distributed and then speak to it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Brief moment. This will be A2, hon. members.

Proceed, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Let me just read in the amendment that I am proposing here. It goes as follows, that the Alberta Accountability Act be amended as follows:

A. Section 1(15) is amended

- (a) in the following proposed sections by striking out "12 months" wherever it occurs and substituting "24 months":
 - section 23.1;
 - section 23.7.

- (b) by striking out the proposed sections 23.11 and 23.71.

B. Section 3(5) is amended

- (a) in the proposed section 25.4 by striking out "12 months" wherever it occurs and substituting "24 months"; and
- (b) by striking out the proposed section 25.41.

What this amendment does, as far as I can tell – this is an amendment that changes the cooling-off period for all those officials subject to the Conflicts of Interest Act to 24 months from 12. It also removes the waiver provision that allows the Ethics Commissioner to waive or reduce the cooling-off period at his or her discretion. These changes correspond with the recommendations that our caucus made in our minority report for the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee in 2013. These are the recommendations we made at that time.

The 24-month cooling-off period does reflect standards that are used in other jurisdictions. It ensures that people are totally separated from governance before they become consultants or lobbyists or employees of certain sections of our provincial government. It also, as I said before, removes the discretion to waive the cooling-off period. We clearly had an example before where we had a former minister hired under the former Premier within I believe it was three or four months of him having lost his seat by a very slim margin, and there was no clear record or proof of any kind of a full, competitive process, any posting of the position, any of that kind of stuff. Rather, it was a decision that was made very much to bring on an old friend, an insider, and find them a soft landing.

Quite honestly, Mr. Chair, the public service is not designed to be a soft landing for failed Conservative candidates. Taxpayers deserve better. That is why the conflicts of interest legislation is in place. There was never really any kind of significant explanation or worthwhile explanation provided for the waiver. Frankly, I think that it puts the Ethics Commissioner in an awkward and

uncomfortable position. I think that if you have rules that are designed to prohibit conflicts of interest, then you should simply apply them and live by them. This is not rocket science. It is not the case that every time this government brings in a rule to control its own behaviour, they need to write in a loophole to avoid following the rule that controls its own behaviour.

Quite honestly, I think that if they really are concerned about demonstrating a commitment to ethical behaviour, then they will accept this amendment, that includes this elimination of the waiver, and simply sign on to follow the rules that they themselves passed.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Speaking to the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

4:20

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. This is a very good amendment that I will be supporting. Moving the cooling-off period from 12 months to 24 months seems to be a reasonable time period from which we enact. Clearly, people with this type of power and influence in their former positions in the government should have a significant time away before they come back in to work in the government. Simply put, because of their position they would have a great deal of weight and sway and influence over various policies and provisions that have gone over, and they may actually limit the number of fresh eyes that go over legislation, fresh eyes that look at a problem differently, and fresh eyes that can implement a government agenda and work on behalf of the Alberta people.

I would also support removing the waiver provisions, largely for the same reasons that the hon. member spoke to. Having a waiver provision simply allows for an opt-out clause, that allows the government not to follow their own rules that they're setting under our code of conduct. That, to me, does not seem like a wise principle to put in. If you have the rules laid down, well, my goodness, you follow the rules. Having a waiver provision just seems like an ability to put a loophole in that allows the government, whenever they see fit, to appoint someone that used to be part of their government to a position, into a soft landing or into a job that they believe will provide that member with an employment possibility.

You know, why not wait the 24 months? Why not just enforce the code as put down and not put the various people in a conflict position themselves? Sending this to the Ethics Commissioner to get a ruling on a waiver: well, I too agree with the member that this puts the Ethics Commissioner in a very difficult spot in trying to analyze the rules as they're set down yet looking at this unique situation that has come about. In my view, it's not necessary, and we should, simply put, make the rule clear, make it transparent, make people follow it, and not allow for any wiggle room in this regard.

It would restore confidence in the system and ensure that situations don't arise like where we had a former cabinet minister lose in a close election and inside of three to four months receive a job within the same ministry where he worked. Well, my goodness, if that's not what we are trying to correct here, I don't know what is. We should close these loopholes and go forward in this regard. I think this is a good motion to go forward on.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be relatively brief as well. There are parts of this that I like. I understand the intent that the members are bringing forward by doubling the cooling-off period.

The Chair: Hon. member, if I may. You did send me a note, and if you're going to speak to that, I was going to try and send you one back.

Hon. members, the member has asked whether this amendment could be split and voted on separately. That can be done with the concurrence of the House. So if that is the wish, I can ask the question. I just need to verify.

With a majority of the members of the House, if that is your wish, hon. member, we could deal with that request. I'll leave you to continue and decide accordingly.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you for the clarification. I appreciate it on short notice. If I could ask for consent to do that. I don't know if you now call a vote.

The Chair: Just to be clear, then, hon. member, we have A and B. Are you hoping to separate that into two, or how would you propose to separate it?

Mr. Wilson: I would like to separate it into four if I may. Here's the intent of what I'm trying to do. I would like to be able to vote on the proposed sections 23.11 and 23.71 separately from the rest. So it's the ability to vote for A(b) separate from the remainder.

Part of the reason for this, if my hon. colleagues will entertain me, is because we had an amendment similar in intent to that, and I believe that if this is defeated, then we will not be able to present that amendment. So we'd just like to be able to have the vote separately for that.

The Chair: Well, if you want to put that to the House, then, hon. member, I can put that question, and we'll deal with it.

Mr. Wilson: So moved.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw is asking that this amendment A2 be dealt with in two parts by voting separately for everything but item A(b). I would entertain discussion on that proposal.

Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: Just the question? Okay. The question, then, as asked by the hon. member, to be clear. We would vote this amendment A2. I would make it A2(1) and A2(2). Everything but item (b) under A is one, and the remainder.

[Motion lost]

The Chair: Then, hon. member, we're back to debating the amendment in its entirety. You may continue to speak.

Mr. Wilson: Well, I thank the members opposite for their co-operation in this matter.

I think it's pretty clear, Mr. Chair, the reason we would be supporting this, particularly around the striking of 23.11. You know, we're all very familiar with the situation that happened with our former agriculture minister, and I believe that the Ethics Commissioner having the ability to waive that period of time, the cooling-off period, for any former minister – I don't believe that that should be a viable alternative. I believe that if we're going to be truly accountable – and there's a reason why the cooling-off

period exists – having the option to waive it or find a loophole in the legislation allowing for it to be waived is not ideal.

Now, I struggle with it because now that this amendment is one piece, I don't think I would be supporting the idea of doubling the cooling-off period to two years, because I don't know if that meets what I would call a reasonable test. So I am going to sit down and hear the remainder of the debate and will be making my decision on whether or not I support this amendment shortly.

Thank you.

The Chair: Other speakers to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We're back to the main bill. Speaker to the bill? Are there others? The Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This is my first opportunity to speak to Bill 2, the Alberta Accountability Act. I, too, will be offering some amendments to go forward on to try and make this bill better and more inclusive of what I think the members of the Alberta public want and actually deserve. I will note, for instance, that this bill largely tries to acknowledge in some small way the difficulty the current government is under when it comes to ways it has acted in the past in regard to, I think, being seen to be using the public purse and to the unfortunate matters that were not necessarily what the Alberta people expect out of government.

I will say that the bill does fall short. We remember the new Premier promised to do much more than he is currently doing in this act. He promised amendments to the financial management act that would require the budget to be presented in a clear, consolidated format; producing a biannual report card on savings; and also to have merit-based appointments for agencies, boards, and commissions. The promise to cap staff severance payments and to put an end to sole-source contracts also never made it into the legislation. Instead, those provisions were only written into the Treasury Board directives instead of law, a practice that is quickly becoming a hallmark of this government.

4:30

We would have liked to have seen that happen. I also think it's a fair suggestion that if we were trying to really get a handle on things here in this province, it would have been wise to open up the Election Act and deal with our finance laws here, which can only be considered outdated in comparison to other jurisdictions. The fact that we still allow for union and corporate donations in this province, in my view, is an outdated rule. We should simply get to the principle where individuals can contribute in a reasonable fashion. I don't believe that having the ability to contribute up to \$30,000 in an election year meets the smell test of actually having average Albertans being able to contribute fully and fairly to the party of their choice. It leads to rampant abuses that can happen and rampant unlevel playing fields out there.

Simply put, we only look at the long list of contributors to political parties to figure that there is at least an air that people are supporting their political donations by having access to the government. We could go a long way to eliminating that perception if we actually got a handle on that. We all know that it's not in the government's interest at this time to do so, so I don't think we'll see that despite many members of this House stating that it is clear that we should have it. In fact, many editorial commentaries have been the same throughout this province.

So those are the shortcomings of the bill. I think you could have gone a lot further.

On that note, I would like to move an amendment to try and make the bill a little stronger if I could do that at this time.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Amendment A3. We'll pause for a brief moment and circulate that.

Mr. Hehr: I move this amendment on behalf of the leader of the Alberta Liberals, that Bill 2, the Alberta Accountability Act, be amended in section 1(15) in the proposed section 23.1(1), (2), (3), (4), and (5) by striking out "12 months" wherever it appears and substituting "24 months."

If we look at this, it's simply to allow for much of what the last amendment was, to allow for a longer cooling-off period.

The Chair: Hon. member, just pause for a moment. This is out of order. This is exactly what we just dealt with in amendment A2. It's redundant.

Mr. Hehr: It's redundant? Well, it was approved by Parliamentary Counsel.

The Chair: I don't know about the sequencing of when they came through, but it's trying to do the same thing that we just dealt with a moment ago, hon. member. It's the same section, 23.1, and substituting "24 months" for "12 months." We just dealt with that.

Mr. Hehr: Well, are you ruling it out of order?

The Chair: This is out of order, hon. member. I won't accept this one. If you have another one, I'll deal with that.

Mr. Hehr: Sure. Let's try it again.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: Roll the dice.

Mr. Hehr: Let's roll the dice. Let's see what we can come up with next here. That is part of the difficulty, I guess, when we're dealing with amendments. Many parties in the opposition have similar ideas on how to increase openness and transparency.

Let's try this again. I will pass out another one here that may or may not pass your wise and thoughtful purview, but we'll try. I'll move it along.

Here it . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, if you'd just pause till I've seen it.

Mr. Hehr: Certainly. Sorry.

The Chair: Thank you.

This one is fine, hon. member. This will be amendment A3, and you may speak to it.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much. You know, we've come upon this time and time again in this House, where once a matter is kicked up to the Ethics Commissioner, we have a situation where we're not able to ask about it in question period. In my view, given that it often pertains to actions that the government is currently going through and that it actually applies to various things that are on the public's mind, I think this is an anomaly that may not be necessary in the spirit of openness and transparency and allowing us to actually get through the debates of the day.

We can see a situation that has arisen here recently where in the by-election numerous portables were granted to a school in the

midst of a by-election. These portables were on a list that the Calgary board of education had at a lower priority than other schools in the area on the list. We see this government time and time again saying that they respect local autonomy and local school boards' ability to make those decisions on behalf of their constituents, yet in the heat of a by-election we had a candidate who was the Minister of Education making a decision that directly impacted the list that had been provided by the CBE and may have actually impacted the election.

Hence, I would actually have liked to have seen in this Alberta Accountability Act a law that would have come forward, much like in other provinces, that would say, "Government, you have to respect the 30-day election period and not muddle in it, to be seen to be acting in a way that is trying to influence the election," which I think is the only conclusion that a reasonable person could come to, that that's why that decision was made. I don't think it was in the best interests of serving a reasonable democratic system and providing reasonable elections going forward.

We saw that when that was an issue at play here in question period, where we would have liked to have held the minister to account, understood more his thought process behind making that decision and the like. We've had other situations where something has been before the Ethics Commissioner, and it essentially ties the hands of this body to deal with the issue that is front and centre in the minds of the Alberta public. We think that given the importance of this we should have the ability to do that, to have that discussion here and to explore it while the Ethics Commissioner is doing his work and investigating. We think this would allow for issues of the day to be dealt with in a more expedient manner while they're fresh and topical and while the Alberta public wants answers.

I'm not certain what my colleagues in this House think about this. It's a new approach, and there may be actually some drawbacks to it. Nevertheless, on the whole, on balance, I believe it allows us to cut to the thrust of debate in a more reasonable fashion.

I'll put that forward, and hopefully some people will provide their thoughts on what we're trying to propose here.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there speakers to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will certainly be supporting this amendment. You know, we've seen this now twice in this Assembly, where there's an issue that is on the top of the mind of the public and we are unable to ask questions to those who are involved in this Chamber, where we're supposed to hold the government to account, because the issue is being investigated by the Ethics Commissioner.

4:40

I believe that it's a relatively loose interpretation of the clause that has been enforced as it is. It doesn't make sense to me that we can't come into this Chamber and ask questions to the Premier or ask questions to a minister about actions that they have taken simply because it's under investigation by the Ethics Commissioner. It's not right. I do understand why we may not have a special select committee struck or an ad hoc committee struck to investigate an issue, but in the sense of not being able to address it right here in this House, where the ultimate accountability is supposed to happen, it seems strange.

I thank the hon. member for bringing it forward, and I will certainly be supporting it. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there other speakers to amendment A3?

Ms Notley: I would rise very briefly to say that I, too, agree with the spirit behind this amendment. These are important political issues that are also important to the public. It has been the case in the past that debate in this Assembly has been, in my view, artificially restrained as a result of sometimes an inappropriate interpretation of this rule and sometimes a less clear interpretation of this rule. So I think that, certainly, if we were to accept this section, that would promote the transparency brought by sunlight. Was that the phrase used?

Mr. Hehr: Sunlight is the best disinfectant.

Ms Notley: Yes. Sunlight is the best. That would promote the disinfectants brought to bear through sunlight, and we want to do that at every opportunity we can. So I urge my colleagues to support this motion.

The Chair: Further speakers to amendment A3?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: Back to the main bill. The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Yes, Mr. Chair. I have another amendment that I'd like to circulate.

The Chair: Please do, and we'll just pause for a moment. Thank you. This will be, if it's in order, amendment A4.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Anderson: Yes. All right. This amendment is dealing with sole-sourced contracts. Now, as we know, Bill 2 does not contain anything in the proposed legislation regarding sole-sourced contracts, which was a major campaign promise by the Premier. Now, what the Premier has done is that he has ordered or organized a Treasury Board directive that deals with sole-sourced contracts, improves the rules around sole-sourced contracts.

One of the biggest improvements, of course, was the idea of making any exceptions to the rule, any sole-sourced contracts, public within a quarter after they're entered into. This greater transparency is obviously going to improve and make sure that bureaucracies, departments, et cetera, are very sure that a sole-sourced contract is warranted and is justified under the circumstances because it will be public knowledge according to the Treasury Board directive.

That is a very good improvement, as is the fact that anything over a \$50,000 contract for capital and \$10,000 for services will automatically trigger a tendering process. That should save the public a lot of money. There has been a ton – a ton – of waste on sole-sourced contracts, particularly, again, in AHS. It's been a huge problem, as we've shown, billions of dollars in sole-sourced contracts, some of them probably justifiable, others, you know, almost loony-tunes. [interjection] Well, if we had a sole-sourced contract with the RCMP, for example, that would be a justifiable sole-sourced contract. But some sole-sourced contracts on things like communications and some of these other things are just not justifiable. There are many communication firms out there, and you can go down the list. So in most cases there is no need for a sole-sourced contract, which is why this will greatly improve things.

Now, the problem is, though, of course, that the Treasury Board directive is a directive and essentially is a policy of the

government at this time, which means that it can change at any time. It can change with another Treasury Board directive or with an executive order of cabinet or what have you. What this amendment does is that it essentially takes the Treasury Board directive, particularly the piece about making things public if there is a sole-sourced contract, and moves it into the actual legislation, which I think is stronger and makes it so that instead of just policy, it's an actual law.

The amendment says:

(1.1) Any regulation made under subsection (1) must contain a provision prohibiting any employee from issuing, granting or otherwise facilitating a sole-sourced contract with a supplier unless it is made public and made in accordance with all laws, regulations, and policies adopted by the Government respecting procurement.

So it's saying that they have to follow that Treasury Board directive, but the most important piece of this is that it must be made public.

I think that even though the procurement process can be changed by policy, that piece about making it public, I think, is just good governance. I think sunshine is the best disinfectant. It just causes people, even people that, frankly, might not even mean to be doing something untoward, to just have to pause and think, you know: if I grant the sole-sourced contract to X communications firm or X building firm or so forth, can I justify this if it's in the public eye? That pause, that sober second thought, looking and knowing that it's going to be out there – not with a FOIP or anything else; it's just automatically going to go out there – I think is going to cut dramatically the waste that we see in government, particularly with regard to sole-sourced contracts. A very easy way to tighten our belts.

I hope, Mr. Chair, that this will pass. Thank you.

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment? The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I support this amendment. I think anybody who is serious about accountability in contracting and the problems we're having with public confidence and public trust in this province and the exorbitant overcosting of institutions like the south Calgary campus, which went from \$500 million to \$1.1 billion or \$1.2 billion because it was a cost-plus contract – anybody who really is serious about wanting accountability and transparency I can't imagine not supporting this.

The other added dimension of it requiring any sole-source contract to be public is just another check and a complement to that particular amendment. I think it's a good suggestion to strengthen a bill that this Premier and this government wants to gain credibility on. If they're really serious about this move to be more transparent, more accountable for the public purse, there is no question that this should be supported.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Yes. I'm just going to speak in favour of this amendment so kindly and respectfully put forward by the Member for Airdrie, understanding that almost every sole-source contract is indeed justifiable, as he so kindly pointed out.

Notwithstanding that fact, I do think that this is a fundamental piece of the Premier's so-called accountability legislation, yet the way it currently exists, it's entirely discretionary and doesn't provide the certainty one would see if it were in legislation. So this amendment attempts to ameliorate that fact and attempts to

put a more definitive rule in place with respect to the prohibition on sole-source contracting and to give it legislative authority. Presumably, members from the other side, following on the guidance of their Premier, who thought this was a huge priority, would be moving forward to support this amendment.

I agree that this amendment is a good one, and it should be passed. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Other speakers to the amendment? I'll go to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, then Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

4:50

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I thought it was a very good amendment put forward by the hon. Member for Airdrie. In particular, I like the piece around public disclosure. I think having that as an automatic flow through that goes through as a result of putting this into legislation would be a big step forward. I know right now it's a directive and not in legislation, and having that piece, I think, goes a long way to ensuring that the public at least has the information available so they can judge for themselves whether a sole-source contract was necessary at the time or whether it was not. Just having a flow-through mechanism to make it public would go a long way to making things better in this province and, I think, easier for us to do our jobs on the opposition side of the House.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I think that this is a very good amendment if we want to make government more accountable. I disagree with the Member for Airdrie citing that there are several examples of when sole-source contracts are necessary. I think that they need to be used with extreme caution.

You know, here's the thing, Mr. Chair – and I really hope the members accept this amendment. I find it really rich when you have a party that privatizes as much as it can in the name of competition in order to keep prices down, yet when it comes to contracts, then they play both sides. “No, no, no. But these contracts we're just going to give to our friends.” So if it's for your friends and insiders, then we don't want competition. We just want to hand it off to – I don't know – somebody who has a lifetime membership in your party. I don't know what the qualifications are.

You want competition, and then you don't want competition, so you're playing both sides of the fence here. I think that in the interest of saving and preserving and spending wisely the tax dollars that are collected, sole-source contracts are not the way to go about that. We do want competition. We want the best company being awarded a contract based on qualifications and merit and track record, not based on who they know on the inside, how long they've been a member, and how much they've donated to someone's campaign.

So this amendment, I think, is quite reasonable. In fact, after we've seen a few of the sole-source contracts go out this year for ridiculous amounts of dollars and then we learn about their connections back to the PC Party, I think Albertans want to see that there is a very open, transparent, healthy competition for government contracts. They should not be awarded or appointed; they should be earned.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: We're back to the bill. Speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Chair. We were talking last time about decisions made by the previous Ethics Commissioner where certain issues arose which sort of offended the common sensibilities of most Albertans who would look at issues and say: “Yeah. It kind of looks like a conflict to me. How can this not be a conflict?” You know, it's kind of hard when you run into people in the store, or the grocery store, on the playground, on the soccer field and they say: “I could have sworn that's what a conflict of interest is. How did that end up not being a conflict?” Then you have to say: well, it's just that our legislation is both written unclearly and, in some cases, not interpreted as clearly as it could be. As a result, we have behaviour that really does offend the common-sense notion of what is or is not a conflict of interest, where that behaviour is protected by our less than effective conflict-of-interest legislation.

I want to propose an amendment, Mr. Chair, that I had outside of the Assembly referred to by reference to the name of the member that it related to, but I will simply say that a current member of this House would be impacted by this amendment going forward, were it to happen again. In any event, it's one that we want to bring in because it will ensure a higher standard of behaviour going forward by all members of this Assembly.

So I'm going to distribute it, and I will speak when you would like me to.

The Chair: Briefly, once I've seen it, hon. member. This will be A5.

Proceed, hon. member.

Ms Notley: The amendment – I'll just read it into the record – is that the Alberta Accountability Act be amended in section 1(3)(a)(v) in the proposed section 1(1)(g)(i) by striking out paragraph (B) and substituting the following:

- (B) that affects an individual as one of a broad class of the public, unless
 - (i) the individual would receive a direct benefit that exceeds the benefit that would be received by other members of the class, or
 - (ii) the interest is so closely linked to that individual that if the individual were to advocate strongly in support of the interest a reasonable person would conclude that the individual if engaging in activities respecting that interest that are prohibited by this Act would be in a conflict of interest.

In essence, Mr. Chair, what this amendment is attempting to do is correct a decision made by the former Ethics Commissioner that essentially said that a member may pursue and advocate and lobby for a private interest and use their elevated access to senior public officials in order to lobby for a private interest if that private interest is one that affects a broad class of people equally.

Then the former Ethics Commissioner's decision concluded that people who have businesses engaged in construction, who would all benefit from a change to the Builders' Lien Act such that the builders' liens would not compel the construction contractors to pay their debts as effectively as they currently do – one of the members was lobbying senior public officials very aggressively to make changes to the builders' liens rules in a way that would have very much affected and benefited a private business that the

member also happened to have and to be actively engaged in at that time. What happened was that the Ethics Commissioner said: well, there's a broad class of people that would be affected by this, i.e., any builder.

Now, quite honestly, I think the member in this particular case actually had an uncharacteristically high number of legal disputes under way where they were defending against builders' liens, so I'm not entirely sure that I would buy the interpretation that it affected everybody in the class equally, because some people seem to be more engaged in litigation than others.

Notwithstanding that fact, that particular definition of a private interest by the former Ethics Commissioner essentially meant that it was not possible for a member to ever be found in a conflict of interest unless they had a business which no other person had. In essence, you'd have to be a person whose business was focused only on, you know, reproducing and sharing polka-dotted Barbie dolls with green hair because if anybody else was in the business of selling polka-dotted Barbie dolls with green hair, then suddenly there would be a broad class, and it was no longer a benefit to that member exclusively, so it did not amount to a conflict of interest under the legislation.

5:00

That's, effectively, how the Ethics Commissioner interpreted the legislation. It was, in my view, not a correct interpretation by that previous Ethics Commissioner. It essentially created a great big gargantuan loophole through the very heart of the Conflicts of Interest Act, the very foundational piece of the Conflicts of Interest Act which most Albertans would expect would work in a certain way, which is to make sure that MLAs aren't using the fact that they're MLAs to promote their private business interests. That's basic conflict of interest 101. Yet somehow this act was interpreted in such a way to allow a member to get away with basic conflict-of-interest behaviour 101.

This attempt at amending the act – and I will admit that it's a little bit awkward because we're limited to only amending the sections which are touched upon by the accountability bill that we're discussing. Nonetheless, what this language attempts to do is to inject a standard which comes down to: what would a reasonable person under reasonable circumstances conclude was going on? So a reasonable person test would be injected into this in terms of whether there is a perception of a conflict of interest.

And just in case people think that that's way too broad, just understand that conflict-of-interest legislation across the country has typically used different versions of the reasonable person standard. If it walks like a duck and it quacks like a duck, the odds are good that it may be related to the duck family, you know, if you're a reasonable person with a reasonably strong knowledge of what ducks look like. That kind of legal test has been injected into conflict-of-interest legislation in other jurisdictions.

Indeed, when the all-party committee looked at that issue, we looked at language from other jurisdictions that talked about this notion of not only should justice be done, but justice should be seen to be done. And where a member is behaving in a way that a reasonable person, based on all the facts and circumstances before them, would conclude that it looked like a conflict of interest was going on, then a problem arises and there is jurisdiction for the Ethics Commissioner to step in and make the behaviour stop and perhaps make a finding against the member.

That's what this section is about. We clearly have had a profound exception interpreted into our conflict-of-interest legislation by the former Ethics Commissioner, and it effectively means that there's almost no such thing as a conflict of interest in the Alberta Legislature right now. So if we don't take this

opportunity to fix it, then we run the very real risk that, for all intents and purposes, there's almost no behaviour which is prohibited under the guise of conflict of interest for MLAs within the province of Alberta.

I don't think that that's what Albertans believe is happening. I don't think that's what Albertans want to see happening, nor does that align at all with much of the language that we've seen coming out of the new Premier in terms of what he thinks is happening. I'm not even sure if he understands or if he's aware of this very unfortunate interpretation of our current legislation, that essentially allows for us, for all intents and purposes, to have marginal, at best, conflict-of-interest protection for Albertans in this province and that, in fact, this needs to be fixed.

This amendment is our attempt to fix it, so I hope that people will give it some consideration. Is it a little bit awkward? Yeah. We're using the wrong sections because we are limited to the sections which this bill touches on. Might I have written it a bit better if I could have? Yeah. But at the end of the day what we're getting at here, very clearly, is to expand on the exception to the private interest allowance so that people who are engaged in active lobbying on issues that very definitively and directly relate to their private business interests don't do it. It's that simple.

The Chair: Other speakers to amendment A5?

Mr. Hehr: I will be supporting this amendment for the reasons given by the hon. member. I believe we have struck out here because of a previous Ethics Commissioner's ruling on a grey area that essentially allows us to drive a Mack truck through a loophole here, that allows for an interpretation that the Alberta public, in fact, would probably deem offside with where we wish to go.

We should look at this amendment very closely. I think it goes a long way to looking at the individual member's conduct in this House when they're directly advocating on behalf of their business interests. When they're receiving a direct benefit from changes that they are proposing, this would go a long way. I think that the wording is actually pretty good.

- (ii) the interest is so closely linked to that individual that if the individual were to advocate strongly in support of the interest a reasonable person would conclude that the individual if engaging in activities respecting that interest that are prohibited by this Act would be in a conflict of interest.

It enacts the reasonable person test, which is what we've gone to as a standard of law. It would allow our members under this act to understand, you know: govern yourself accordingly. I think that by having this in there, it would send a strong message to the public that we're not going to have this type of behaviour condoned in this province. I think that under the act, by injecting the reasonable person test, we'd be able to look at things as they are. As they are. Does this pass the smell test? Does it provide the protection that we are looking for?

We in this House have an honourable, you know, position. We have access to things and the ability to talk to other members and people in power and to make decisions in a much greater ability than the average citizen in this province. Accordingly, we need to be governed by strong rules that regulate our behaviour, that make sure it's above board, that serve the broad interests of the public.

I think it's a good amendment. I think we should support it. I think it moves this province forward. It makes us regulate our activities and makes us think about what we're doing prior to going forward and forwarding our own private interests, whether they be for ourselves or for other classes of people if we think about how this legislation is going to directly affect our economic

outcome. If we see that situation where we're advocating for what has a direct benefit to our bottom line, well, then we have to govern ourselves accordingly, think twice, get clarification from the Ethics Commissioner and the like, and not allow for our actions to go past what would be acceptable behaviour under a reasonable person test that all Albertans could look at and say: yeah, that's not right. I think we need this to move forward in a fashion that would protect the public and would actually help us govern our actions more closely in this House.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Other speakers to amendment A5? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Very briefly, I will just concur with my colleagues. I, too, believe that this is a valuable addition and adds some much-needed clarity to this section of the Conflicts of Interest Act. I understand what the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona was saying, that she would have possibly tried to write this differently if she'd had the opportunity to do so. Barring that, I do believe, as the Member for Calgary-Bufferlo just articulated, that inserting the reasonable person test and giving our Ethics Commissioner the option and the ability to insert and use a reasonable person test while making a ruling or a judgment in regard to conflicts of interest is an important option for the Ethics Commissioner to have. Right now the act doesn't have that written into it.

I think that we should pass this amendment, and I look forward to members across the aisle supporting it as well.

The Chair: Other speakers to amendment A5?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Chair: We're back to the main bill. Speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

5:10

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I, too, rise today to talk about the Alberta Accountability Act, Bill 2. I would like to table an amendment as well, and I have the requisite copies of it here.

The Chair: We will just pause while we circulate that. Just a brief moment before you start to speak to it.

It is amendment A6.

Mr. Barnes: Amendment A6. Thank you.

Amendment A6 wishes to lay out some specific people that a minister cannot grant specific contracts or benefits to. This would prevent ministers from granting the benefit of a government announcement to a candidate during a writ. Of course, the recent by-elections, branded by the press as buy-elections, B-U-Y, went a long way to hurt the value of democracy in our province. It went a long way to hurt the entire system. This is an opportunity to tighten up the rules for everyone. This is an opportunity, maybe, to make it fair for all parties but certainly – certainly – to make it so that 4 million Albertans feel that the system is fair and that they want to engage in it.

One of the reasons way back in 2010-2011 that I decided to get involved was because only 28 per cent of eligible voters voted in the 2008 election in Cypress-Medicine Hat. We've all heard the reasons why, the cynicism that comes out of voters, you know: we're all the same; the bureaucrats make all the decisions anyway; it's about favours. Here we are with a situation where the words "buy-election," B-U-Y election, were in every paper for a long

time, and we've seen this raised. We had it raised today by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and the Member for Calgary-Bufferlo, about a way we can make a law stronger, make the election process fairer and more First World for all Albertans.

It was interesting. During the by-election campaigns we literally saw billions of dollars worth of announcements in 28 days. It kind of surprised me, when we barely scratched the Stelmach schools, never mind the Redford ones, that we were announcing more. I hope someday that the cynicism of those announcements, when September 2016 rolls around and those schools aren't full of Albertans, will come back. Hopefully, I'm here to remind Albertans about what happened.

I heard some members, too, mention just briefly and recently the reasonable person test. The Member for Calgary-Bufferlo aptly called it the smell test. Everywhere in Cypress-Medicine people were saying: this is unfair; they're the government; they can do it; we know in opposition you can't. Again, guys, I think what happens is that Albertans don't reward you for it. They don't pat you on the back. Some of them support other parties, or they remove themselves from the system. Why would you want either to happen?

You know, other provinces, two of our neighbours, have already looked at this and said that it doesn't pass the smell test, that it doesn't pass the reasonable person test. Let's look at what Manitoba does. In Manitoba the government is not permitted to

advertise or publish any information about its programs or activities:

(a) in the last 90 days before election day . . . in the case of a fixed date election,

(b) [or during] the election period . . . of a by-election.

Manitoba has recognized that this doesn't pass the reasonable person test, that it doesn't lead to our young people being involved in our democratic process, that it doesn't lead to the level of fairness that we all like to expect and we all like to have when we put our heads on our pillows at night.

In Saskatchewan

(2) During a general election, no government ministry shall publish in any manner any information with respect to the activities of that ministry.

(3) During a by-election in a constituency, no government ministry shall publish in any manner in the constituency . . .

or the city where the by-election is happening

. . . any information with respect to the activities of the ministry.

So Saskatchewan, like Manitoba, has already gone several steps here to ensure that the process stays fair, to ensure we have the best process possible so our 18-year-olds and our 19-year-olds and our people that have felt disengaged who want to be involved feel that their voice counts, as it should count for every Albertan. Rural, urban, rich, or poor: it should count for every Albertan.

Dozens of new schools, dozens of new modernizations. September 2016 is coming. I hope you make it. Does this amendment tie your hands in any way?

Mr. Mason: I hope so.

Mr. Barnes: Actually, I hope so, too. It ties it in some ways to be more fair. What a shame that would be.

This amendment would not limit the ability of the government to govern during by-elections because if the announcement is required to be made because of an emergency or another urgent matter relating to public safety, well, then, of course you could make it. The opposition would want it no other way; the voters of Alberta would want it no other way. To this House: I know the voters of Alberta want a system that looks more fair, that is more fair. They want a system that's more inclusive to every Albertan

and a system that's more inclusive to all the opposition parties, even the ones without the \$45-billion chequebook.

I will ask all members of this House to support my amendment and help me make this more fair for all Albertans. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chair, it's funny; we always get accused and just did in the last bill of hastily constructing legislation and not consulting anybody, and then we go through this process where we craft several amendments in the dead of the night and supposedly somehow they were all well constructed.

Mr. Chair, this particular amendment proposes to change a section under 23. Section 23 refers to restrictions on former ministers – former ministers. When you get to 23.1, the section that we're trying to change, it talks about what a current minister is in contravention of if he deals with a former minister or a former member of the staff. But the section is about former ministers, so why would you all of a sudden talk about the relationship between the current minister and somebody else? This is about former ministers and their staff, so this doesn't belong in this section, first of all.

Second of all, you're talking about the conduct of a candidate or his campaign. That is best left for the Election Act, where we talk about the conduct of candidates and their campaigns and what is proper or not. Mr. Chair, I'd humbly suggest this is not the proper amendment, nor is it the proper place for such an amendment in this act.

I'm going to urge that the Legislative Assembly do not support it. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Chairman, just to respond. You know, the fact that the government has produced this bill and provided to the opposition for the last two or three days does not constitute a failure on the opposition to be thorough and consult. The government is setting the pace here, and for the minister to blame the opposition is just a little bit absurd. Nevertheless, I think the important thing here is that we might want to rename this the portable clause. The Minister of Education has said, you know, that he's listened to the public and so on and whatever and given them what they want. What they wanted, apparently, in the by-election was portables and school announcements, of course. Yes, they do.

5:20

I'm going to be making this point as we go on with some of the NDP amendments as well, that you can't count on this government to clean up its own mess. It has tightened rules except where there have been egregious breaches by the government itself in the past number of years. So the opposition, including our amendments, will try to hold the government to account and actually make amendments that would affect what the government has actually done or failed to do that violates the sense of ethics of the people in this province. I find it very interesting that they're not going to support these amendments. I think, quite frankly, what they've produced is an ethics and accountability bill that looks more like Swiss cheese than something that's bulletproof. [interjections] It reminds me of some highways just with driving around rural Alberta. It's full of holes, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Hon. members, would you keep the side conversations just to a whisper. Thank you.

Proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: The government has multiple blind spots with respect to its own transgressions, and that's very evident in the bill they brought forward.

Thank you. I'm going to be supporting this amendment.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I'd just like to say that, frankly, I couldn't give a tinker's darn whether it's in the right place or not. Getting this amendment through in this fashion will go a long way to providing good governance going forward. So if it's in the bill, even if it's in the wrong place, it's on the books. It would preclude the government from doing actions which the Alberta public saw in the by-election as being essentially untoward and not necessarily what's expected out of a government in other provinces. Manitoba and Saskatchewan have written in this law. I think it's a very good place to put this rule in place. It would get it on the books, and it would save us from having to do it at another time. I applaud the member for doing it, and it's a good place to put this rule in so people have it on the books. We'll be able to see it and have it right there in plain view so this government can govern itself accordingly on that file.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I, too, will support this given that last year we spent many days on the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act amendments and tried to instill some of these principles into the reformed, improved Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act amendments, and this was rejected. Where else can we introduce it? This is an eminently reasonable and publicly supported principle of accountability and reducing conflict of interest and building trust. The only reason I can see for this government to reject it is that they don't want to be accountable, and they don't want to improve trust with the public in Alberta.

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A6 lost]

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

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Barnes	Hehr	Swann
Bikman	Mason	Wilson
Fox	Stier	

Against the motion:

Anglin	Horne	Oberle
Bhardwaj	Horner	Olesen
Brown	Jeneroux	Olson
Calahasen	Johnson, J.	Pastoor
Campbell	Khan	Quadri
Casey	Klimchuk	Quest
Cusanelli	Kubinec	Sandhu
Dallas	Lemke	Sarich
Dorward	Leskiw	Starke
Drysdale	Lukaszuk	Towle

Ellis	Mandel	VanderBurg
Fenske	McDonald	Weadick
Goudreau	McQueen	Xiao
Griffiths		
Totals:	For – 8	Against – 40

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Chair: Hon. members, we are back to the bill.

Speakers on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I also have an amendment. I would like to present it now. I will send it up to the table on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

5:30

The Chair: This will be amendment A7.

Hon. member, please proceed. You may speak to the amendment.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'll move on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that Bill 2, Alberta Accountability Act, be amended in section 1(3) by adding the following after clause (a):

(a.1) in subsection (5) by striking out “or” at the end of clause (d), by adding “or” at the end of clause (e) and by adding the following after clause (e):

(f) a person or group of persons in a relationship with the Member which a reasonable person would conclude is a proximate political or business advisory relationship or with whom the Member shares closely aligned personal or business interests.

Now, Mr. Chairman, this is part of the NDP set of proposals for strengthening the Accountability Act. As you no doubt have been told, we focused very much on the transgressions of this government or members of this government in the past in trying to close the loopholes that were used in order to excuse behaviour that would have been considered very questionable from an ethical point of view.

This particular one focuses on the issue of the potential conflict of interest or the purported conflict of interest of a previous Premier, who shall not be named in deference to the PC's preferences. In that particular case, there was a major contract, a huge contract awarded, when a previous Premier was the Justice minister, to a law firm to fight a tobacco case. In this particular case, this massive contract was awarded to a firm in which her ex-husband, campaign manager, and close political confidant was a senior partner. Mr. Chairman, this was dealt with by the Ethics Commissioner, and in a judgment, which we strongly disagreed with, the incident was cleared.

This is an attempt to close that loophole. In fact, I think I can recall, Mr. Chairman, that the Conflicts of Interest Act specifically says that if the person was involved in making the decision, there is a conflict of interest. The former Premier argued that she had not made the decision, and she pinned it on the then Justice minister who replaced her, now the agriculture minister, for making the decision. But the documentation clearly showed that the initial selection of the firm from among three contenders had been made by the former Premier when she was the Justice minister. So she clearly was involved in making the decision.

Nevertheless, Mr. Chairman, the Ethics Commissioner for whatever reason ruled that the relationship between the former Premier and her ex-husband, campaign manager, and close political confidant was not sufficiently close to have constituted a

conflict of interest. Nevertheless, we felt very strongly that the then Justice minister should have recused herself from this case and let someone else make the decision. In our view, the whole thing smelled very badly.

This amendment is simply an attempt to close the loophole, to say that in a case like that, there's no question but that a conflict of interest exists or that at least the perception of a conflict of interest exists, and the person should recuse themselves. This would strongly strengthen the bill, which, amazingly, seems to be dotted with bits of amnesia about what the real conflicts of interest are, what the real ethical lapses have been over the last five to 10 years in this government. This will strengthen the bill.

I'm sure all hon. members on all sides of the House will want to strengthen Bill 2, the Alberta Accountability Act, and correct those bits of amnesia and will support this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment?

Mr. Hehr: I think this is an excellent amendment. It allows our Ethics Commissioner and those in charge to apply the reasonable person test to be able to aptly judge in situations where close business or personal relationships or, in fact, political relationships are maybe being rewarded in certain instances. You can look no further than the examples brought up in this House over the course of the last number of years, and probably going back even further, where this principle has not been followed through on and the government of the day has played fast and loose and rewarded friends and political supporters with contracts. This would go a long way to end that practice and give us time where we can think about our actions and have laws that actually say that these actions will have more scrutiny and the ability to have an interpretation made about the behaviour in question.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to stand in support of this as well. I think that if you ask the average Albertan if a close associate, business or otherwise, a relative, or a friend had an interest in one of the decisions of this Legislature, one of these ministers, the average person would say: of course that's a conflict of interest. Somehow that's escaped this government to this point, and I'm hoping that they will see this as an important opportunity, again, to rebuild some trust in our political process, in the decision-making, in the interpretation of conflicts of interest, in a sense of fairness, justice, and integrity, which there's a critical need to do.

There's no question that this is an important and strengthening amendment. It doesn't conflict with anything that these folks have said that they believe in. In fact, it would add to the strength of this whole bill. I hope that we'll see some support despite the fact that it's coming from across the floor.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers to this amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A7 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:39 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

For the motion:

Anglin	Fox	Stier
Barnes	Hehr	Swann
Bikman	Mason	Wilson

Against the motion:

Bhardwaj	Horner	Olesen
Calahasen	Jeneroux	Pastoor
Campbell	Johnson, J.	Quadri
Casey	Khan	Quest
Cusanelli	Klimchuk	Sandhu
Dallas	Kubinec	Sarich
Dorward	Leskiw	Starke
Drysdale	Lukaszuk	VanderBurg
Fenske	Mandel	Weadick
Goudreau	McDonald	Woo-Paw
Griffiths	McQueen	Xiao
Horne	Oberle	

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 35
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[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

The Chair: We're back to the main bill. Speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. I have an amendment, sir.

The Chair: All right. If you would circulate that and just pause for a moment until I get the original at the table.

You may speak to this, hon. member. We'll call this amendment A8.

Mr. Hehr: I'm moving this on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. It's to move that Bill 2, Alberta Accountability Act, be amended in section 1(12) by striking out the proposed section 20(6). The reason for this is that under the proposed section 20 of the Conflicts of Interest Act a minister cannot hold financial interest in a company where his or her decisions as a minister may benefit the same company. For example, holding significant shares in a bank while Finance minister is a major no-no as it can be a large conflict of interest.

There are exceptions to this, where there is a blind trust or if the Ethics Commissioner gives his or her blessing. Subsections (2), (3), and (4) of section 20 lay out the criteria for this blessing. However, subsection (6) allows the commissioner to arbitrarily approve the financial holdings "subject to any conditions determined by the Ethics Commissioner." As subsection (6) is written, it appears to give the minister an out so that other criteria need not apply. We believe that the commissioner should make decisions based on the criteria set out in the act and only in the act, to allow for less wiggle room and to allow the full criteria to be evaluated as it is written in the act.

That is my amendment. We think it goes some way to increase accountability.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Other speakers to the amendment?

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Chair, again, another statement of offering to strengthen a bill that while moving the yardstick a little bit could be moved a lot if this government would let go of some of its pride and allow some reasonable amendments to be embraced. This would, again, build trust, give a stronger sense that this government is truly committed to doing what it says it's wanting to do: create a new relationship with Albertans and the Legislature

of Alberta, build a new sense of integrity and confidence in the political process, and reduce the level of conflict of interest that has been widely perceived and has created tremendous cynicism in this culture.

I'm hoping again that this government will honour its commitment to the people of Alberta and support this amendment.

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A8 lost]

The Chair: Back to the main bill. The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm moving that Bill 2, the Alberta Accountability Act, be amended in section 1(15) in the proposed section 23.3, and I have all of the copies right here.

The Chair: Okay. Just pause for a moment, please.

This will be A9, hon. member, and you may speak to it.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. The whole idea here is to set out some general parameters for staff members on what constitutes a conflict such as influence or insider information. This amendment would be another way of preventing by-election announcements by saying that the Premier's and the ministers' staff enter into a conflict of interest if they participate in an announcement that benefits a candidate during a writ.

Probably a good idea is to have some protection from political staff. It's always important for employees and contractors to know where the boundaries are and what the limits are, so I feel that that may be helpful. Of course, a lot of our good, hard-working political staff can be very partisan at times, so clarification on ethical lines should be drawn. I don't see any way that this gets in the way of the work of political staff during the by-elections. It just keeps them from being pressured to take part in the kind of announcements that Manitoba and Saskatchewan know aren't ethical, that many people in Alberta don't like to see and know aren't ethical. It would give them some protection; it would give them some boundaries.

It's interesting when we look at this. As the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood said, you know: to get these into the exact proper spot, to get it into the exact proper part of the bill on such short notice is always difficult. So I very, very much appreciate my LAs' work on it, and my researchers' work on it.

But it reminds me of what the Auditor General said. I can't remember if it was the government planes or the sky palace he was checking into, but he said something like: you can't make a law or a rule for everything, so you have to fall back on principles. Manitoba and Saskatchewan understood the principle of not having partisan taxpayer money. All 4 million Albertans, all of them, get involved in a by-election in a way that is unfair, in a way that doesn't build a stronger democracy, in a way that doesn't promote a stronger and a better system.

5:50

Again, we saw billions of dollars of announcements during the 28-day by-elections a short time ago. People knew that all of the opposition parties, if we'd have won all four, still would have been the opposition. Is that a fair way to run an election in this time when we want more people engaged, when our people are smart and have so much information?

This amendment would go some distance – some distance – to make it so that staffers understand clearly where their lines are. It

would go a long distance to make it so the system is fair, the system is stronger, and I would ask that members support it.

The Chair: Other speakers to amendment A9? Do you want to speak to the amendment, hon. member? Okay. Go ahead, please.

Dr. Swann: Thanks. Well, again, an eminently sensible recommendation that would add to the credibility of this bill. It's interesting to me that the other side rejects amendments without giving any arguments for rejecting them. They don't want to, I guess, be on the record as rejecting something that's reasonable and supportable. It's disappointing. It's not what I think most Albertans would expect of their elected representatives, that they just sit there and then reject amendments one after the other. It's disappointing, but I hope that we will see some change.

Thank you.

The Chair: To the amendment, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Yes. Once again we see that just because something is legal doesn't mean it's moral or ethical. We're talking about accountability, and it's really quite appalling to think that the government – I know you're not this unaware. You do have some self-awareness. You realize that you're playing on a field that isn't level, that it's tilted in your favour. It's one, of course, that's been very effective. It's one of the explanations for 44 years of continuous rule.

It's not so much that the results that you've produced are above reproach, because we've seen time and again examples of reproach and unethical behaviour, whether it's actually ruled that or called it. People know in their hearts what's right and what's wrong, and you do, too, I submit, hon. members across the floor and those sitting beside me to the right, of all places, when they actually should be sitting to the left.

But it's the right thing to do. It's the right thing to do. I think that sometimes you have to do the right thing even if it's going to make it a little harder for you to perpetuate the myth that the only government worthy of support in Alberta is a PC government. Because it simply ain't. [interjections] It simply ain't so in spite of the loud protestations to the contrary by those who have hair.

Nevertheless, do the right thing for a change and support this.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm glad to stand up. I will not support this amendment. I've heard this same debate now twice in a row with the Wildrose, and I'm going to be blunt because that's what I generally do. [interjections] Can you believe that?

The public is not stupid, and this amendment makes this presumption that the public can't see through some sort of campaign stunt if it is a campaign stunt. The fact is that the original provision of the act does cover what I think everybody wants covered. This idea that we're going to legislate morality – what we're dealing with is something that is both moral and ethical, and the fact is that there has to be some sort of decision-making capability with the Ethics Commissioner. But on this idea that the public can't see through it, I disagree with the Wildrose. The public is fairly intelligent, and they get what's going on. They see through falsehoods, many of the same falsehoods that the Wildrose throws out there.

I will tell you this. This amendment is a terrible amendment. It presumes that the public is not intelligent. I will tell you that the public is intelligent.

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, I can support part of this, but I do have a problem with one of the sections. Certainly,

- (a) to influence or seek to influence a decision to be made by or on behalf of the Crown to further a private interest of the member, a person directly associated with the member or the member's minor child or improperly further any other person's private interest,

is clearly something that we can support.

However, (b) of the same section says that, you know, basically, the government can't talk about something good that it's done in an election. Now, that's a little different from our amendment, where you can't make specific announcements to further your interests in a particular election or a by-election. You can't make those announcements during that period. This is that you can't talk about it. You can't publicize something that the government may have already done. I don't know how you're going to do that. I'm in a bit of a quandary because I don't know how this government gets elected on its record as it is. But if it did have some good stuff that it had done, it seems reasonable to be allowed to talk about it during an election campaign.

So I don't know if we can sever it or if somebody from the Wildrose can explain this one to me. This one gives me a bit of pause. But certainly regarding trying to influence a decision made by the government to benefit a person or a member: that's absolutely worthy of support.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A9 lost]

The Chair: We're back to the main bill. Speaking to the bill, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: I have an amendment, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Can you pause for a moment while we circulate that, hon. member?

Mr. Oberle: I wonder – and I certainly defer to your wisdom, Mr. Chair – considering the time, if we should not consider calling adjournment until 7:30 this evening.

The Chair: I think the process, hon. member, is just that at 6:00 I would just recess until 7:30, so by the time I see the member's amendment, I suspect that's what will likely happen.

Mr. Oberle: I'm good to go. I'm sorry I interrupted, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be amendment A10.

You may speak to it briefly, hon. member. You might have about a minute or so.

Mr. Mason: I'll at least put it on the floor. On behalf of my hon. colleague the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona I move that Bill 2, the Alberta Accountability Act, be amended in section 1(17) in the proposed section 25(1) by adding "or where the Ethics

Commissioner has reasonable grounds to believe that a breach or contravention of the Act has occurred or is occurring” after “reasonable notice to that individual.”

Speaking briefly to it, Mr. Chairman, the Conflicts of Interest Act currently only allows the Ethics Commissioner to investigate breaches or contraventions when there’s a request made or when he or she believes that the member or individual is acting in contravention of his or her advice or directions. This is really very narrow, meaning that a number of breaches or contraventions could happen and not be investigated as long as the MLA never approached the Ethics Commissioner for advice in the first place and no one else thought of requesting the investigation. So it says

that the Ethics Commissioner on reasonable grounds can start an investigation, and that seems to be a very natural thing to have happen.

I have some other things to say, but that’s basically the nub of the issue. If there are reasonable grounds for the Ethics Commissioner to start an investigation, he or she should do so.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, the committee will now recess until 7:30 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, December 10, 2014

Issue 16

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 10, 2014

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'll reconvene the committee. Please take your seats.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just before we move ahead with the debate on amendment A10, I wonder if I might ask that we waive the appropriate section of our standing rules in order to allow a one-minute time frame between division bells.

The Chair: I believe that because we just recessed, hon. Deputy Government House Leader, it continues. We don't? We have to redo it?

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. We have to redo it.

The Chair: Oh, okay, then. I stand corrected, and I appreciate your motion, hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: I didn't know that, actually. Your table officer told me.

The Chair: Okay.

Well, then. I'll ask the members of the House.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders

Committee of the Whole

Bill 2

Alberta Accountability Act

The Chair: We'll reconvene debate on amendment A10. Any more speakers to amendment A10? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: I'm not sure I was quite finished, Mr. Chairman.

I think that there are real limitations on the Ethics Commissioner's ability to undertake an investigation. The current Conflicts of Interest Act says that he can only do it under two circumstances: one, when he or she believes his or her advice has not been followed, which would require the member to approach the Ethics Commissioner in the first place and seek direction. That may not happen in all cases. Secondly, the Ethics Commissioner can undertake an investigation when he or she receives a formal complaint.

Otherwise, the Ethics Commissioner's hands are tied, but if it is apparent that something may have happened or, for example, if someone may want to bring something to his attention without laying a formal complaint for their own reasons – privacy, job security, other reasons may be valid – then the Ethics Commissioner is not in a position to open an investigation. I think that that is an unreasonable limitation that hamstring the ability of the Ethics Commissioner to look into matters that he or she should look into, and they certainly are not the kind of limitations that are put on other people who are responsible for investigating and enforcing legislation, for example police. I'm not trying to make the case that the Ethics Commissioner is a police officer or akin to one, but it's an example of how other officers responsible for investigating and enforcing legislation are not constrained by this kind of limitation, which the amendment will correct.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'd urge all members to support it.

The Chair: Other speakers to amendment A10?

Mr. Hehr: I think that this is a reasonable amendment. It actually would free up our Ethics Commissioner to maybe do his job more efficiently and effectively. He would be able to undertake investigations at his own behest. His hands wouldn't be tied, as noted by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, where a complaint has to come through his office and the like before he can go out and look at certain situations or a member is going to have to seek his advice. If in the Ethics Commissioner's wisdom he deems the member hasn't followed that advice, then an investigation can occur. It seems like this limits his capacity not only to investigate but to hold people to account for what their true obligations are, to represent the public interest.

I think this would be a good move. I don't know if any other Ethics Commissioners have this wide a latitude, but it'd be a good place to start, right here in Alberta. So I applaud the amendment, and I would urge all members of this House to vote in favour.

The Chair: Other speakers to amendment A10?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A10 lost]

The Chair: We're back to the main bill.

You want to speak to the bill, hon. member?

Mr. Mason: I want to make another amendment, but I was really hoping for a standing vote on that one.

The Chair: Well, I did pause, hon. member, and at best I saw two.

Mr. Mason: Well, I think the hon. member . . .

The Chair: I didn't see him signal.

Mr. Mason: No?

The Chair: But I invite you to carry on.

Mr. Mason: Okay. All right, Mr. Chairman.

I have another amendment, which I will send to the table, and you let me know when you want to make it.

The Chair: Hon. member, you may speak to amendment A11.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona I move that Bill 2, Alberta Accountability Act, be amended as follows. Section 2(4)(b)(1) is amended in the proposed schedule 1 in section 2(l) by striking out "became a former public officer within the previous 2 years" and substituting "is a former public office holder." Section 2(5)(b)(1) is amended in the proposed schedule 2 in section 2(k) by striking out "became a former public office holder within the previous 2 years" and substituting "is a former public office holder".

Well, Mr. Chairman, one of the objections that we've had to the act and to previous government decisions is this two-year time limit, this statute of limitations of a mere two years. Changes to the Lobbyists Act: the government inserted a two-year period, which didn't previously exist. This amendment removes that limited time period and makes the provisions in question apply to everyone who is a former public office holder. There are still other provisions in the act that allow for exceptions and exemptions, so there's no good reason here to insert a two-year time limit.

Those are my comments, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Speaking to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A11 lost]

The Chair: Back to the main bill. Speaking to the bill, any other speakers?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

7:40

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 2. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report just offered? If you do, say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: If you do not, say no. Accordingly, that is so ordered, carried.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 2

Alberta Accountability Act

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to move third reading of Bill 2, Alberta Accountability Act.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation is part of a package that will help restore public trust, improve accountability, and end entitlement. Bill 2 will strengthen the conflicts-of-interest guidelines for political staff. It will extend the cooling-off period for political staff and designated office holders, and it will clarify the distinction between the role of registered lobbyists and government consultants. Complementing the legislation will be two Treasury Board directives that will eliminate sole-source contracts except in clear and exceptional circumstances and restrict severance packages for political staff.

Bill 2 amends the Conflicts of Interest Act, the Lobbyists Act, and the Public Service Act. Changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act include prohibiting staff in Premiers' and ministers' offices from participating in discussions or using confidential information which would further a private interest and from using their office to improperly influence others for their own benefit. Bill 2 also

bans ministers, the Premier, and their staff from lobbying government for 12 months after leaving office. The cooling-off period for ministers' and the Premier's office staff would be extended from six months to 12.

Premiers' and ministers' staff will also be required to make financial disclosures to the Ethics Commissioner each year, Mr. Speaker. Bill 2 also makes available an administrative penalty for those who do not file their financial disclosures on time. With Bill 2 more detail is provided about when an MLA may accept a gift in a protocol situation and includes additional reporting requirements about gifts to the Ethics Commissioner.

The bill also revises the exceptions allowing travel on noncommercial aircraft, making them similar to the federal model. Members must disclose all noncommercial travel to the Ethics Commissioner within 30 days. The Ethics Commissioner will make this information public.

The Accountability Act also expands the authority of the Ethics Commissioner. Two examples of those changes are providing authority to post public disclosure statements on the Ethics Commissioner's website and providing for greater investigative powers for the Ethics Commissioner such as the authority to call witnesses and compel production of documents. These amendments reflect input from both the Ethics Commissioner and the Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee.

Mr. Speaker, under Bill 2 a person would be prohibited from lobbying and providing paid advice to government or a prescribed provincial body on any subject matter at the same time. With this bill anyone who is currently lobbying and consulting would be required to choose which activity will continue and end the other activity within 60 days of the bill coming into force. Bill 2 amends the Public Service Act so that it parallels many of the conflict-of-interest provisions applicable to MLAs.

The Alberta Accountability Act makes important changes to the government. The amendments, coupled with the Treasury Board directives, will change how things are done in government. It will ensure high ethical and accountability measures are in place as we work together to restore public trust.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 2 and the changes that are being proposed by the government. Now, we've just heard the Deputy Government House Leader and Minister of Energy talk about how this will eliminate entitlements and restore public trust. I guess I will have to say that there are a few things about this act that are improvements, but I do not believe that it meets the goal of restoring public trust. If you compare the changes in this act to the government record over the past number of years and ask how this act would apply to various transgressions of members of this government over the past several years and whether it would fix those transgressions and prevent them from occurring in the future, the answer has to be no. I think that it bears some discussion.

There are some improvements in terms of this. High-level political staff will now be subject to the same conflict-of-interest principles as current MLAs. That's one thing. I know that in my notes there are some good things to say about this bill.

Another good change in Bill 2 comes from recommendations that the NDP made in our minority report of the special committee. That's now: MLA disclosure statements may be posted to the website of the Ethics Commissioner. But there's still no requirement that they could be posted.

There are changes to the Lobbyists Act, a few improvements there: expansion of the definition of a former public servant and the clarification of many sections, including schedule 1, 1(3) and 2, and schedule 2, 1(2) and 2, whatever those are.

I think there are good changes as well to the Public Service Act: greater transparency, the ability of designated office-holders that would limit the ability of office-holders to influence government decisions, and so on. They've added adult interdependent partner to the definition of spouse.

But I want to talk about the application of this bill, if passed tonight and proclaimed, to some of the issues that we have seen in the last number of years. Now, the hon. leader of the NDP and MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona released a list of priorities for ethics legislation from the NDP a couple of days ago, and the focus there was on looking at some of the things that had occurred in the past under this government that were found to be very questionable by many Albertans but were not dealt with because of interpretations of existing legislation that allowed these transgressions to be unchallenged, I guess you could say.

First of all, we had one clause to deal with the donation by Daryl Katz to the Progressive Conservative Party before the last election of over \$400,000, clearly illegal under the act, but for some reason the interpretation was that you could divide it up, say that the different amounts had come from different people associated with Mr. Katz, either business or family, and it would all be okay.

7:50

We've proposed inserting a new clause under the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act that would say:

No person should

- (a) circumvent or attempt to circumvent a limit set out for maximum contributions, or
- (b) act in collusion with another person or entity for that purpose.

No person or entity shall

- (a) conceal or attempt to conceal the identity of the source of the contribution governed by this act, or
- (b) act in collusion with another person or entity for that purpose.

That was drafted in accordance with section 405.2 of the Canada Elections Act. That would have closed a loophole that this government used in the last election, but the government has chosen not to support that and to not make those changes.

Secondly, we have another proposal to deal with the appointment of a previous member of the cabinet, Mr. Berger, to a government position, and that would have amended section 31 of the Conflicts of Interest Act by changing the length of the ministerial cooling-off period to two years. That has not been accepted by the government. Those are based on a proposal from the B.C. NDP to their conflicts of interest act.

Thirdly, a clause to deal with actions taken by the Minister of Education in the recent by-election would insert a new section under part 6 of the Election Act, corrupt practices, that reads:

During the following periods a government department or Crown agency must not advertise or publish any information about its programs or activities:

- (a) in the last 90 days before an election and on election day in the case of a fixed-date election,
- (b) in the election period in the case of a by-election or a general election that is not a fixed-date election.

That does not apply to advertisements or publications required by law that are required for soliciting proposals to tenders or something that relates to an important matter of health and safety. It goes on to say that during the period of a by-election this also

applies. These are based on section 92 of Manitoba's Election Financing Act.

These aren't, Mr. Speaker, just figments of the NDP caucus's imagination. These are actual provisions that have been provided in other legislation in other provinces but remain gaping holes in Bill 2.

There was a clause which we tried to amend tonight, named after a previous Premier of the province, to insert a new clause under section 2(2) of the Conflicts of Interest Act that reads, "For the purposes of this act a member has an apparent conflict of interest if there is a reasonable perception which a reasonably well-informed person could properly have or the member's ability to exercise an official power or perform an official duty or function must have been affected by his or her private interest" and insert a new section:

A person or group of persons in a relationship with the Member which a reasonable person would conclude is a proximate political or business advisory relationship or with whom the Member shares closely aligned personal or business interests.

This is language, Mr. Speaker, based on the British Columbia Members' Conflict of Interest Act, and similar clauses also exist in other jurisdictions, including Saskatchewan. The latter is derived from deficiencies noted in the Alberta act when it was reviewed by the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee in 2013.

There's another clause that we would propose to deal with actions of a member of the government caucus who voted on something that closely affected his business, and that would insert a new clause under a section of the Conflicts of Interest Act that reads:

An interest that affects a person as one of a broad class of public except where

- (a) the Member or person directly associated with the Member or the Member's minor or adult child gains a direct benefit exceeding other members of the class, or
- (b) where the activities of the Member exceed that of other members and are so closely linked to the interests of the Member, a person directly associated with the Member, or the Member's minor or adult child if it gives rise to the perception of a conflict of interest by a reasonable person.

This is based on recommendations that arose from the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee when it reviewed the act in 2013, specifically in a discussion on how to strengthen the legislation in regard to the case of the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

There's a clause that we have identified, called the PC Party clause, which would amend the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act as follows: a prosecution under this act may be commenced within five years after the facts on which the information is based first came to the knowledge of the Chief Electoral Officer. These limitations were derived to take into account a typical election cycle. The latter clause was drafted to include the requirements that the Chief Electoral Officer be aware of the possibility of an offence before the limitation period has begun to run. That exists in legislation in Ontario, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan.

The next one that we proposed was called the building Alberta clause, to pass legislation that compels the government to publicly disclose criteria for determining public infrastructure investment priorities, a clear public infrastructure priority list, and a detailed explanation for changing the priority list when that occurs. I'm sure my friends in the Wildrose, who've been talking about this

for several years, would have been very interested in seeing such a provision in Bill 2.

Another clause that we propose, Mr. Speaker, is called the friends and insiders clause, and it would amend the Conflicts of Interest Act so that public officials who are subject to both the act and the authority of the Ethics Commissioner would include those who run major government organizations, including the Alberta Energy Regulator and Alberta Health Services. Now, it is the case that Alberta Health Services has been included, but I think we could go further and talk about other boards appointed by the government that have large responsibilities as well, including the university boards of governors and so on.

Finally, we have a clause called: all cattle, no hat. Now, we've certainly said that the government's Bill 2 is all hat, no cattle, so if we wanted to put some hooves on the ground rather than chapeaux on the head, then we would do this. We would make sure that the promises of the Premier to limit severances and sole-sourced contracts exist in legislation and not in a Treasury Board directive that can easily be changed and, potentially, not noticed at all. It should actually be in the act if the Premier wants to be counted on for keeping his promise.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that we will not be supporting Bill 2 at third reading. It's not that there are not some slight improvements. It is because the actual violations of ethics that have taken place on the part of this government in the past several years are mysteriously missing from Bill 2. In other words, Bill 2 would have done nothing to change the bad behaviour of this government in many, many respects, and they have left those things out. They haven't written them into the act. They're trying to pretend that they're going to fix the PC Party. They're going to try and pretend that they fixed this Progressive Conservative government and all of the bad things that happened under she who must not be named, or before her, and that they will never happen again because they have made sure that it can't happen again.

Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. In actual fact, almost every egregious example of ethical violations conducted by members of this government in the past few years are excluded from this legislation, and that's why we're not voting for it. That's why we don't buy it when the minister stands up and says: "Well, you know what? We promise that we're going to fix things. We're going to make sure that the ethical standards are of the highest nature, and all this bad stuff that we really want you to forget about will never happen again."

Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no guarantee that it will never happen again because the legislation doesn't make it an offence. The legislation doesn't fix the problem. The government is misleading the people of Alberta when it's claiming that their legislation will clean up their own act. You can't count on this government to fix the problems of this government. Only the voters can do that, and I hope that they will. Once they realize that this piece of legislation is, in fact, not what the government promised, I think the voters will have something to say about this government's ethical standards. They have not fixed the problems that they themselves have created, and I don't think that's any surprise to any of us, Mr. Speaker. I don't think that any of us that have been around for more than a day or two really expected this government to actually legally prohibit the kind of behaviour that they've exhibited over the last five years, and certainly they have not.

8:00

Mr. Speaker, with that, I just want to indicate once more that we are not going to support Bill 2. We really have a set of proposals, I

think, that would have made for some really strong and effective ethics legislation not based on a wish list as we're sitting around the caucus table or at an NDP convention but actually drawn from legislation that exists in other provinces that have dealt with some of these things that this government consistently refuses to do. I think that's really unfortunate. We could have really done some good work here together if the government had been serious about ending entitlement and ending the culture of corruption that has enveloped it in the last number of years, but unfortunately I have to say that they have not done so. They don't seem to have a desire to do so, and I leave it to the people of Alberta to draw the appropriate conclusion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed, could I have unanimous consent from you to revert to the Introduction of Guests briefly?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: We have three quick introductions, one by the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, followed by the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations, followed by the Minister of Seniors.

Please proceed.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for your indulgence and to every member here. I just wanted to introduce to you and through you a long-time friend of mine with a great sense of humour. Lesley Kasper has joined us this evening. Please stand and be recognized.

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not often that we get visitors in the evening, and it's not often that we get visitors to stay more than about 30 seconds. So we thank all the visitors for coming tonight.

I had 14 years of basketball coaching, and in amongst all the youth and children that I coached were included Cameron and Lauren, the kids of Cindy and Rob Green, and they're here tonight. Cindy and Rob, could you stand up and say hello to the group, please?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege to introduce a very special individual, whom we lured out of retirement to be the president of Athabasca University, and we've managed to convince him to stick around for another year or so to help with that university. He's got quite a resumé, including being the president of the University of Saskatchewan for 13 years, I believe, and the dean of law there for a decade. He's a former chair of the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada. He's a former chair of the Canadian Association of Law Teachers. In 2006 he was one of three people shortlisted for the Supreme Court of Canada vacancy at the time. He's on the Prime Minister's Advisory Committee on the Public Service. He has the Order of Canada. The original building at the University of Saskatchewan, a national historical site, is named the Peter MacKinnon Building, and he holds honorary degrees from five universities. So, Peter, please rise and be recognized.

The Speaker: Thank you, and welcome, all.

Are there any others?

If not, let us go back to third reading of Bill 2.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 2

Alberta Accountability Act

(continued)

The Speaker: We're looking for the third speaker, after which 29(2)(a) will be available. Are there any other speakers at third reading on Bill 2? I see one. That would be the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't tend to go long, but we'll look at the Accountability Act. I think it did go some small way to making things somewhat better here in Alberta. You can look at some of those things that on the face of it sound reasonable, and they have been put forward in this bill: extending the cooling-off period to a full year for elected officials and political staff and senior civil servants who leave government, and some other things like that. Then we go on, looking at gifts and when they're going to be allowed to happen and when they're not and the like in that matter.

But to be clear, there was so much more that this act could have done. We could have actually done a wholesale look at some of the things that have been happening in this province and made this accountability legislation the strongest in the country, which at this time it is clearly not. Look at some of the things that were promised to be brought in: amendments to the Fiscal Management Act that would require budgeting to be presented in a clear and consolidated format; producing a biannual report card on savings; and merit-based appointments for agencies, boards, and commissions. Some of these things were left off the radar, so to speak, and were not included in this bill.

I listened with great interest to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and I, too, believe that we could have used this opportunity to look at our Election Act and how we could have done better primarily around financing elections in this province. Everyone knows Alberta has the loosest arrangements when it comes to allowing donations. Extreme limits are present for corporations and unions and, in fact, individuals to give to what can only be called obscene limits when you compare them to other provinces and how they have moved in the direction of allowing only individuals to contribute, like our federal financing laws that say that only individuals can make up to \$1,200 a year in contributions. I think that would go a long way, if we'd gone in that direction, to limit those rules on financing.

We also looked at ways where we could have empowered the office of the Ethics Commissioner to be more judicious and to have more freedom to investigate on his own and use the reasonable man test to ascertain whether, in fact, things are as they are and whether they could have been done differently. I think we lost an opportunity to do some of those things.

I think it was brought clear that this act has been brought forward to try and restore public trust. You know, it's great to put out a press release saying that we're actually going to change things and actually be different, but it takes more than that. I think this act fails to do that in that it would not have stopped many of the flagrant abuses and violations that we've seen of the public trust and, in fact, with the public purse over the course of the last number of years. That is disappointing.

Many good amendments were brought forward by all parties in the opposition, that I believe could have strengthened this Accountability Act. I think the government knew full well that when it brought in this legislation, it was merely scratching the

surface of where it could and should have gone, and I think we need to do better. I think we have to look to other provinces that have moved ahead.

I thought one thing that we should be doing – and it's become patently clear over the course of the last little while – is that we should be bringing in election laws that limit what, in fact, the government can do during elections and by-elections. It is abundantly clear that this time period should not be used to make government announcements that are clearly trying to buy votes. We see other jurisdictions – Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and others – that have moved in that direction, that have actually said: look here; elections are no time period for us to make government announcements that are clearly derived for winning that election. Look, there's the business of the government to do, and then there's politicking. We should try to separate the two roles and responsibilities, and that has not been done in this act.

My hope is that the government will follow the lead of these other jurisdictions that have brought in comprehensive electoral reform. That, sadly, has been lacking here over the course of my time in this Legislature. It tends to suit the government of the day's purpose to allow election financing laws and other loose laws like this to exist. You know, really, I think it's time; we could have done better. We didn't do that, and I think the public record will show that.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, those are my final comments. I, too, will be voting against this bill for those and many other reasons.

8:10

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. Does anyone wish to participate?

If not, do we have any other speakers who wish to speak at third reading? I see none.

Hon. Members: Question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division.]

The Speaker: Just to be clear, I am aware of a previous motion that the time between bells would be limited to one minute. Is that still the agreement of the House? Is anyone opposed to that? I hear no opposition, so the distance between the two bells will be limited to one minute.

[The division bell was rung at 8:11 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anglin	Hale	McQueen
Bhardwaj	Horne	Oberle
Brown	Horner	Olesen
Calahasen	Jansen	Pastoor
Campbell	Jeneroux	Pedersen
Cao	Johnson, J.	Quadri
Casey	Kennedy-Glans	Quest
Cusanelli	Khan	Rodney
Dallas	Klimchuk	Sandhu
DeLong	Kubinec	Sarich
Denis	Lemke	Scott
Dirks	Leskiw	Towle
Dorward	Luan	Weadick
Drysdale	Lukaszuk	Wilson

Fenske	Mandel	Woo-Paw
Fox	McAllister	Xiao
Goudreau		

Against the motion:

Hehr	Mason
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Totals:	For – 49	Against – 2
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[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a third time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's been a pleasure working with you this session, my first session as Government House Leader. I want to thank the deputy House leaders and also the opposition House leaders for working with us this session.

Without further ado, it is my privilege to advise the House that the government business for the fall sitting has now been completed. Therefore, pursuant to Government Motion 5 the Assembly stands adjourned.

Statement by the Speaker

Decorum

The Speaker: Hon. members, I will adjourn the House in a moment. However, I want to make a couple of points known to

all. I've had the privilege of being in this Assembly for over 20 years, and I have never seen the level of decorum that you offered, particularly during question period, in all 20 of my years. I don't know if you are fully aware of the gravity of what I'm alluding to, so let me put it to you in different terms. You have gone for four weeks without even a single point of order being raised during Oral Question Period. I emphasize during Oral Question Period, and the reason this is significant is because you may well have set not only a record in that respect for this Alberta Legislative Assembly, but you may well have set a record for all Legislatures in Canada, perhaps throughout the entire Commonwealth. We will research that and let you know. Over 700 minutes of questions, responses, replies, and answers were offered, which equates to over 10 hours of serious accountability during question period, and that totalled well over 1,300 questions, answers, responses, replies, what have you. I want to sincerely thank and congratulate you. You did well. Thank you.

With that, I also want to say thank you to our table officers and to others participating.

Therefore, pursuant to Government Motion 5, agreed to on November 18, 2014, the Assembly will stand adjourned until 2015 at a date to be identified in the sessional calendar, that will be published sometime during January 2015.

We stand adjourned.

[The Assembly adjourned at 8:19 p.m. pursuant to Government Motion 5]

Bill Status Report for the 28th Legislature - 3rd Session (2014)

Activity to December 10, 2014

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 199 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1 Respecting Property Rights Act (Prentice)

First Reading -- 6 (Nov. 17, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 30-31 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft.), 142-46 (Nov. 24, 2014 eve, passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 169-73 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 206-11 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft.), 277-79 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

2* Alberta Accountability Act (Denis)

First Reading -- 404-05 (Dec. 8, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 456-67 (Dec. 9, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 500-14 (Dec. 10, 2014 aft.), 515-16 (Dec. 10, 2014 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 516-20 (Dec. 10, 2014 eve., passed on division)

3 Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014 (Quadri)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 89 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 165 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 173 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 259-75 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

4 Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 89 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 165-67 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 174-75 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft.), 177-79 (Nov. 25, 2014 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 279-81 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

5 Securities Amendment Act, 2014 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 89-90 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 167-68 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 173 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 281-83 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

6 Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2) (Olson)

First Reading -- 22-23 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 90-92 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 175 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 193-206 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft.), 283 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 321 (Dec. 2, 2014 eve., passed)

7 Chartered Professional Accountants Act (McIver)

First Reading -- 159 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 275-76 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve.), 319 (Dec. 2, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 425 (Dec. 8, 2014 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 480 (Dec. 9, 2014 eve., passed)

- 8*** **Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (Kennedy-Glans)**
First Reading -- 159 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 276-77 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve.), 319-21 (Dec. 2, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 425-28 (Dec. 8, 2014 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 480 (Dec. 9, 2014 eve., passed)
- 9*** **Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014 (Olesen)**
First Reading -- 237 (Dec. 1, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 336-38 (Dec. 3, 2014 aft.), 428-33 (Dec. 8, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 470-75 (Dec. 9, 2014 aft.), 477-80 (Dec. 9, 2014 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 495-500 (Dec. 10, 2014 aft., passed)
- 10*** **An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children (Jansen)**
First Reading -- 238 (Dec. 1, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 300-18 (Dec. 2, 2014 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 338-55 (Dec. 3, 2014 aft.), 357-66 (Dec. 3, 2014 eve.), 367-74 (Dec. 3, 2014 eve., passed with amendments)
- 11** **Savings Management Repeal Act (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 334 (Dec. 3, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 433-41 (Dec. 8, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 468-70 (Dec. 9, 2014 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 494-95 (Dec. 10, 2014 aft., passed)
- 201*** **Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014 (Anglin)**
First Reading -- 86 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 125-28 (Nov. 24, 2014 aft.), 238-52 (Dec. 1, 2014 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 406-08 (Dec. 8, 2014 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 408 (Dec. 8, 2014 aft., passed)
- 202** **Safe and Inclusive Schools Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (Blakeman)**
First Reading -- 86 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., passed), (Dec. 3, 2014 aft., withdrawn)
- 203** **Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 192 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 409-18 (Dec. 8, 2014 aft., passed)
- 204** **Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014 (Amery)**
First Reading -- 388 (Dec. 4, 2014 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, March 10, 2015

Issue 17

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Calahasen	Xiao
Cao	Young
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 10, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome back to the Assembly.

Let us pray. O gracious God and Great Creator, we pray for the future of this great province and for its great inhabitants, whom we are honoured to serve through our roles in this Assembly. May truth and wisdom, care and compassion guide us in our duties and deliberations. Amen.

Hon. members, please remain standing, if you would, for the singing of our national anthem, as led by Mr. Robert Clark.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Hon. members, may I ask you to remain standing.

As is our custom on our first day back, we pay tribute to members and former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met.

Mr. James E. "Bud" Miller March 31, 1923, to January 23, 2015

The Speaker: Today we pay tribute to Mr. James Edgar "Bud" Miller, who was born on March 31, 1923, and passed away on January 23, 2015. Mr. Miller served the Legislative Assembly of Alberta as the Member for Lloydminster for four consecutive terms from 1971 through 1986. He was born and raised in Kitscoty, Alberta. In addition to being a farmer and rancher, Mr. Miller also served as a sergeant in the Royal Canadian Air Force during the Second World War.

He was first elected to our Legislative Assembly in 1971, and from 1979 until 1982 Mr. Miller served as the associate minister of public lands and wildlife. During his 15 years of service he also served on 10 select standing committees and was deputy chair of three search committees. Shortly after his retirement the Bud Miller all seasons park in Lloydminster was named in his honour in June 1986. His ongoing involvement in the development of our province continued long after his tenure as an MLA and included his participation in major initiatives such as being the chair of the biprovincial upgrader from 1988 to 1995.

In a moment of silent prayer I would ask you to remember Mr. Bud Miller as you may have known him, and I would ask that you add to your prayers Mrs. Margaret Miller, Bud's beloved wife, who passed away just four weeks after Bud, on February 19. O Lord, grant unto him eternal rest, and let light perpetual shine upon him. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, following up on our prayer, it is with great admiration and respect that we pay gratitude to members of the families who shared the burden of public office and of public service. Today I would like to welcome some special family members of the Miller clan who are present in the Speaker's gallery. Please allow me to introduce all of them. I would ask that they rise as I call their names, and then we can applaud them with our thanks and gratitude after they have all been introduced: Sandra Erickson, daughter of Bud Miller; Jody Erickson, granddaughter of Bud Miller; Joe Miller, son of Bud Miller; Elizabeth Miller, daughter-in-law of Bud Miller; Ian Miller, grandson of Bud Miller; Dan Miller, son of Bud Miller; Kathy Miller, daughter-in-law of Bud Miller. Honourable family members, please know that our thoughts and prayers are with you at this very difficult time. Thank you so much. [applause]

The hon. Minister of Energy, followed by the Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Joe Pastion, who is the chief of the Dene Tha' First Nation in the Peace River constituency in northern Alberta. I'm very, very pleased to have the chief here. I've had a chance to meet with him and discuss a couple of issues of common mutual interest. He's here with other Treaty 8 representatives to further the interests of Treaty 8 and their own individual communities. He's seated in your gallery, in the Speaker's gallery. He's risen. I'd ask that we all give him the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two special visitors who are former MLAs and belong to the Alberta Association of Former MLAs, also known as the AAFMLA. They are Karen Leibovici, the president of the AAFMLA – Karen was the MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark from 1993 to 2001 – and Mr. Julius Yankowsky, secretary of the AAFMLA. Julius was the MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont from 1993 to '97 and MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview from 1997 to 2004. They are seated in your gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're going to begin with school groups. Could I ask you to please keep your introductions as brief as possible because we have so many introductions to do today and so much business to carry on with.

Let us begin with the Minister of Seniors, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a group of young students from H.A. Kostash school in Smoky Lake. Of course, Smoky Lake, in my constituency, is the pumpkin capital of Alberta and one of my favourite spots in the constituency. These students – I think there are 29 visitors – are joined by their teacher, Tara Harris, and parent helpers Shylha Brodyk, Mrs. Deloyce Kusick, and Mr. Billy McMullen. If I could ask them to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Young: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly my honour to stand and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 37 students from the Malmo elementary school. They are escorted today by their teacher, Mrs. Theresa Bonar, and parent helpers Brandon Bosma and Howaida Hassan. I ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you 30 students from York elementary school, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Manning. They are accompanied by their teacher, Ms Dora Strasdin, and two parent helpers, Mrs. Lemmon and Mrs. Fenniak. These bright students are the future leaders of our province and country. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask my guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure today to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 26 of the brightest young people from my diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler. One of the best parts of this job is to meet and greet the future of Alberta, and the future is bright, sir, with these students from Mother Teresa Halkirk Catholic school. They are accompanied today by Alyn, Michael, and Crystal. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you 20 visitors from McArthur elementary school along with their teacher and a chaperone, Ms Ginette Larocque and Ms Patsy Best. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of everyone here at the Legislature.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other school groups?

If not, we'll move on to other important guests. Please remember that I will give you a signal if I see that you're going on a little too long with the introductions.

Let's start with the Associate Minister of Asia Pacific Relations.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. For my first introduction it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the House some individuals who have contributed much to building vibrant and inclusive communities in our province. I have Mr. Allan Kwan, a former GOA executive and now an active volunteer with ASSIST Community Services Centre, providing services to newcomers, and a member of seniors and long-term facilities; Ms Sandy Pon, a successful realtor, business owner, and now very involved with the United Way and the Edmonton Realtors' Charitable Foundation. Also with us today is Ms Mary Fung, a former teacher who now volunteers with many organizations, including the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating

Council and Age Friendly Edmonton for Edmonton's Chinatown. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I ask that they please rise and receive the very warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Thank you. Hon. associate minister, you have a second introduction?

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. For my second introduction I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you again three individuals who not only embody Alberta's international spirit but through their activities and actions have helped strengthen our international relations in Asia, an important region for the future of this province: Mr. Larry Lang has as a former director for economic development and tourism worked to enhance our trade ties in Asia and helped negotiate the establishment of the China-Alberta petroleum training centre in Beijing in 1985. It's been 30 years since Mr. Lang sat in this gallery. Next is Ms Eloisa Lau, who's been incredibly active in the Filipino community, has organized events and fundraisers when tragic disasters hit the Philippines. She has worked with the temporary foreign workers in our province and helped to solve many of their problems. Also joining us today is Mr. Gongjie Ma, an international student who graduated from Zhejiang University, a very important partner to the U of A. He also obtained his MBA from the U of A this last summer. Gongjie has been very active also with the Chinese international student community. They are now seated in the members' gallery. I ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Minister of Human Services, followed by Livingstone-Macleod.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives from the Alberta College of Social Workers, a number of whom work with the government of Alberta. Last week was Alberta Social Work Week. Alberta has over 7,000 registered social workers, and I'm proud to share that over 3,000 are employed by the government of Alberta. Every day thousands of Albertans benefit from their support. They demonstrate dedication and professionalism as they work to improve the health and well-being of all Albertans. I would ask the following individuals to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. First of all, Vince Pasqua and Colleen Geake are representing Human Services staff today. They are joined by Lori Sigurdson and Lynn King, representatives of the Alberta College of Social Workers, plus two social work students, Beverley King and David Von Haller. Please join me in welcoming these guests.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some very important team members. Nathan Steinke and Maureen Gough have recently joined team Wildrose and have been working hard to help prepare us for session. They are in the gallery here today. I know all members appreciate having great staff, so I'd invite them to stand and invite all members to welcome Maureen and Nathan with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two hard-working Albertans who work to support communities all across the province through their positions with the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies. Ag societies are present in many, many communities across the province and provide great services and facilities. With us today are Doug Kryzanowski, who is the president, and the chief executive officer, Tim Carson. They are in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition, followed by Lethbridge-West.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you to this Assembly my guests, Guy Smith and Tyler Bedford, both representing the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. AUPE represents 80,000 working Albertans who are an essential part of this economy. Tyler has worked in communications with AUPE for almost five years and is a former staffer at the Legislature, and Guy has worked for AUPE for over 25 years and is the current president. He spent decades fighting against government cutbacks to protect quality of care for all Albertans. His exemplary service to this province stands as a shining example of what can be achieved through political participation. I want to recognize these fine individuals for their hard work in this time of uncertainty, so in recognition of this I would ask Guy and Tyler to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Gord Tait. Mr. Tait is a long-time member of Lethbridge, he's a chartered accountant, and he's one of the founding partners with Meyers Norris Penny, which was a small local firm that is now one of the fastest growing firms in Canada. I would ask Gord to please rise and receive the warm greeting of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we won't be able to start question period right now, but I would beg your indulgence to let us carry on and complete the introductions and then move on to Ministerial Statements with responses and then go to OQP. I'm assuming that will be okay with everyone. Yes? Thank you so much.

Let us move on, then, to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure, followed by Sherwood Park.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you three individuals: Mr. Mike Brar, Kuldip Gil, and Kuldeep Sidhu. Mr. Brar is no stranger to this House, having previously worked for and closely advising then Premier Don Getty as a special adviser. Up till today he continues to be a tireless advocate for the community. He works very closely with many community organizations, and individuals like yourself and the hon. Premier would count Mr. Brar as a close friend. I'd ask all three to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two visitors from

my constituency of Sherwood Park. Dr. Herb Belcourt is a Métis, aboriginal, and First Nation champion, author, member of the Order of Canada, recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee medal, and a long-time Progressive Conservative supporter, dating back to the '70s.

I also have with us Mr. Joe Lipka, a dedicated director of the Sherwood Park Progressive Conservative Association and a renowned champion old-time fiddle player. Most of all, he served our community and our country as an RCMP officer for many years.

These esteemed gentlemen are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to introduce a good friend of mine and a guest who is no stranger to this House as well. Mr. Tom Olsen is here today. Through you and to the rest of the members of the House I would like him to rise and receive the honourable welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Are there any others? One from the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce Jerry Aulenbach, a good friend of mine and a constituent and also on the Twitter feed ZoomJer. If Mr. Aulenbach could please stand up and give the Assembly a wave.

Thank you.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my honour on this first day of the spring session to speak to the Assembly on a topic of profound importance for Alberta students and many others across our province. I am referring to Bill 10 and the matter of legislation regarding student gay-straight alliances in Alberta schools. This matter was first brought before us by the Member for Edmonton-Centre through her private member's bill early in the fall, and I want to acknowledge her efforts this afternoon. Your efforts have not gone in vain.

Late last year the Premier wisely put the government's Bill 10 on pause in order to permit a time of extended conversation with Albertans on this important matter. As Minister of Education I have felt a particular obligation to hear from as many Albertans as I could about this issue and have therefore spent much of the last three months speaking with a wide variety of teachers, parents, members of the LGBTQ community, religious leaders, trustees, principals, counsellors, legal experts, and a broad assortment of community leaders.

Most importantly, in my travels around the province I talked with numerous students who are directly affected by gay-straight alliances. If you could have joined me in these conversations, Mr. Speaker, you would have heard students talking about the taunting, mocking, and bullying they have suffered because of their sexual orientation. You would hear them speak of parents who don't understand them, of online bullying, and of suicidal thoughts. They told me, sometimes in tears, how alone and helpless they have felt when caring friends and sympathetic teachers are not around them. But when I asked them, "Tell me about your GSAs," their faces

brightened, and with animated voices they would tell me about their GSA, how it helped them feel safe at school and how they now felt valued, respected, and welcomed.

Mr. Speaker, even if you talked to no one else on this matter except students, you would quickly come to the conclusion that GSAs are all about providing groups of gay and straight students with safe, caring, respectful, welcoming, and inclusive spaces at our schools. But, as I mentioned earlier, I also spoke to a broad spectrum of adults – teachers, parents, religious leaders, community leaders, trustees, principals, and others – who wanted to talk about the bill and tell us what they thought we as a government should do about GSAs. Not surprisingly, I received a wide range of opinions, but there is no question that the vast majority of Albertans with whom I interacted spoke in favour of ensuring that kids who want to form a GSA club in their school should be able to do so.

It was my privilege along with other members of this Assembly to attend at a public forum sponsored by the Rocky Mountain Civil Liberties Association, where I heard compelling presentations by mothers of gay students, professors, straight students supporting their LGBTQ friends, postsecondary students, and experts in civil rights. Their messages were clear. Schools should allow GSAs on school property, just like every other kind of voluntary student friendship club at school is permitted to operate.

Mr. Speaker, GSAs in schools do not segregate students. They are voluntary, open, and inclusive of anyone who wants to join, and they are not designed to be exclusive to LGBTQ students. As well, it should be noted that the freedom for religious, faith-based schools to engage in religious instruction is in no way limited by and does not conflict with the existence of a GSA at a school.

The conversation on Bill 10 and GSAs with Albertans these past three months has been of vital importance, and I am thankful to every Albertan who took the time to express their perspective to their Member of this Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that there is only one way forward. I am pleased therefore to table today a draft amendment to Bill 10 that stresses the importance of ensuring that every student in Alberta that feels the need for a GSA can have one. This draft amendment calls for students to be able to establish gay-straight alliances in any Alberta school, for these GSAs to be allowed to meet on school property, and for students to be able to call their club a GSA, a QSA, or any other name of their choosing.

Mr. Speaker, the draft language reads that

if one or more students attending a school operated by a board request a staff member employed by the board for support to establish a voluntary student organization, or to lead an activity intended to promote a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging, the principal of the school shall . . . permit the establishment of the student organization or the holding of the activity at the school.

For the purposes of the draft amendment

an organization or activity includes an organization or activity that promotes equality and non-discrimination with respect to, without limitation, race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, family status or sexual orientation, including but not limited to organizations such as gay-straight alliances, diversity clubs, anti-racism clubs and anti-bullying clubs.

The amendment also clearly states that the principal of the school shall

designate a staff member to serve as the staff liaison to facilitate the establishment, and the ongoing operation . . . or to assist in organizing the activity.

If no staff member is available to serve as the staff liaison, the principal shall immediately inform the board and the minister, and if so informed

the Minister shall appoint a responsible adult to work with the requesting students in organizing the activity or to facilitate the establishment, and the ongoing operation, of the student organization at the school.

The draft amendment also states that

the students may select a respectful and inclusive name for the organization, including the name “gay-straight alliance” or “queer-straight alliance”, after consulting with the principal.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, ensuring our children, who are the future of this province, have a safe, caring, respectful, inclusive school environment free from bullying is of paramount importance. Because this is such an important matter, it is my hope that all members of the Assembly will support Bill 10 moving back to Committee of the Whole so that this important draft amendment, that ensures every Alberta student who wants a GSA will be able to have one, can be dealt with in Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Speaker, I have copies of these draft amendments to be passed out to each member. I thank you for the opportunity to bring this matter to members and urge them to take this matter up forthwith.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to get up and respond to the minister's statement. Let me start off by saying that I think credit has to go where credit is due, and that credit doesn't go to the government, but it goes to the Member for Edmonton-Centre, quite frankly, because she's the one that brought the legislation forward under Bill 202, which actually got this conversation started.

I want to start by saying that in 22 years in the Legislature I have never encountered a situation like we're seeing today. The tradition in this Legislature, as far as I can find – and we've checked – is that if a minister is making a ministerial statement, they share the ministerial statement with the opposition so that we have time to respond. That hasn't happened today.

2:00

What I find extraordinary is that I had a call from two of the ministers at about 11:30 this morning and asked with 10 minutes' notice to meet with them to tell me what they were doing. At that particular time I said, “Can we see a copy of the ministerial statement that the minister is preparing?” “Nope. Can't do that.” Not only do we see a statement, but we've also seen amendments tabled in the Legislature without giving us proper time to respond.

I want to say, though – and there's no question – that I'm on the record that I support GSAs, and I did when I spoke on Bill 10 about how I feel about GSAs in schools. I explained to people in the Legislature, when we were debating Bill 10, that I have a gay family member and am very proud of that and have been around gay, straight people for as long as I can remember. I think that where we're going on this is the right thing to do. If a gay student wants to start a club in a school, it's a club, and they should be allowed to do it.

So we are looking forward to seeing the amendments that the minister is going to propose. I don't think we should be playing politics when we're talking about children, quite frankly. To me, it's about providing a safe environment for our children, and it's apparent to me that the government is trying to get its act together, if I can say that. We will be speaking when we deal with the amendments on Bill 10.

Again, I truly want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Centre for all the work that she's done. I think it's something that she will be able to go down in history as saying she brought to this province, and I think it should be a very proud moment in her life.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask unanimous consent of the Assembly to allow myself and the leader of the New Democrat Party to respond to the ministerial statement.

The Speaker: Thank you.

You've heard the request for unanimous consent, and I'm going to add to that a request from the independent Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre to also add some brief comments. If anyone is opposed to giving unanimous consent to any of these three members who wish to speak, please say so now.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, it's hard to contain my joy, but always being a stickler for process, I will just ever so gently chastise the minister for being unable to provide the ministerial statement in advance as is the customary courtesy. I understand why it didn't happen. Nonetheless, I'll just give a little gentle reminder there.

Today's announcement is a victory for safety and inclusivity and proof of the value of an effective opposition, an effective Liberal opposition. Last April with Motion 503 Alberta Liberals began the fight for gay-straight alliances in any school where they are needed, and that was brought forward by my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo. When that motion was voted down, it prompted a backlash that I don't think anyone expected. They underestimated the progressiveness and inclusive values that Martha's and Henry's children hold dear.

We understand these values because they are our values, progressive values, so we brought forward Bill 202, the most comprehensive bill to protect the LGBTTTQ community that this province has ever seen. While cynical political tactics were used to kill Bill 202 before it could ever be debated, we again saw an inspiring backlash at the alternative Bill 10. Together this inclusive, progressive generation of Albertans, Martha's and Henry's kids, has ensured that schools provide safe spaces for vulnerable children in this province.

Thank you to every Albertan that refused to tolerate discrimination in this province. Your voice mattered.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader of Her Majesty's fourth party.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do plan to acknowledge my colleague from Edmonton-Centre, but let me just say that making me get up to speak right after she gets teary is not fair.

Anyway, you know, all students can now claim their right to start a GSA, and they can now start the work of building inclusive schools in communities across this province. Gender identity and gender expression will be added to the Bill of Rights, and the offensive section, 11.1, in our human rights code is being removed.

All of this is a long-overdue step in the right direction, Mr. Speaker, but it's important to understand that it didn't come without a fight. In 1998 the Supreme Court of Canada told all provinces that protection from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation had to be included in all human rights codes, but for over a decade this PC government and only this PC government in this province dragged its feet, refusing to fix our code. Even when they did, they gave with one hand and took away with another.

In 2009 I fought passionately against the decision to amend our human rights code so that teachers could be disciplined for talking about issues of equality and sexual orientation. Then last spring the issue of gay-straight alliances made its way into this Legislature, and the vast majority of government members twice voted down proposals that would have ensured that the best tools for protecting kids from bullying were a matter of right. Then even last fall our caucus proposed to include gender identity in Alberta's Bill of Rights, and it, too, was rejected. But – there is a but; don't worry – two and half months later it appears that we may be on the verge of fixing the unfortunate historical record of this government. Most importantly, we will provide real and meaningful support to members of the LGBTQ community in their schools and in their families, and that is the greatest outcome of the work that we will do on this bill.

I'd like to offer my thanks and congratulations to the many people who have been front and centre in these debates. I'd like to thank the Edmonton Youth Council, who successfully took a resolution to the Edmonton city council in support of GSAs. I'd like to note the Edmonton public school board and its former chair, Sarah Hoffman, who led the EPSB to developing the most inclusive and welcoming LGBTQ school policy in western Canada several years ago. I'd like to thank the many activists who never gave up pushing on this important issue over the last few months and over the last many years. I'd like to acknowledge my colleagues from Edmonton-Centre and from Calgary-Buffalo for using their rights as private members to set this debate in motion in this House.

The sad truth is that the PCs had to be dragged across the finish line on this one. That being said, they are here now, so I'd like to offer them our sincere welcome to this side of the line and congratulate you. This is a sound decision. It will help many Albertans, and it will represent a good step forward in the ongoing efforts to promote diversity and inclusion for all communities across our province.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills did state a point of order around 2 p.m., I believe. I did not hear it, but the clerks at the table did, so we'll recognize that in a moment.

My apologies to you, hon. member, for not having heard you.

Let's now hear, however, from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While there are a lot of accolades and thank yous and credit for what is happening here and certainly the Member for Edmonton-Centre deserves a tremendous amount of credit, as do other members in this House, I would also like to give credit to the Member for Calgary-North West for putting out a lot of advocacy on this very issue. I want to acknowledge the fact that the Premier did come around at some point, and now we have the changes that are coming forth to address this issue.

It's interesting to note that this is the 50th anniversary week of something called Bloody Sunday, which, as some of you people who are old enough might remember, was a huge civil rights moment. I liken the issue that we dealt with in Bill 10 and Bill 202 to a civil rights moment. I did that in debate, and I still believe that in my heart.

2:10

The idea of equal rights is always a battle against ignorance. The battle against ignorance is never-ending. This bill is a battle against ignorance. It does more than just provide equal rights. It does something that we need to take credit for; maybe we stumbled on

the way to get credit for it. It actually reduces bullying, and it saves lives. The data is there to prove that it reduces teenage suicides. That is something that I am in favour of.

I want to thank the minister, and I want to thank the various members for standing up, for making this fight, and for getting the job done. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

The hon. member who is the Official Opposition House Leader wishes to raise a point of order.

Point of Order

Ministerial Statements

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief. I just rise according to Standing Order 23(e), which states that a member can be called to order when he "anticipates, contrary to good parliamentary practice, any matter already on the Order Paper or on notice for consideration on that day." I would just make the observation, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Education minister reading an amendment before this House before it's been submitted into this Legislature is unheard of. I haven't heard that before. I think that clearly one can indicate the substance of such an amendment, but in terms of reading in the amendment verbatim before it's been properly submitted in this Legislature, it's contrary to good parliamentary procedure. It seems like a minor point, but there has been a steady deterioration in protocol here, so I would just ask that the Speaker consider that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think that the point of order from the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills is more of a point of clarification. In his own submission he did not indicate any rule that was extensively broken. I don't believe there has been any rule broken by the Minister of Education or anybody else, and I would invite your comments.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Government House Leader is quite correct, and so, too, in part at least, is the hon. Opposition House Leader. No rule has in fact been broken. However, there is a spot in the agenda where tablings normally occur.

This was a very unique situation, too, however, because traditionally ministerial statements sort of run in that four- or five-minute range. Today it went, I think, a little bit over six, which is allowed because there's no rule about the length of ministerial statements either. There is a rule, so to speak, with regard to the length of time opposition members or independent members have to respond.

However, in this case I have sent a note already to the Minister of Education, so you might say that through words on paper we have chatted about what just occurred.

While I'm up, I might also just ask the members of Executive Council that any time you have a ministerial statement, it is the courtesy to usually provide a copy of that in advance to opposition members. In this instance my understanding is that the subject of the minister's statement was at least provided, so that was found to be helpful, but for whatever reasons in this case the entire speech was not. I'll leave that to House leaders and to individual ministers to determine how they wish to proceed in the future.

Therefore, there is no specific point of order because no particular rule has been broken; however, I believe the record will clarify what the intent should be going forward.

That being said, let us now move on to the next item of business, Madam Clerk.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Let us begin with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Fiscal Responsibility

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [some applause] Small but mighty.

Last week the Premier excused his government for the fiscal mess the province now sees itself in. When asked who is at fault, he told Albertans to look in the mirror. Now, if I were to hold up a mirror where I stand today, I'd see a principled opposition holding this government accountable for waste, entitlement, and bad management. If the Premier were to hold up a mirror right now, he'd see behind him the people directly responsible for the mess, his PC government. Will the Premier stand up, acknowledge what he sees in the mirror, and apologize to Albertans for blaming them for the mess his government created?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would similarly extend the courtesy of welcoming the Leader of the Opposition back to the Legislative Assembly for what, I think, has been a historic day in this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, I take responsibility for what I say, whether it is in the media or whether it is in this Chamber. As the hon. member knows, as members of her party know, as former members of her party know, I have been the harshest critic of former governments, and that is, in fact, why I'm here in this position. I intend to continue to serve Albertans, and I intend to continue to take responsibility for what I say.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: First the Premier blames Albertans for the provincial fiscal woes because it couldn't possibly be a series of bad decisions by a series of bad PC governments; now his ego won't allow him to apologize for insulting the very Albertans who pay for the most expensive Premier's office in the country, the most expensive MLAs in the country, and the most expensive government in the country. Mr. Premier, a little humility goes a long way. The former Premier had to learn that lesson the hard way. I'll ask you again. Will you apologize for the mess that you have incurred?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I take responsibility for what I have said. I will always take responsibility for what I have said. But the real issue is: what does the leader of the Wildrose Party have to say about the important issues that face Albertans today? What does she have to say about the fiscal issues that the government deals with on behalf of all Albertans? What indeed does she have to say in truth about the amendments to Bill 10 that have been put forward in this House today? It's about being accountable on the significant issues that we face as Albertans, and I look forward to hearing what the hon. member believes and is prepared to put forward.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, when Albertans hear about the sky palace, outrageous severances for health care executives, and sole-source contracts to friends of the PC government, they rightfully get upset. Albertans already contribute more tax per capita than anywhere else in the country. Now the Premier says that all of that waste is the fault of Albertans and that now Albertans are going to have to pay. Premier, Albertans don't deserve to be made the

scapegoats for the failing of your government, whether it's the past or the present. Just how much are you going to make Albertans pay for the mistakes of your government?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that shortly after becoming the Premier of the province, together with the Minister of Finance we eliminated the possibility of sole-source contracts. It was one of the matters which I was a harsh critic of relative to the former government, which I spoke up about, and which I changed when I became the Premier. That's indicative of the sort of changes that we are making as a government.

We face challenging financial circumstances. Alberta is tough. It is resilient. We will get through this. We'll get through this together. But I look forward to hearing from the opposition the specific ideas that they have about how we can deal with maintaining core, quality front-line services and at the same time manage our fiscal situation responsibly.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions. The Official Opposition leader.

Mrs. Forsyth: Premier, that sole-source contracting that you're talking about: half of your front bench allowed them.

Government Policies

Mrs. Forsyth: In a radio interview the Premier said that he's fully committed to keeping every promise he made in the PC leadership race. In the summer he promised no tax increases. Since then he's talked about every kind of tax he can think of: a sugar tax, a higher gas tax, higher income tax, sales tax, health tax, more sin tax, and higher user fees for just about everything. It's hurting the economy, Premier, and it's the latest example of the Premier pinning the blame on Albertans. Premier, there's still a chance you can keep . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Premier to respond.

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've never at any time suggested that Albertans are responsible for a collapse in oil prices that has resulted in a \$7 billion hole in the provincial government's revenue base. The real question is what to do about it. [interjection] If I might continue, the real question is what to do about it in a measured, balanced way. The Minister of Finance will be introducing to this Legislative Assembly a budget that is more than just a budget; it will be a fiscal plan for the next 10 years for how we will manage this circumstance. The real question for the opposition is: what do they intend to do about it? How do they intend to proceed? What do they have to say?

The Speaker: Thank you.

2:20

Mrs. Forsyth: Premier, you can't call an election on the price of oil and gas. Do you know how many elections you'll be in?

It's no wonder Albertans don't trust this government. It's obvious the Premier's tax talk is hurting economic investment. In October he said that it's time to wind down the government's \$2 billion commitment to carbon capture, but two weeks ago he expanded the program to five years. We estimate that ending this type of corporate handouts will save over a billion dollars in the next year alone. Why is the Premier insisting on spending billions of dollars in corporate handouts while threatening job-killing tax hikes on Albertans?

Mr. Prentice: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance will put forward a very detailed, comprehensive fiscal plan for how,

in a measured and balanced way, we will deal with the revenue shortfall that the government faces, how we will maintain quality services. Front-line services – health care, education, senior citizen care, and other front-line services – are extremely important to Albertans. How we maintain those services in the circumstances which we're in will require careful thought. It will require balance. I hope that the member opposite and her party have some concrete, specific ideas other than slashing and burning their way through the government.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Premier, I've already given you one idea. Stay tuned for the rest.

It's no secret Albertans are heading towards a very expensive, unnecessary, and, quite frankly, illegal election, and while the Premier had better be careful about what he wishes for, it's just another example of a broken promise he made to Albertans. The legislation is designed to be a contract between Albertans and the government. Premier, you are breaking this contract by threatening to call an election. Premier, are you going to honour that contract you have with Albertans? If not, will you tell Albertans today when you're going to call the election?

Mr. Prentice: Well, the hon. member knows full well that the legislation in question allows the Lieutenant Governor to call an election at another date, and, Mr. Speaker, in light of the financial circumstances that this province is in, circumstances that I think are without parallel, really in a generation, in terms of a precipitous collapse of our revenue by \$7 billion, a \$7 billion shortfall this year, \$6 billion in the year after that, a structural deficit thereafter if we do nothing – these are significant circumstances – Albertans need to have their say. No decisions have been made relative to elections, but we will press on and table a fiscal plan in this Chamber.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The third and final set of questions. The Official Opposition leader.

School Construction

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, this PC government went around the province in 2012 promising 120 school projects to be built before the next election. Well, yesterday we find out that only one has been built. Construction has literally been slower than a snail's pace. The Premier seems intent on pinning the blame on Albertans who expect the kids aren't packed in the classrooms like sardines. So I'll ask the Premier: how do you think Albertans can expect these schools to be built on time with the dismal PC record of keeping promises?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, there's been no more outspoken advocate about the need to catch up on our capital construction for schools than myself, and I stand by that. The schools in question – the hon. member should be frank with Albertans. It takes three and a half years to construct a school. That's a minimum in terms of the time that it takes. The schools that were committed to in 2011, some 35 schools, 30 of those schools are in fact completed. The schools that were announced in 2013, the 120 schools: 38 are under construction, 54 are in the design phase, and frankly another 26 are in the tender process. This is a process of a government building schools in a proper way, in a methodical way, in the best way possible, on time, and on budget.

Mrs. Forsyth: The Premier can try and run from his government's own record, but he can't hide. In October the Premier called the state of school construction the most expansive commitment we've ever seen in Alberta's history. But that was when the Premier was

buying his Education minister a seat, and this is now. It's been six months since he announced 77 new schools, and – guess what? – not a single shovel is in the ground on any of these projects. It's this kind of electioneering and broken promises that Albertans are sick of. Premier, when are you going to look in the mirror, clean up the mess, and admit you won't keep your promises that you made to Albertans?

The Speaker: Thank you.

A point of order from the Government House Leader has been noted at 2:26.

The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier has indicated, of the phase 1 schools 30 are done. Two additional schools have students in the schools today. A further two are going to be ready in a very short period of time. Of the phase 2 schools 38 are in construction today, 54 are in design, 26 are in the tender process, and of the phase 3 schools that were announced last October, 12 of those schools have been expedited to have a target completion date of 2016.

Mrs. Forsyth: Now, Mr. Speaker, here is where the government aren't talking to each other. I'm going to try and put some facts out, Premier and Infrastructure minister. The Infrastructure minister says that it takes 12 to 18 months to build a new school. The Premier says three years. Wonder why people don't trust you? Six months since you promised 77 new schools, 60 of them are still in the planning phase. Zero are in construction. Excuse Albertans for their collective cynicism, but the stockpile of new school promises is beginning to rot. To the Premier: when are you going to stop announcing schools, reannouncing them, announcing them, and reannouncing them again?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, my comments have been very clear on this matter. To construct an elementary school, it takes between 12 to 16 or 18 months, and that is just the construction phase. That does not take into account the planning that happens with community groups, the design that has to take place on a specific site, testing the specific site conditions, and let's not forget our municipal partners that we have to get permitting from. That can take six months, eight months, 10 months, or even 12 months. The total process: about three to three and a half years.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Government Policies (continued)

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's good to be back in the House. When the Premier looks in the mirror and sees a reflection of where the PC government has been over the last 25 years, he must see an awful sight indeed. The PCs have spent all the oil wealth in a generation. They're taking us into debt, unable to build schools our kids need or address poverty or provide good care to the sick and elderly. As a result of your negligent fiscal structure this generation will not have the same opportunities to be healthy or succeed as the previous. What is the Premier going to do to ensure that Martha's and Henry's kids are not left sweeping up broken dreams after the mirror shatters?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I rise, I would just like to add my voice to congratulate and on behalf of the province and all

Albertans thank the Member for Edmonton-Centre for her leadership on Bill 10 and Bill 202.

I would be more encouraged if the Member for Calgary-Mountain View would go back to gentle reminders, to use that phrase from the member. Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, we are attentive to our children. We are attentive to future Albertan children, who will grow up to be the stewards of this province. We are intent that they do not inherit broken dreams but that they inherit a province that is fiscally sound, that has excellent front-line . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Forgive me, Mr. Speaker, for not being gentle when we're cutting 2,500 teachers from Alberta's schools. This is a failure to take care of our most cherished promise. Overcrowded classrooms, the lack of any commitment to full-day kindergarten: can you not see that Martha's and Henry's kids, our future, are not getting the education they deserve, and what are you going to do about it?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I take great exception and umbrage to the assumptions of the member opposite. They are entirely inaccurate. We have no intention of cutting 2,500 teachers. That's an absurd thought. I'm here to advocate for education, not to cut 2,500 teachers, and the member opposite knows that. We're doing everything we can to ensure that we have a productive, progressive, healthy education system going forward, that will continue to provide the best in educational outcomes for our children.

Dr. Swann: Pray tell: how is \$80 million cut out of Calgary going to increase the teacher-to-child ratio? That doesn't compute. To quote Michael Jackson, "I'm starting with the man in the mirror. I'm asking him to change his ways." We need revenue. Despite floating a series of trial balloons, the Premier has eliminated most of the ways to raise stable, predictable funding. To the Premier: if all Albertans are in this together and we should all be looking in the mirror, when are you going to ask the wealthy individuals in your collective and corporations to pay their share? Progressive tax.

2:30

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've been very clear in our discussions across the province that we're going to look after the low-income families. We're going to look after the most vulnerable. I'd ask the member just to stay tuned for the budget coming on March 26.

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

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, when I look in the mirror, I don't see someone who doled out reckless tax cuts to Alberta's most wealthy while allowing schools to crumble and ER wait times to skyrocket. For months Albertans have been wondering how we got into this jam, and last week the Premier gave them an answer. He thinks that Albertans looking for who's to blame need to look in the mirror. To the Premier: will he finally apologize, not take responsibility but apologize, for last week's remarks and acknowledge that it is his party's failures that have left Alberta so financially vulnerable?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, at the risk of reiterating: I take responsibility for what I have said. I have always taken responsibility for my comments, whether they're in the media or in this Chamber or elsewhere. The hon. member knows that I have been amongst the harshest critics in terms of how the public finances of this province have been administered. That is why I ran for the leadership of my party, that is why I'm in this Chamber, and that is why I intend on doing the right thing by Albertans.

Ms Notley: Well, I guess that's a no.

Last week the Premier said, quote, we've had the best of everything in this province. But, Mr. Speaker, people in this province are crammed into crumbling hospitals. Students are paying more. Kids are busing hours a day to go to school in makeshift, overcrowded classrooms. To the Premier: if this is the state of our service after we've had the, quote, best of everything, why won't the Premier admit that the cuts he's threatening to front-line services will make things much worse, not better?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, to correct the leader of the fourth party, I have not suggested cuts to front-line services. I've been very clear. I've been very clear in this Chamber just this afternoon. This government intends on maintaining the quality of front-line services, health care, education, how we take care of our senior citizens, and so on. We do need a response from the government in terms of how we're going to manage through our finances facing a \$7 billion shortfall in the coming year. The Minister of Finance is going to table a budget and a fiscal plan that addresses those circumstances. But I want to be clear. Front-line services and the quality of those services is critical to this government, and we stand by Albertans on that.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Premier thinks that he can take 9 per cent out of the budget and not hurt front-line services, he's living in wonderland.

Now, schools, hospitals, and seniors' homes are so full that they're ready to burst, while people continue to line up outside. This, Mr. Speaker, is not the best of everything. The best of everything has been enjoyed by the Premier's boardroom buddies in corporate high-rises and by his very wealthy friends through massive tax breaks. So given the sacrifices that he's asking regular Albertans to make, why won't he stop protecting his friends and insiders and instead axe the flat tax and raise corporate taxes to bring fairness to this province?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the real issue in terms of taxes is what the NDP is advocating, what the leader of the NDP is suggesting. I would simply pose the question: is she advocating the AFL's so-called Better Way campaign to double personal taxes, to levy an \$11.6 billion tax increase on Albertans? Is that what this party advocates?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. I will comment with regard to the new rotation for OQP later. We're trying to get as much in as we can by 3 o'clock, so let's curtail our preambles hereafter to supplementaries.

Let's start with Edmonton-Centre, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Women's Economic Equality

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta women experience the largest income gap in Canada. The recent Parkland study indicates that the highest barriers to women's economic equality are part-time work, precarious work, and unpaid work. Alberta women put in a whole extra 35-hour workweek for domestic care, child care, and elder care. Martha's and Henry's daughters are doing worse, not better, under successive PC governments. To the Premier: why has this province allowed this inequality to continue, giving Alberta women 55 cents on the dollar compared to men?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that question today. I have to say that in Human Services we are very committed to diversity in our appointments and the questions about wage parity and all of the challenges that are out there for women that are working. One of the challenges for women who are working is adequate child care, and that's something that we have worked on very hard, with additional spaces for families who need them as well as making sure it's affordable, accessible, and it's quality for women who want to work.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. Back to that same speaker, thank you for recognizing that there is indeed a very close relationship between child care accessibility and cost and the availability of women for full-time employment in the workforce. However, I would ask the minister whether she recognizes how much the made-in-Alberta solution of this government toward child care has impaired Alberta women's ability to actually get good, quality, accessible child care.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, when we talk about women going into nontraditional occupations, which may demand child care 24 hours a day, most certainly we need to work in that area. We know that child care, if it just goes till 6 at night – many employees work past that. That's an important thing we need to work on. But it's really important to encourage women to go into nontraditional occupations. I look at Women Building Futures, the tremendous work that's going on there. We are moving in the right direction, and we need to encourage women to aspire to and reach for their dreams. [interjection]

Ms Blakeman: Scary thought.

To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: why has this government steadfastly refused to implement equal pay for work of equal value in the public service in Alberta? That would certainly help close the wage gap.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, wage equity for women is part of Alberta's belief in fair and equal opportunity for all. In fact, the hon. member might like to know that in Alberta women make about \$2 an hour more than the average across the rest of Canada, \$25.38 an hour, and there's more work to do yet. In fact, in the report recently released, one of the points was that women don't have access to higher paying jobs, and that's why when my colleague mentioned programs that we have like Women Building Futures, we're actually allowing women to build those bridges and make those higher wages.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Dental Services in Northern Alberta

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The McLennan, High Level, and La Crête satellite dental clinics are still facing great uncertainty. Although promised funding until the end of July 2015, the employees of the clinic have been assigned their layoff notices, effective the end of March 2015. The clinics are important institutions in our constituencies, in my case serving over 5,000

patients. My question is to the Minister of Health. Will our constituents be facing a permanent closure of the satellite dental clinic?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the clinic is not closing. This is simply an administrative issue. We are simply working to transfer responsibility from Alberta Health to Alberta Health Services. This means funding arrangements and changing, and the collective agreements in place for clinic employees outlines a process that needs to be followed under these circumstances. I understand that receiving layoff notices is frustrating and would be very concerning to all employees, but we will work that system out. This program will continue to provide affordable dental services to rural and remote area individuals.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. That's excellent news, but can you please confirm if funding is in place for the clinic past the July deadline?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I noted in my previous response, there are no plans to close the clinic, so the funding is in place. My ministry will be transferring funding to AHS for the continuation of the program. McLennan dental clinic is one of three satellite clinics operated by the University of Alberta dental outreach program, and the program reaches a high percentage of vulnerable Albertans and young patients. We intend to continue providing this very important service to Albertans.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

2:40

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: has there been any effort at all to communicate with the University of Alberta and the staff of the satellite dental clinics to ensure that they know their jobs will be secure after the proposed funding expires?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Health has been working with Alberta Health Services and the University of Alberta School of Dentistry to continue to support this program. The University of Alberta has outlined all available options for clinical staff, and they have also made it clear that their goal is to maintain employment during this transformation. I want to ensure that affordable dental services, including preventative measures, will continue in Alberta's rural areas.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, I understand you are going next in place of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, so please proceed.

School Construction (continued)

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, it looks like the PCs inflated their performance yesterday on the progress of new school construction. This morning we heard from the Red Deer school district that a school that the PCs said was starting construction next month has not even gone to tender. Families and communities should come first, not this government's self-interest. To the Infrastructure

minister: how many other schools on this list has the government misled Albertans about?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to comment on the unparliamentary language, really, that this member here is implying. Regardless of the fact, this is the largest school build in Canadian history undertaken by a province, 230 projects under way – 230 projects – of which 30 schools are complete. Two schools have children occupying the schools, and a number of schools are under construction. If there is a specific question about a specific project, I'd be more than happy to provide the answers, as we always have, and make it very publicly available.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think the admonishment has been given. I want to reiterate: let's watch our parliamentary language in the Chamber, please.

Your first supplemental.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If one new school is the largest in Alberta's history, that's pathetic.

Given that yesterday we got an update showing just how far behind the PCs are on school construction – again, 1 school out of 50 that were promised in 2012 – and given that those 50 new schools were election promises, can anyone in this government give Albertans any assurance that there is any reason to take them at their word?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that there are 30 schools today that are completed. There are an additional number of schools that have students actually occupying the schools. Students are in the schools. They're learning in the schools while minor work continues. In addition, 26 tenders are out there right now. The member is more than welcome to go and bid on them himself should he choose. There are 38 under construction right now, 54 in design. These are all publicly available on Alberta Purchasing Connection. I'd invite the member to take a look to see the progress that's . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
Final supplemental.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to remind the member that those schools were promised four Premiers ago.

Given that leadership is about taking responsibility and given that no one in the government seems willing to take responsibility for manipulating schools for political purposes, to the Minister of Infrastructure: when will your government stop playing games with our public schools and provide real information that's based on reality, not political opportunism?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, I actually remember attending a school opening in the member's constituency. It was quite unfortunate that the member couldn't attend, but that was a school that was open in the member's constituency. We have attended school openings across this province. We are building schools. More schools are going to tender. More schools are getting their permitting in place. We've met with municipalities to say: how can we work together with our school boards to shorten the process? We're getting the job done.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, your point of order was noted at 2:43 p.m. Point of order at 2:43.

Let's move on to Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Bassano Health Centre

Mr. Hale: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency of Strathmore-Brooks people are alarmed and concerned about what they have heard regarding the Bassano hospital. A recent report suggests that Bassano is in need of \$1.2 million in repairs or upgrades, which many believe could lead to the potential closure of the hospital. To the Minister of Health: can you please clear the air on this issue and let my constituents know if the Bassano hospital is slated for closure?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to clear the air and say definitely that the Bassano hospital is not slated for closure. We know how important this facility is to the community, and we're committed to keeping it open. We recognize that the hospital has some maintenance issues. We're working with them to try to work through to get them repaired.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, given that I have delivered members' statements and asked questions on the Newell Foundation's proposal for a one-building, aging in community concept, a proposal which has been worked on for years and was presented to the Health minister of the time, can the minister let us know what the status of this business plan is?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the Newell Foundation's leadership in bringing this project forward, and we recognize the value of the aging in community model, which is really vital. A key step in approving any new health facility is the development of a business case, which outlines options and project costs. We're awaiting that, and when that comes in, we'll move forward as quick as possible.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister: given that we've been working on this project for years and that in order for the Bassano health centre to move ahead, AHS needs to sign an agreement, what is the status of that agreement, and when can we expect a signature?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first step before AHS can enter into any operational agreement is to have the business case complete. We're working with them, and we hope that this business case can be done as soon as possible, and then we'll sit down to work out an arrangement to move ahead with this very, very important project.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Sherwood Park.

Full-day Kindergarten

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much. In 2003 the Alberta Learning Commission recommended the government implement full-day kindergarten as such programs are essential to improve child development, especially kids at risk. A decade later the PCs promised to act on it, but Martha's and Henry's kids and their grandkids are still waiting. Now the even fewer remaining programs are in danger of being cancelled due to this Premier's 9 per cent across-the-board cuts. To the Minister of Education: why do you continue to stop Martha's and Henry's kids from getting the head start they need, especially kids most at risk?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that when our children thrive, they are likely to become adults who are going to thrive. We continue to build a more integrated system of community supports for young children, with my colleague minister to the left, and families by exploring a range of programming and policy options. We are working to balance the needs and priorities of families, schools, and other stakeholders in the community, all while considering the new fiscal reality that we're now facing. School boards, of course, have the option as to whether to offer this kind of full-day programming. In many parts of Alberta they do.

Dr. Swann: They don't have the option, Mr. Minister. They don't have the money, and you know that.

The facts are clear. Full-day kindergarten improves social behaviour and child health, stimulates learning, reduces risk, and develops language and social skills. Why will you not support that as a priority?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, we provide millions of dollars every day to school boards across the province, and they set priorities based on their local needs and determinations as to what is going to be in the best interests of their children. There are full-day kindergarten programs in our province, there are half-time kindergarten programs in our province, and boards make those final determinations based on what they deem to be in the best interests of their students.

Dr. Swann: And how is a 9 per cent cut going to facilitate that, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, we have every intention of ensuring that we provide the funds that are necessary to protect our very important and crucial front-line education services. We want to ensure that every child has the kind of education that is going to help them become the adults that we all want them to be, thrive, develop to their full potential. That's exactly what we intend to do. Stay tuned for the budget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by Livingstone-Macleod.

2:50

Seniors' Facility Safety Upgrades

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Minister of Seniors announced \$80 million to make immediate upgrades to 105 government-owned and -supported seniors' facilities across Alberta. Actually, it was at the Hardisty care centre in the Edmonton-Gold Bar constituency. As MLA for Sherwood Park I was happy to share this good news with the Clover Bar Lodge in my constituency. Unfortunately, the management, while thankful for the funding, was somewhat disappointed. They feel the lodge requires replacement and that putting sprinklers into it would be a waste of money. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Seniors. What process did your ministry use to determine the safety upgrades?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to discuss the process. It is different than it's been in the past. In addition to the fire and safety initiatives, we are also selecting sites for the supportive living grants and the lodge renewal projects. In many cases in the past these would have been the same organizations bringing the proposals forward to us on these three initiatives: our

housing management bodies, our municipalities, and our nonprofits. In the past they would have had to go to three different ministries, three different doors in government, even for the same project, but because this Premier put all the housing in one ministry, these groups have now one window in government to go to. It's allowed us to select projects faster and do more with the money we have. If you're looking for evidence that Alberta is under new management, this is it.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Seniors: will the Clover Bar Lodge ever be replaced?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it's another good question from the member, who's a great advocate for her constituency and talks about her seniors' facilities there often. The lodge renewal program was announced by the Premier in the fall at the AAMD and C. There's \$160 million over the next four years. We're in the process of selecting those sites. This site is certainly a candidate for that, and it will get fair consideration. But, moving forward, we do need to do a lot of work to renew some of our aging lodges and seniors' facilities.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given the fact that you'll eventually replace the Clover Bar Lodge, why are you wasting money installing fire and safety systems in facilities that could be bulldozed in just a couple of years?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we certainly don't view this as a waste of money. It may be less than ideal to put some money into some upgrades in some facilities that will be eventually replaced, but we can't compromise the safety of our parents and our grandparents. We can't replace all these facilities in one year, so while this project is a worthy project to be looking at for renewal and potential replacement, we're not going to wait. We're going to get to the fire and safety upgrades at all the facilities that need them, and we will also look at the renewal over time. It's not one, though, or the other; it's both of these things that need to happen.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, your point of order was noted at 2:52 during the first exchange of questions and answers between Sherwood Park and the Minister of Seniors.

Let us move on to Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Red Deer-North.

Municipal Sustainability Initiative Funding

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the Minister of Municipal Affairs announced \$400 million in increased grant monies for municipalities, but confusion has eclipsed this information and this announcement for our community leaders. To the minister: since this government hasn't even come close to meeting its \$11.3 billion MSI funding promises from 2007, is this \$400 million a new, ongoing commitment to our municipalities, or is it just another pre-election promise to mask this government's failed record and win votes?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. The MSI commitment to our municipal partners is \$11.3 billion, and we have made that commitment and will be

keeping that commitment. MSI has provided over 6 billion, with a "b," dollars to date, has been able to access over 4,800 projects across the province for our municipalities. This is a program that is extremely important to municipalities, one that our municipal leaders support and one that we are long-term funding for them for municipal sustainability.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, but I don't think we've got the answer to the question yet, Minister. Since this government has failed to meet its MSI funding commitment in any given year since '07 and considering that municipalities have consistently called for predictable, sustainable funding over the current complicated grant system instead, will you admit that this current boom-and-bust model doesn't serve our municipal partners well and that it's inadequate for maintaining infrastructure and hampers growth?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government remains committed to investing in infrastructure that supports economic development and keeps Albertans working. That is why approximately \$400 million is being provided from Budget 2014-15 to MSI, to ensure municipalities have the capacity to meet their existing infrastructure project commitments, to keep the economy strong, and to keep Albertans working.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's the same old types of answers and the same old platitudes.

Unlike this government, which could only manage to build one of the 50 schools it promised in 2012, Minister, our municipal officials are planning for the future and building critical infrastructure – or at least they're trying – but they need predictable funding to be successful. Does the minister expect municipalities to be satisfied with the odd injection of extra money rather than a predictable agreement that treats them with respect?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say that \$11.3 billion is significant funding, and it is predictable funding. Our municipal leaders very much support the MSI. I travelled across the province to talk to them prebudget. I talked to them, and the number one thing that they support that we do for municipalities is MSI. Quite frankly, last week we had our municipal leaders from AUMA, from AAMD and C, from Red Deer county and city, and they were quite grateful and thankful about the announcement. They support MSI funding.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Eye Examinations for Children

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Children with undiagnosed visual impairments often have serious challenges learning to read, the foundation of all learning. These children usually suffer a loss of self-confidence, self-esteem, which further impairs their ability to learn, and in many cases they develop behaviour problems in school. To the Minister of Education: given that a comprehensive eye exam is one of the best ways to diagnose visual impairments and that the government covers the cost of

comprehensive eye exams for children to the age of 18, how supportive are you of having every child receive a comprehensive eye exam before grade 1?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, kindergarten students may take part in the Eye See ... Eye Learn program, a childhood eye health and vision awareness program funded by Health. Education materials to support school staff in the identification of possible vision problems as well as information for parents about the importance of eye examinations are available through this program, and free eyeglasses are provided to children who require them.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, it's 1 minute to 3, so I'm going to recognize the Government House Leader since we have considerable business left in the Routine.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move that the House continue with the proceedings here past 3 p.m. notwithstanding rule 7(7).

The Speaker: The essence of your motion is to seek unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 7(7), which would allow us to go beyond 3 o'clock, complete question period and all the other matters in the Routine.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Unanimous consent has not been given, so that would end the Routine right at 3 o'clock.

You might squeeze in your last question. [interjections]

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that studies have shown that children . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, Red Deer-North has the floor, and let's give it to her for the 30 seconds left.

The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that studies have shown that children with undiagnosed visual impairments often require additional supports in the classroom and are unable to learn to their full potential, what is your ministry doing to ensure that all . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but it is now 3 p.m. We do not have unanimous consent to proceed beyond and conclude the Routine, which includes question period. Apologies to those of you who are left waiting until tomorrow or another day.

With that, we shall move on to Orders of the Day.

My apologies. We have some points of order that must be heard, so we'll have to deviate and hear those now.

I have a point of order that was raised at 2:26 by the Government House Leader with respect to comments and questions coming from the Official Opposition, so would you please proceed with your citation.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Denis: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 23(h), (i), (j), and (l) as well as *Beauchesne's* 489. During her exchange the Leader of the Official Opposition had indicated the word "illegal," which is a prohibited term under *Beauchesne's* 489. I refer you to page 146. At the top thereof it

indicates that there are two items that talk about "illegal" being a prohibited term.

3:00

Secondly, the member had also indicated in a question to the hon. Premier that – I don't have the exact transcript or the Blues, Mr. Speaker, but I believe it referred to buying a member a seat. I would submit to you respectfully that this is unparliamentary language, to assert that someone would buy someone a seat or offer or curry favour, and this clearly is offside of 23(h), (i), (j), and (l). All I would do is just to ask that the member please withdraw these comments and refrain from making them again.

The Speaker: Hon. Opposition House Leader, you would go first normally, but if you're ceding the floor to Edmonton-Centre, I'm prepared to recognize her. It's your wish to recognize her first?

Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thanks very much. If I just might disagree with the Government House Leader, I understand that in *Beauchesne's* 489 the word "illegal" does appear, but we need to be mindful that that particular section appears as a subsection under rules of debate, not question period, so it's not particularly applying there. If the Government House Leader had been trying to be more specific towards question period, I believe he would have been looking in the section that specifically referred to that, which is much more likely to be – yes, indeed – under the section that begins with 407, which is Oral Questions. Nothing in there talks about use or non-use of the word "illegal."

In addition, of course, we recognize in a number of places that words may be termed illegal at one point but at another point will not be. I would think that since the opposition leader was referencing a piece of legislation passed here that appeared not to be followed or would not be followed, the term was probably correct.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader, briefly, please.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to respond to the first point, about using the term "illegal." Of course, when you make a point of order, you have to do it immediately after the question is given. In the Official Opposition leader's question the term "illegal" was not used just right before the House leader introduced his point of order, so I would suggest that that would be out of order and there's clearly no point of order given that.

The second point. The House leader referred to the Premier buying the seat of the Education minister. I'm very glad that the House leader has brought this up because it allows us to elaborate a little bit more about what occurred during the election. In particular it allows us to talk about the Ethics Commissioner's ruling. I think that's relevant. It provides context to what the Official Opposition leader's comments were. It said:

However, having found that [the Education minister] did not violate the letter of the Act does not mean that his actions with respect to modular classrooms at William Reid School were appropriate.

This is the Ethics Commissioner.

If I had been asked advice on this matter during the campaign, I would have advised the Minister not to make decisions and act on specific issues in his constituency during the by-election. This issue was not one of general policy or ongoing work. . . . His actions, while not contrary to the Legislation, created an unfortunate perception. I would have advised him to leave this

decision, if it were an emergency, to a substitute Minister or, otherwise, to deal with the problem after the election.

This is what the Ethics Commissioner concluded.

In this case the three approvals that were given during the election period and outside the normal approval process appear to have been done for purely political reasons.

What does she mean by purely political reasons? Obviously, if you read the whole judgment, it talks about the fact that when you spend money that helps a member's private interests in terms of getting elected – you know, it's open to debate. Was there causation? Did the abuse of taxpayer dollars as outlined in the Ethics Commissioner's ruling help the Education minister get elected during the by-election? It's probable.

With respect to the exact language, I mean, perhaps the Official Opposition leader could have said, you know, that the Premier spent a lot of taxpayer money in order to get the Education minister elected. If that would please the Government House Leader, I'm sure that we could accommodate that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you very much.

Hon. members, I think we're all seasoned enough to know that frequently comments get made in the House that sometimes are intended one way and are taken another. I don't have the benefit of the Blues on this occasion. I'm sorry. Normally I would have the Blues, and I'd be able to zip right into the exact verbiage that was used. But in this case I think it's more a matter of interpretation, so I'm not going to find that there is a point of order as such.

However, let us be careful when we're using charged language. At the same time let us be careful when we are referring to an act which clearly does allow for certain things to occur at certain times, and that would be the case with regard to any forthcoming talk of an election. I think you're all acquainted with it. So while the language was a bit charged, I don't find that there's a point of order, but I would ask you to please take greater care, all members, when you're speaking and when you're inferring or otherwise imputing any allegations.

Let us move on, then, to the second point of order, which was raised by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, I think, during the time when the Minister of Infrastructure was speaking.

Please proceed with the second point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise according to Standing Order 23(h),(i), and (j), and it was with respect to the minister's comment about the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview alleging that his language was unparliamentary language. I'd refer the Speaker to *Beauchesne's* paragraph 485, which says, "Unparliamentary words may be brought to the attention of the House either by the Speaker or by any Member." That's referring to that member putting forward a point of order.

Now, it's my understanding in this House that it's you that determines whether language is unparliamentary, not the government or the minister. If the minister felt that it was unparliamentary, clearly the Government House Leader could have risen on a point of order and had you make the ruling on it. Maybe the Government House Leader fell asleep at the wheel here. But his minister can't make that determination; it has to be you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, on a basic submission I would make the argument that alleging that language is unparliamentary is, in fact,

unparliamentary, and I'd ask that you request that the minister retract that statement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Anyone else wish to respond?

No. Again, hon. member, I regret not having the Blues, and I will look into that. I don't see immediately that there is a point of order, so I'm going to hold in abeyance my decision till I do see that because I don't have the Blues, unfortunately. It's a rare circumstance.

However, let's again be reminded about parliamentary language and unparliamentary language. It may be suitable in one instance. It might be the same word used again in a different instance, and a different finding could be had. The point is that it's not only the words that are used; it is also the tone, the temperance or lack thereof, the context within which they are used, and the general disposition and mood of the person offering the comments. That being said, a reminder: again, let's please be very, very careful during questions and during answers to not impugn these kinds of motives, if that in fact is the case, on others or onto certain circumstances.

Let us move on to the third point of order, that was raised at 2:52 p.m. by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview during the exchange between Sherwood Park and the Minister of Seniors.

Please proceed.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll cite 23(h), (i), and (j). I just want to clarify for the record that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood attended the opening of Cardinal Collins high school in the Clareview rec centre on my behalf as I was attending my own wedding. I want to assure the minister and the House that I take my duties and responsibilities very seriously in my constituency.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'm sorry. I'm not sure what your point of order was or what citation you uttered. I was listening carefully, and I didn't hear one, so shall we just move on now that you've put your comments on record?

All right. Let us then move on. I believe that concludes that. However, I do have a couple of brief statements I need to read to you if you would allow me, please.

Statement by the Speaker

Commonwealth Day Message from the Queen House Leaders' Agreement

The Speaker: First of all, hon. members, as you will know, yesterday was Commonwealth Day, and throughout the world our Commonwealth nations are celebrating with a special message honouring a young Commonwealth given by Her Majesty the Queen. Please note that this message from Her Majesty has been placed on each of your desks for your review and for sharing with your constituents.

I also placed on your desks a copy of the new written agreement amongst all four House leaders. I will read it into the record tomorrow because we are short on time today, but you all have a copy of it on your desks. I'm obligated to read it into the record. I'll dispense with doing that and taking up those two minutes today.

We will move on.

3:10

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to first assure you that I'm not asleep.

Government Motions**Evening Sittings**

16. Mr. Denis moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business for the duration of the 2015 spring sitting unless on motion by the Government House Leader made before 6 p.m. which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the following sitting day.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Government House Leader has moved Government Motion 16. You've all heard it. This is not debatable.

[Government Motion 16 carried]

The Speaker: We'll move on to the hon. Government House Leader for the next motion.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Adjournment of Spring Session

17. Mr. Denis moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the 2015 spring sitting of the Assembly shall stand adjourned upon the Government House Leader advising the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the Government House Leader has moved motion 17. It, too, is not debatable.

[Government Motion 17 carried]

The Speaker: Let us move on.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Committee Membership Changes

18. Mr. Denis moved:
Be it resolved that the following changes to
- (a) the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund be approved: that Ms Smith be appointed to fill a vacancy;
 - (b) the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices be approved: that Dr. Brown replace Dr. Starke as deputy chair, that Mr. Saskiw replace Dr. Starke, that Mr. Strankman replace Mr. Bikman;
 - (c) the Standing Committee on Private Bills be approved: that Mr. Barnes replace Mr. Strankman;
 - (d) the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing be approved: that Mr. Stier replace Mr. Cao;
 - (e) the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved: that Mr. Saskiw replace Mr. Sandhu, that

- Mr. Saskiw replace Mr. Anderson as chair, that Mr. Anglin replace Mr. McAllister;
- (f) the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services be approved: that Mr. Strankman be appointed to fill a vacancy;
- (g) the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future be approved: that Mr. Stier be appointed as deputy chair, that Mr. Barnes replace Mr. Horne;
- (h) the Standing Committee on Families and Communities be approved: that Mr. Barnes replace Mrs. Jablonski, that Mr. Barnes be appointed as deputy chair, that Mr. Strankman replace Mr. McAllister;
- (i) the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship be approved: that Mr. Strankman replace Mr. Anglin, that Mr. Strankman be appointed as deputy chair, that Mr. Stier replace Mr. Casey.

Mr. Denis: Going once, going twice. Mr. Speaker, I hope that's sold.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, this motion is debatable. However, if no one else wishes to speak, then let's go for the question.

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 18 carried]

Transmittal of Estimates

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

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

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've received this message from His Honour via the Minister of Finance, and it reads: the Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you, and please be seated.

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

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When supplementary estimates are tabled, section 8.3 of the Fiscal Management Act requires that an updated fiscal plan be tabled. Accordingly, I wish to table the 2014-15 third-quarter fiscal update, which serves as the amended fiscal plan. The 2014-15 third-quarter fiscal update has already been provided to all members and released publicly as required by the financial management act. The quarterly fiscal update provides a framework for additional spending authority for the Legislative Assembly and for the government.

I now wish to table the 2014-15 supplementary supply estimates. Mr. Speaker, the supplementary supply estimates will provide additional spending to one office of the Legislative Assembly and 11 government departments. When passed, the estimates will authorize approximate increases of \$730,000, an expense in capital investment of the Legislative Assembly, \$459 million in operational funding, \$705 million in capital funding, and \$63 million in financial transaction funding for the government. These

estimates will also authorize the transfer of \$4.8 million of the previously approved spending authority for the Department of Municipal Affairs to capital investment within the Department of Seniors.

The Speaker: I understand that the message and the supplementary supply estimates have been distributed to everyone by the pages, correct? [interjection] Well, they will be shortly. That is my understanding.

Pages, as soon as you're able, if you could distribute those to all the members of the Assembly, that would be appreciated.

Government Motions (continued)

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

19. Mr. Campbell moved:

Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2014-15 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this motion is debatable. Does anyone wish to speak to this?

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Speaker: Okay. The question has been called.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, you had a point?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I just wanted to get some clarification. We seem to have missed the notice of motion for a point of privilege, so I just wanted to get that on the record.

The Speaker: I've indicated to you twice that I'll address it in a moment, but let's deal with this first, please.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Great. Thanks a lot.

The Speaker: The question has been called, then.

[Government Motion 19 carried]

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

20. Mr. Campbell moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the 2014-15 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund for six hours on Wednesday, March 11, 2015.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has moved Government Motion 20. This is not debatable.

[Government Motion 20 carried]

The Speaker: Just before we move on, I've had a couple of questions with regard to the point of privilege that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder did appropriately submit to my office within the time frames and so on. Unfortunately, we had to get unanimous

consent to continue on with the Routine, and, as you know, Notices of Motions are part of the Routine, and first a notice of motion would have to be uttered in the Assembly. That opportunity was not available, and therefore we'll probably deal with it tomorrow, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. So we'll move on.

Hon. Government House Leader, did you wish to make a comment here as to where you'd like to go?

Mr. Denis: No, Mr. Speaker. I just would move the item on behalf of the hon. President of Treasury Board. I have no further comments.

The Speaker: Actually, that has already been dealt with, and we're looking to see if you have other business that you wish to attend to this afternoon. If you do, that's what we're looking to hear.

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the Order Paper third reading of Bill 10 is going on here. Does that require a motion at this point?

The Speaker: As you wish. Bill 10 is on the Order Paper, and it would require somebody to move it at third reading if that's where you wish to proceed. I don't have any knowledge of that in my script, so if there's an agreement that that's where you wish to go, then we'll look forward to somebody who is sponsoring the bill to either move it at third reading or to someone on behalf of the member sponsoring it to move third reading at this time.

3:20

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 10

An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Education or Government House Leader, would you like to move third reading of Bill 10 on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-North West? I need someone to move it at third reading.

Mr. Denis: Okay. I'm rising on behalf of my colleague the hon. Minister of Education who wishes to move third reading of Bill 10.

I believe there are 10 minutes to speak, Mr. Speaker. Is that correct?

The Speaker: It's Calgary-North West, isn't it? Hon. Government House Leader, I believe it's actually a bill sponsored by Calgary-North West on behalf of the government.

Mr. Denis: I rise on behalf of the Member for Calgary-North West to move third reading.

I understand there's 10 minutes of time. Is that correct, Mr. Speaker? Yes.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Denis: My understanding, Mr. Speaker, is that we're waiting for some amendments to come by and that there's one hon. member opposite that wishes to have this bill moved back to Committee of the Whole so certain amendments may be held. I will take my seat so that you can hopefully recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. A little tough not to see her today.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, I believe we have arrived at your space.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted to rise and speak in third reading on Bill 10, and I'm delighted because what I am going to be doing here is moving a recommittal motion to move us back from third reading to Committee of the Whole in anticipation that we may be able to do some good work here today and make some changes to Bill 10. Of course, they're changes that I would really like to see. So, you know, you can understand why I want to do the recommittal motion.

Now, what was the problem? Well, as most of you know now, either here or in Internet land, I had introduced private member's Bill 202, in which I was trying to do a few small things that would be very meaningful to a number of people in Alberta. Specifically, I wanted to see that where students in a school asked for a gay-straight alliance, they would be accommodated and that there would be no discrimination that was specific to gay-straight alliances, that the students would be allowed to call the organization or the school group or the peer group a gay-straight alliance. Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to underline that again. That is important because these kids have to know that that's what it is and that it's clearly delineated and that they are able to go there and know that it's a safe space for them. It's not helpful if they are going to a diversity group or a multi-acceptance group or something by any other name. In other words, it was really important to me that there'd be no euphemisms. Use of euphemisms can be misunderstood, and if a kid accidentally outs themselves in a group that isn't a GSA, they're in serious trouble, serious physical trouble, probably setting themselves up for some pretty dramatic bullying as well. So it's important to me that they could call it a gay-straight alliance if they wanted to.

I understand that for some faith groups that is a challenge, but I believe that the Rocky Mountain Civil Liberties Association did superior work in their two public hearings done in Edmonton and Calgary, in which they opened it up to parents and students and brothers and sisters and neighbours to come forward and speak about how important GSAs were in schools for kids that had them and for kids that couldn't get them, and those kids were brilliant, absolutely brilliant. They spoke with passion and intellect and focus and understanding. They put the adults to shame, quite frankly, and I enjoyed every minute of it, and I was at all three consultations that were done, including the one sponsored by the Youth Council from the city of Edmonton in conjunction with the Edmonton Social Planning Council and Public Interest Alberta. Those kids so got it. They so got it.

I believe that the amendment is at the table. Yes, and it is currently being distributed.

This is a recommittal motion. I do these fairly often; I just don't get to get them passed very often. So we'll hope that that's going to happen here and that we've got the support of the Assembly to do that. Essentially what it does is say: "You know what? We need to go back to Committee of the Whole because there are some things that we want to look at again." Specifically, we want to look at and reconsider sections 1, 2, 3, and 5, and my thanks to Parliamentary Counsel for making my way through all of that and for helping me with the right language, because I didn't have it right the first time. Unusual, I know, but it just keeps me humble, don't you understand, when I make mistakes in public, no less.

I'd like to thank the Minister of Education for going and listening to those students. I faulted him a lot publicly for not holding a public consultation. I think he should have, but I do appreciate that he actually went to the groups where kids were talking, and I know those kids had an effect on him. They had an effect on me. I hope someday you all get a chance to read the papers that were produced both by the Rocky Mountain Civil Liberties Association and the

one produced by the young people from the City of Edmonton Youth Council because they are just drop-dead amazing.

That's what the kids said. You know, GSAs are safe. I remember one kid that said: I just dreaded every day; I dreaded going to school; I dreaded every hour that I was in school, and then I went to another school, and there was a GSA there, and in three weeks my life turned around. Can you imagine? Her life turned around completely. She went from being on medication to joining a number of clubs, finding a leadership role, a leader in her home community, joined a bunch of stuff at the school. She just blossomed, just exploded, just took her place, as she should, as a young leader of today.

So I'm very pleased that the minister was able to go and listen to the students and the parents and the neighbours and the people that run associations who came out to these hearings and that he went to GSAs in different schools and talked to different people and that they were able to convince him, as he mentioned in his ministerial statement, of some draft ideas that he would like to bring forward.

I'd like to thank the Premier for his support. I know that it's rough trying to paddle that canoe upstream in a caucus as big as this one if you don't have the support of the leadership, and I do thank the Premier for his support and leadership in this. I'm so glad that you all heard those students. It was important that you did.

I also really want to thank the Trojan work of the Member for Calgary-North West, who responded so eloquently to my colleague's Motion 503 and did bring forward Bill 10 with the best of intentions, I know, although I disagreed with her absolutely. But that's okay. We will come through this, I'm sure.

So I'd like to get the motion on the floor if you don't mind, Mr. Speaker. So at this point I will move this motion, which would be numbered as A1 or R1.

The Speaker: A1. Amendment A1.

Ms Blakeman: I'm getting the body language here.

The Speaker: We'll go with A1 in case there's another one. That's our tradition.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Let's go with A1. So I'd like to move A1. I will move that the motion for third reading of Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, be not now read a third time but that it be recommitted to Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsidering sections 1, 2, 3, and 5.

Please support this, everybody, so that we can do this. I look forward to – who knows? – unanimous support, and we will get this sucker back into Committee of the Whole and get this fixed.

Thank you very much.

3:30

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition on the amendment.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm incredibly pleased, actually, to stand up and support the motion by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. I think, as she's alluded to in some of her speaking notes, that it's amazing how the Marthas and Henrys of the world have changed. I have not been shy to explain where my life has been in regard to this particular issue. You know, I can hardly wait till the day ends and I get to pick up the phone and call

a family member and talk to him about the fact of being part of our family for the last – well, I don't want to say how long because then it says how old I am, and I'm not going to go there on that. [interjection] Twenty-nine and holding.

I'm honoured, actually, as I said, to stand up and support the Member for Edmonton-Centre. I think this is a good day for us in the Legislature, I think it's a good day, actually, for Albertans, and I think it's even a better day for the children in this province, quite frankly. I have always wondered why we hadn't been able to support this bill in the past when we're talking about clubs and how we view clubs and how we don't view clubs and what clubs are good to have in a school and what clubs aren't good to have in a school. I remember that in this Legislature many, many years ago, when as a government member I had to deal with the issue of same-sex marriage, there was a lot of controversy at that particular time – I can't even remember how many years ago that was – suggesting that the world isn't going to be any different tomorrow when we wake up, that it's going to be the same.

I am proud to stand up and support this motion. I am looking forward, as I'm sure my colleague is, to seeing the amendments. Quite frankly, I haven't seen the amendments other than what's appeared on Twitter. That's unfortunate, that it's hitting the Twittersphere before it's hitting what members in this Legislature can see. Debate, I'm sure, is going to be interesting.

I just have one question for the House leader if I may, because I'm not the Government House Leader. Am I understanding by reading the government motions that you're putting time allocation on these bills? Is that my understanding? Okay. Good. He's shaking his head no. That's good. I was wondering why on a bill that they consider so important, they would want to put . . . [interjection] No. I'm used to him, Mr. Speaker. I don't even have my hearing aids in. His voice seems to carry, similar to how people tell me mine does also. I'm glad that he's clarified that because that's one of the things.

We will be supporting the Member for Edmonton-Centre's amendment, and I look forward to seeing the amendments as they hit the Legislature. I just want to end by saying that this is a good day for Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you very much.

Are there any other speakers to the amendment? The leader of the ND caucus.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've made many of my comments already in the response to the ministerial statement, but of course I'm pleased with the opportunity to support this motion so that it can go back into committee. With any luck, we can make some positive changes to Bill 10 as it previously existed and turn it into something that would be of use to the children of this province and, in particular, those who are members of the LGBTQ community as well as the adults who are members of the LGBTQ community.

I'm looking forward to that opportunity because I think that we could potentially do some good work here. I'm hoping that if we do go back into committee, we move through this at a respectful pace because we'd like the chance to review these amendments in the context of the act to determine whether there are opportunities for us to make improvements to the proposals that are coming from the government.

You know, some preliminary conversations that I've had are conversations that suggest that there wouldn't necessarily be disagreement on some of the points that we have raised as a question or as a concern, but that requires ensuring that we have enough time to carefully and thoughtfully analyze the language

that's being put forward, analyze the language in the context of the bill as it currently exists, and draft our own proposed alternatives.

I very much support the idea of this matter going back into committee, but my hope is that members of this Assembly will then be given a couple of days to look at the proposed amendments before we vote on them all, because, of course, if one of the amendments is approved, then it may well block our ability to touch on that issue if we're only reading it as it's passing. If we're going to have a proper discussion about these amendments, we'd like a chance to review them and review the language that's being proposed with a little bit more, as I say, thoughtfulness because we are, really, potentially looking at a very historic time. So let's do it effectively and conscientiously in the process.

I'm very much in favour of this motion, and I look forward to having a considered conversation about moving forward on these changes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

If not, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment carried unanimously]

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we move on, I want to express how delighted I am that there was such a high and positive spirit of co-operation amongst all parties, including the independent member, on this very important matter, which is clearly a high priority for Albertans throughout our province. I'm equally pleased that proper process was followed and that House leaders amongst themselves, perhaps with the help of others, found a way to get it done. It shows you that history like that can be made in our Assembly, and I'm delighted to be presiding over it, believe me. So thank you, all, for that spirit of great co-operation.

We shall move into Committee of the Whole, then, and hear whatever the committee might yield. Let us recess briefly for about 30 seconds.

3:40 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 10 An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Dirks: Yes. I would like to move amendments to Bill 10. I believe they have been provided to the table and are prepared to be circulated now to all members.

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause for a moment while the amendment is being distributed. Hon. members, since this is a continuation of our last Committee of the Whole on Bill 10, this amendment will be known as amendment A6.

Minister, you can proceed if you are ready.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you. I do want, first, to say thank you to all members for agreeing to move into Committee of the Whole so that

we can consider these important amendments, A6, that are now before us. I'm not going to give lengthy comments because I did make a significant ministerial statement on this. I just want to walk us through the four clauses, essentially.

Section 35.1(1): here we are giving students the opportunity to have a GSA in their school if they request one. If they ask a staff member for support

to establish a voluntary student organization, or to lead an activity intended to promote a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging, the principal of the school shall . . .

You'll notice there that it is the principal of the school.

- (a) permit the establishment of the student organization or the holding of the activity at the school, and
- (b) designate a staff member to serve as the staff liaison to facilitate the establishment, and the ongoing operation, of the student organization or to assist in organizing the activity.

It's appropriate, I believe, that the legislation direct the principal to do this as this is an activity that's happening at the local level. Education legislation in our province, of course, does give significant direction to principals in our world, so I think this is a significant improvement on the previous iteration of the bill. That iteration talked about boards getting involved, and this, essentially, keeps things at the local school level, where I think it's most appropriate for it to be determined.

The principal permits the establishment of the school organization or the holding of the activity at the school and designates a staff member to serve as the staff liaison. Now, we know there may be unique circumstances where a staff member may not be able to or perhaps even willing to, and we'll come to that later.

If we go over to the next clause:

For the purposes of subsection (1), an organization or activity includes an organization or activity that promotes equality and non-discrimination with respect to [a broad range of criteria] without limitation, race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, family status or sexual orientation, including but not limited to organizations such as gay-straight alliances, diversity clubs, anti-racism clubs and anti-bullying clubs.

Here we have a very large expression of options for students to establish the kind of organization that is going to accomplish what was talked about in 35.1(1). So while we are talking significantly this day about gay-straight alliances, the reality is that the legislation does permit a broad range of student clubs to be established in schools, and we can envision, if we wanted to, what some of those might be perhaps in the future, but we don't need to go there today. It's simply important to note that the legislation facilitates that to happen.

Then if we go to clause (3):

The students may select a respectful and inclusive name for the organization, including the name "gay-straight alliance" or "queer-straight alliance", after consulting with the principal.

We did hear in our consultations that students, of course, wanted and others felt that they should be able to name their organization. Some of them have actually moved away from the name gay-straight alliance and are using the terminology queer-straight alliance, as we know, and there may be other names that might come up. This amendment is suggesting, of course, that it be a respectful and inclusive name, and consulting with the principal before the name is actually picked would be a reasonable and respectful thing for students to do in the school environment, I think.

Then, finally:

The principal shall immediately inform the board and the Minister if no staff member is available to serve as a staff liaison referred to in subsection (1), and if so informed, the Minister shall appoint a responsible adult to work with the requesting students in organizing the activity or to facilitate the establishment, and the ongoing operation, of the student organization at the school.

There may be circumstances and I think it's important for the legislation to acknowledge and accommodate where a staff member may not be available to facilitate, and in such a situation it would be sensible and prudent for the minister to provide for the organization to be established, which is, of course, the intent of the first section that we talked about.

With those comments, I trust that all members will support this very important amendment to Bill 10.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. I'm pleased to rise in regard to the government amendment to Bill 10, which is An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect Our Children. I am going to be supporting this amendment. I guess I'm just concerned about the fact of the process. I appreciate that the Government House Leader and the Premier want to get this passed. I'm just truly concerned about the rush.

I had a note from the House leader in regard to passing this amendment today, and I explained to him that, first of all, I've hardly had the opportunity to even look at the amendment – I'm scribbling and trying to write and trying to listen to the Minister of Education as best I can – and we have not even had this discussion as a caucus to make sure that things that need to be covered in this amendment are covered. I say that with all sincerity. I believe this is the third time that, you know, we've discussed this, and it's important that we get it right.

3:50

You made a comment in your speaking notes, Minister, when you were talking about clubs, and you were saying: well, we don't need to go there today. Well, I'm not sure. If we don't go there today, when are we going to go there? You know, is that tomorrow or after the election? All that sort of thing. I can't understand why we don't have the opportunity to kind of clearly read this, clearly have a discussion, and then come back tomorrow. I mean, we have a caucus meeting at 9 o'clock. We can have some thorough discussion.

It bothers me that such an important piece of legislation is dropped on our desk, first of all, by a process that I find unacceptable. When a minister is doing a ministerial statement, never in this Legislature do I remember that ministerial statement not being shared with the opposition, and we alluded to that when we were discussing that. Then you question about what's going to be in the bill, and it's: trust me. You know, I guess for me, Minister, it's about the fact of being able to read the amendments, see if this is what people in the gay-straight alliance want, if it's what they're looking for in a bill. I'm, quite frankly, going to do something that I haven't done in the past. I'm going to look to the Member for Edmonton-Centre and will be listening to her to understand if everything that's in this amendment is included in what she requests.

What I do like are some of the things under 35.1(1), where it says:

If one or more students attending a school operated by a board request a staff member employed by the board for support to establish a voluntary student organization . . .

I think Albertans will realize that we're not mandating anything. It's a voluntary club, so we don't have to worry that we're trying to

shove something down that, you know, people don't – this is a voluntary club, and that's what it should be.

You go on to the point – you know, one thing I've learned in this Legislature is that there's a big difference between "shall" and "may". I see that you're saying that

the principal of the school shall . . .

which is good. That's saying that you have to do that. It's not a "may"; it's a "shall."

(a) permit the establishment of the student organization or the holding of the activity at the school, and

(b) designate a staff member to serve as the staff liaison to facilitate the establishment, and the ongoing operation.

We go on about the principal. If you can't get a staff member, the Minister shall appoint a responsible adult to work with the requesting students in organizing the activity or to facilitate . . .

The Deputy Chair: Excuse me, hon. member. I hate to interrupt you, but the level of noise in the Assembly has reached a higher level than is acceptable. If you have conversations that you need to have, you can take those out into the Confederation Room or another room.

Hon. member, would you please continue, and maybe we can decrease the noise level.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you. It's hard to even think. Obviously, the government members think there are more important things to discuss than listening to the debate on this bill, that they are insisting has to be passed today.

It talks about:

The principal shall immediately inform the board and the Minister if no staff member is available to serve as a staff liaison referred to in subsection (1), and if so informed, the Minister shall appoint a responsible adult to work with the requesting students in organizing the activity or to facilitate the establishment.

I guess the question I have there is: why would you not have a responsible adult in a school whose mandate is the protection of the children that attend that school, that they have to find someone outside of the school to be responsible? You know, you have these little spidey senses that start going off when we have to look elsewhere to have the establishment of a club. I think what's important is the fact that – what has been presented before is something that's important. I mean, we don't have to discuss about – and we've heard the discussion as we've debated this bill – the high rate of suicides. So all of a sudden you can't even find a responsible adult in the school that is willing to work with the group or organization, and the minister then has to appoint somebody.

It goes on to the support for student organizations.

If one or more students attending a school operated by a board request a staff member employed by the board for support to establish a voluntary student organization, or to lead an activity intended to promote a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging, the principal of the school shall . . .

There's "shall" again.

. . . permit the establishment of the student organization or the holding of the activity.

And then he designates a staff member.

I expect that this legislation will go very quickly through the Legislature, and I could be wrong – and I hope I'm wrong – but I would expect that this legislation will come back again because we've missed something because it's been so rushed from the government in regard to an amendment. I'm hoping that the Member for Edmonton-Centre is going to be able to speak up and clear some of the things, if there's anything that she spots, that

might be a problem in this amendment. I haven't honestly had the opportunity to spend a lot of time going through this amendment.

I am actually looking forward to the debate. I guess, on the record again, I just can't understand why we have one day. We've spent literally months and months – I don't even remember when your Bill 202 first came out. Was it a year ago?

Ms Blakeman: No. It was the very end of October, beginning of November.

Mrs. Forsyth: October of 2014.

Then we had Bill 10, and now we have an amendment that's just hit our desks that we haven't, frankly, had the opportunity to even look at, let alone discuss, that's going to be passed. I will say that there's no question that I support gay-straight alliances in schools. I've been on the record suggesting that and saying that. Again, let's just make sure it's right.

This is obviously hasty legislation. When I questioned the minister that I met with at 11:30 in regard to the speech that the minister was going to give in his minister's statement, I was informed by the minister that I had a meeting with that it hadn't even been written then. If I may, Madam, I hope we're right and we've got this right the first time and we don't come back two weeks down the road and say, "oops, we forgot something," or "oops, we didn't check this."

Those are my comments, other than, again, being on the record that I support this. As they say, let's get it right the first time. I look forward to hearing, actually, from other members on the government side, and I look forward to hearing what the Member for Edmonton-Centre has to say.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to rise and speak in our Committee of the Whole to government amendment A6. A fairly dense amendment, but it does appear to be tracking exactly as the minister had outlined in his statement earlier today. The first thing we have – and I actually, as I was flipping through my notes, found amendment A4, which was actually moved by the leader of the fourth opposition, the ND opposition, who had an amendment that's exactly what's being proposed in section A of the amendment here, which is specifically to include sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, or gender expression.

You know, I have to compliment the government for taking this step. I know that gender identity and gender expression is a bit of a leap for some people if they're not familiar with what it means and who it affects and what the possibilities are. I was really hoping that this could be included, and it's why I had included it in the language that I used in Bill 202, but I am really pleased to see that the minister and the Premier and the government caucus were able to understand and to include those two categories of gender identity and gender expression.

4:00

Just briefly, in case anybody following at home does want to know what that is – well, if I could tease the minister just a tiny bit.

Mr. Dirks: No.

Ms Blakeman: "No," he says. "Please don't tease me anymore."

Well, you know, let's say that there's a situation where somebody walks into a classroom and looks around and says: "Oh, gee. You

know, how come it's all one sex in here?" Well, that's kind of a thing in this day and age, that we've come to understand that gender identity is more along a continuum. Oh, I'm getting a very odd déjà vu. Who was it that was talking about somewhere between Marilyn Monroe and Charles Bronson? Right? That's a heck of a continuum. But, in fact, we're now coming to understand that people fall somewhere on that continuum. Not all men are Charles Bronson, and not all women are Marilyn Monroe.

Ms Calahasen: Oh, come on.

Ms Blakeman: I know. Isn't that just crushing? What a blow, but it's true. Some members are more Marilyn Monroe than others. I'll give that to the hon. member from Slave Lake. Okay.

But that is what these kids today are understanding even better than their parents or their grandparents understood, and the way they express that is quite unique and often fun but kind of bizarre to somebody that's not really understanding what's going on there. Once you start to accept that, you know, somewhere between Marilyn Monroe and Charles Bronson, is – we're all on there somewhere. We're just closer to one end than to the other, one imagines.

I'm really glad that the government was brave enough to take that step, and I will give you credit for being brave. That one wasn't easy, and it wasn't a gimme. I didn't think you'd be able to go there.

Then we have the removal of the reference to section 35.1, which is part of your C section. I'm going to have to come back to that one because I don't have the right pieces of paper. This is the wonderful thing about Committee of the Whole, as I'm sure you're aware, Madam Chair, that you can speak more than once, so if you can't find your piece of paper right now, you can find it later and get up and correct your remarks then.

Section C is where a lot of the meat is, or for people who don't eat meat then the aubergine or whatever anybody is using as a meat substitute these days. That is saying that if students ask for a voluntary student organization that is intended to be welcoming and caring as compared to being, you know, discriminatory and nasty, that the local principal "shall," which is an important wording, as my colleague the Official Opposition leader pointed out, "permit the establishment of the student organization or the holding of the activity at the school." Right on. It has to be at the school. "Designate a staff member to serve as staff liaison" for the organization or help it to organize: that's really good because in a lot of cases we've got very connected teachers, teachers that understand the kids in this school, that want to be involved in being the adviser to a gay-straight alliance or to other kinds of voluntary student groups, and I would hope that they would be chosen and would be allowed to do that.

In schools where nobody wants to do it, and we can think of a few examples of where that might happen, we do have a section a little later on that deals with that. That is subsection (4), under C.

The principal shall immediately inform the board and the Minister if no staff member is available to serve as a staff liaison referred to in subsection (1), and if so informed, the Minister shall . . .

Not might, not wiggle room, not maybe, not if the sun is shining. It says shall.

. . . appoint a responsible adult to work with the requesting students in organizing the activity or to facilitate the establishment, and the ongoing operation, of the student organization at the school.

So if you have a school where the staff say, "Nope. Not interested. Thank you very much," and no staff member is coming forward to do it, you have a process here that's outlined where the principal

goes to the minister and the board and says, "Okay. I don't have anybody," and the minister would then appoint someone.

Let me tell you, there are some good people out there. For example, in the Edmonton public school system – oh, as soon as I thought about her, her name went right out of my head. She's running the GSA round-table. She's employed by the Edmonton public school system, which is just light years ahead of us all and really leading the way on this issue. She would be a responsible person to have the minister appoint to help a student establish such a thing. The other woman I'm thinking of works for altView, which is an organization out of Sherwood Park established by my friend Bryan Mortensen, and I am not going to remember her name either. Claudette, Colleen, something like that. She goes out to schools as requested and works with the staff and the students to help put this together.

You know, there are people that exist, that have expertise, that are what I would call a responsible adult, that can be appointed by the minister to go into the school and fill that position if the staff are unwilling to do so, and I think that's an important part of it. It's to work with the students, to organize the activity, or to facilitate the establishment and/or the ongoing operation, so we're covering a lot of ground here.

We have the organization being established. We've talked about the staff that are going to look after it. As the minister spoke – this covers a lot of different kinds of student organizations, but it's meant to be peer support, leadership, nondiscriminatory clubs that are meant to help kids be resilient. You know, Kristopher Wells from ISMSS has joined us in the gallery, and that's a term I've heard him say, that the point of it is to help build resiliency in kids so that when they've got that support group, they can learn and build their resiliency so when they're in situations that aren't so great, they have that resiliency to get through it. They have the wherewithal to stand up and say, "No. You know, you can't bully me like that," or "Don't say that" to some other person, or just to withstand it and get home or walk away from the situation. That's the kind of thing we're trying to build in these kids so that they can get through it on their own and that they come through it in a way that's about thriving. It's about doing well; it's not about coming out kind of battered. I love that term, "resiliency."

I think that's what we're looking at here. In particular, it uses kind of a tip of the hat to the language that I was using because it talks about – it's not limited to organizations such as gay-straight alliances, diversity clubs, antiracism clubs, and antibullying clubs, which is what I was asking, that gender and sexual orientation not be discriminated against when we looked at all these clubs, and I think we've captured that here.

4:10

I spoke earlier about how important it was not to have to default to euphemisms when the kids name these clubs, and, in fact, that's the section that we're looking at in section (3). It says that

the students may select a respectful and inclusive name for the organization . . .

Someday I'm going to buy the minister a glass of wine and find out what would not be a respectful and inclusive name for an organization. I'm sure he's heard some, but I can't imagine what they'd be. Anyway, a respectful and inclusive name for the organization

. . . including the name "gay-straight alliance" or "queer-straight alliance", after consulting the principal,

so you've got to have the principal involved here. But one of the things I was trying to be careful of, and this is another one of Kris's big things, is that the principal could not stop them, could not say: no, you're not going to call it that. I think that's one of the concerns

that I really had, and this says that they are going to be able to call it that. I'm looking at the minister, and he's nodding his head at me. Okay. So they may call it that, but they do have to consult the principal.

Then we've got the last section, section D, which is the support for student organizations, which says that if they're requesting a staff member employed by the board to support this or to lead the activity, "the principal of the school shall permit the establishment of the student organization or the holding of the activity" – listen carefully – "at the school." And that's important because one of the big fights we had on this one was that somehow we would hold it somewhere else but not in the school, that it could be in a community league, or, you know, down the road somewhere, or as I, in a very uncomplimentary way, said, in a garden shed on the property, which is not what we wanted.

The whole point is that if these kids have a bad experience at school or at home, they can go to their club meeting, their safe space, in the school. That's the safe space. Folks, you know, I don't want to hammer on this too hard, but you've got to remember that for a lot of these kids the safe space is not at home, and that's why we have to make sure that safe space is offered to them in the school, not in the garden shed, not down the road, not at the community league; in the school.

So in this case, where they have requested the organization, "the principal shall" – not maybe, not when the sun is shining, but shall – "permit the establishment of the student organization or the holding of the activity at the school," and "designate a staff member to serve as the staff liaison to facilitate" it. And it goes on to talk about "an organization or activity includes an organization or activity that promotes equality and non-discrimination with respect to . . ." and then we have the list, which is a long list now. As far as I can tell, everybody is on it. Just the thing about lists: you've got to have them all. But it does include

. . . without limitation, race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity,

Yes.

. . . gender expression . . .

Yes.

. . . physical disability, mental disability, family status, or sexual orientation, including but not limited to organizations such as gay-straight alliances, diversity clubs, anti-racism clubs and anti-bullying clubs.

Oh, I think I just repeated myself. Sorry about that.

An Hon. Member: It's never happened.

Ms Blakeman: Not usually.

The last two sections. Section E is amending section 3(7), so it's pulling out section 16.1, which I haven't had time to look at, so I'm going to go back and look at – oh, that's sounding very familiar. Okay. I'm going to go back and look at what 16.1 is and what 35.1 is, and I will have that by the time I get up to speak the next time. The final section, section F, is amending by striking out March 1, 2015, and substituting June 1, 2015. I'm just going to take a wild flyer here and assume that that is the proclamation date of the act or when it's all supposed to be implemented.

So I hope that's helped alleviate some of the concerns that I know people had. I know there's a concern about rushing this through, but, I'll tell you: sometimes you have to seize the moment, and the moment is now. I would really encourage people to seize it and to pass the government amendments now, today – look, we have all this time – then we could also pass it through third, and we would have it today. Because remember, my gentle ones, we've already had the passage of Government Motion 20, which, in fact, says that tomorrow, Wednesday, all day, we will be doing supplementary

supply, so we wouldn't be able to come back to this tomorrow, and who knows what we're going to get up to on Thursday, some of that really exciting legislation that they're going to bring in soon, like the fisheries act. So let's try and get this done today.

I'm comfortable enough with it. I'm going to go and check the two sections I'm not quite sure of right now because I didn't memorize the whole thing, and I will allow someone else to speak before I do that.

I'm so sorry, Madam Chair. I'm getting a lot of recognition today. I appreciate that, and I'm basking in it, but really the person that started all of this is my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo [some applause] – thank you – who, you know, really struck out into the wilderness of human rights and education acts in Alberta with his Motion 503 and really did a brilliant job of bringing this onto the agenda and keeping it on the agenda long enough to inspire me to try it again. My thanks to him because that is a big – you know, you don't change public policy with one person. It's always a group of people coming from different places for the same good reason. I do want to make sure that we recognize that he was an integral part of this coming to the place that it is today.

I'm going to sit down and let someone else speak while I rush about and check these two other sections out. I look forward to part B. Thanks very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's a great honour to be able to speak to these amendments brought forward to Bill 10 by the government. I guess the question I ask is: now, boys and girls, was that so hard? No, of course it wasn't. Being on the right side of legislation in human rights in the direction of forwarding your society in those ways is important, and governments need to do it more often. So I thank the government for bringing forward this legislation.

Gay-straight alliances lead to less bullying in all schools and lead to fewer suicides and let kids live freer, more inclusive lives, that they are allowed to be who they want to be and not feel ashamed, bullied, or otherwise as a result. Gay-straight alliances work – the research is clear – and I am glad we have acted on that evidence today and gone forward on the path we have.

But I'd also like to go through a little bit of the history on how we got here. The hon. leader of the fourth party brought up some of the dark days of this province in terms of our respect for the LGBT community. We have to look back to 1998, the Vriend decision that came out of the Supreme Court of Canada, where it was ordered by the Supreme Court that sexual orientation be added to the grounds prohibited to be discriminated against. Alberta, to our shame, fought against that proposal. We fought against it for a full decade. Where other provinces accepted it as an idea whose time has come, an idea where we embrace human rights, not limit them, yet we chose to do the other thing for a full decade.

I will note that in 2008, when I got here, we seemingly were moving the ball a little bit forward. We heard a proposal that would allow for sexual orientation finally to be recognized in our human rights code. In fact, my first question in this hon. House when I became a member was to the then Justice minister asking: when are we going to have sexual orientation become part of our human rights code? We found that that day was coming, but it wasn't without some quid pro quo.

4:20

That was in the unfortunate Bill 44 debates. What transpired out of that was a little bit: well, okay, we're going to give the LGBT community the sexual orientation clause in the Human Rights Act,

but we're not going to give up our social conservative roots that easily. In there we had an addition to our human rights code under 11.1 that many in our LGBT community felt discriminated against them, and rightfully so. We saw that sexual orientation was deemed not worthy of discussion in our classrooms.

Really, how that ever got put into a Human Rights Act, I, for the life of me, do not understand. It had no place when you compared it to other human rights legislation across Canada, in fact throughout much of the world. It was regressive. It was silly. It was just a mean-spirited act that the social cons in the governing party of the day put in to champion parental rights issues. In fact, many of the people who are still here today, well, guess what? They trotted along on this path for a long time.

We can also look at: hey, Alberta was the last province to officially recognize same-sex marriage. We did that just recently, and we were laggards in that regard, too.

So here we are today. I guess we have turned the page under this unfortunate history that has been Alberta in embracing human rights. That's a good thing. Guys, I'm happy we have done so. But I think this should be a lesson to this government, that what they often did in respect to this was that they didn't get out and lead; they often followed. They used politics, admittedly probably to their advantage. In 2004 when you did polling on same-sex marriage in this province, well, 70 per cent of Albertans were against that principle happening. Fast forward to today. Now about 85 per cent of the population is in favour of that happening.

The government of the day back in 2004 probably had the politics right. Okay. Generally it was within the sentiment of what the Alberta population was feeling. They didn't have the principle right. Of course, it was not within the spirit of moving human rights forward, and in fact it would have showed great leadership by getting out and saying: "Look, here we are. We are the government of the day. We are not going to tolerate this. We are going to get out and lead." Eventually that statement of principle by governments gets your population there quicker. That's what I advise the current government to do more often.

Look, we've been laggards in a whole host of areas. You know, seat belt legislation: last province. Smoking in restaurants: last province to recognize this. Now on LGBTQ rights, one of the last provinces to get there, all because we're basing it on polling, not on what is fundamentally right to human rights and moving the chains of justice forward. I think that this government should be more bold in that expression of doing what's right, making the case to the people, and showing leadership in that regard. That's what I would like to see going forward.

Today is a red-letter day for this province. I feel very proud that I played a small role in this, putting forward Motion 503. I put forward the notion that schools, whether they be public schools, Catholic schools, or private schools, where kids wanted to have a gay-straight alliance, that was to be mandatory. I knew from what was going on in the community that at all of these three school systems, for various reasons, kids were not being allowed to have a GSA, and that was unfortunate. So this is a good public policy piece that I thought would save kids' lives.

Starting that debate was important. Of course, my friend from Edmonton-Centre did a great job of putting forward Bill 202, and it corrected a lot of the errors of the past as well as added the notion that gay-straight alliances be made available in all schools where kids want them. I think it served an important role in galvanizing support behind an issue.

We can look to this exercise that we have gone through in this House and out in the public for why opposition MLAs are important. They really are. Without Motion 503, without Bill 202, I doubt that the government would have moved forward on this

issue for perhaps another five, maybe 10 years. Okay? All during that time kids would have been left unprotected, vulnerable, bullied, and committing suicide at greater rates should we not have had this debate. We must remember that.

This was a red-letter day for democracy. It's how the system should work. Sometimes opposition members need to put up ideas that the government may not be thinking of and may actually be in opposition to their current policies or current direction that they believe is in the best interest of our society. What we saw by this exercise was really a celebration of our system. We put up an issue, people got behind it, they told the government where they stood, and lo and behold good public policy was instituted that wasn't in the government's bailiwick.

This is an idea that's been around for a long time. In 2006 the Alberta Teachers' Association passed a motion at their spring conference saying that gay-straight alliances should be in all public schools. I will note that this was supported 100 per cent by all teachers at that meeting, whether they were from the Catholic system or the public system. So this idea has been around for a while, and it took us to get to this stage here, where opposition members and other members of the public and organizations out there in the community had been pressing the government on this issue and where these ideas of GSAs were discussed broadly in the community and the LGBTQ community wanted to have them instituted. You saw that at the discussions around Camp fYrefly communities, ISMSS at the University of Alberta, all over the place. This was an idea whose time had come.

So I'd like us to all recognize the fact that this was democracy in action. I am glad to see here that it looks like we're going to have 100 per cent support of all people in this Legislature on this issue when, remember, just eight months ago that was not the case. The majority of PC MLAs, at that time the complete opposition of the WRP, and the like were against this idea. Over the course of eight short months this was changed. Again, a red-letter day for not only the LGBTQ community, human rights, but democracy. I applaud all members of this august Assembly for going through the motion and the exercise.

I will say, too, that part of the success of what got us here were many members of the government side. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood spoke bravely about this issue through the summer. In the Bill 10 debates we saw the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs and the hon. member for Edgemont, I believe, get up and speak against a bill that they felt was wrong. That is no easy task, no easy feat, to get up and not support your government's own bill. Hey, this is with a Premier who at the time was riding very high in the polls, who had instituted his own bill, his own made-in-Alberta solution, that apparently balanced rights. Yet they got up, and they said that they didn't believe this was right.

4:30

I encourage other MLAs on the government side. You can't do it all the time, but you can pick and choose on certain issues to get up and voice your opinion on what you believe in your heart of hearts to be the correct direction for Alberta's society. I think that, in the main, if you're on the side of progress, on the side of human rights, you will eventually be rewarded for those efforts and recognized for your courage.

Nevertheless, as my time is running short, I'll comment more fully on the actual nuts and bolts of the amendments put forward by the government. In the main, they seem to support the purpose and intent of Motion 503 as well as Bill 202.

I am interested to see how in particular the one section will work: when a staff member is not able to be found to run or organize a

gay-straight alliance, what will that process be, and how will it go forward and the like? You can envision some circumstances where this clause may be utilized by some schools or school systems to derail the process – derail the process – so I'm encouraged that the minister is thinking about that, how to ensure that, hopefully, a staff member is going to be able to lead this exercise. If not, what is going to look like an appropriate person to be there to support the kids, to ensure that the club is respected, to ensure that people have access to this great organization that can lead kids to having less worry, less angst, and less bullying in their lives?

In any event, Madam Chair, it's been a great honour to speak to this. I'd like to thank the government for bringing in this amendment, for listening to not only the opposition but to all Albertans, who have clearly moved on from the social wars of the past. I would encourage them to not be afraid of leading more often and leading in the direction of science, reason, common sense, and human rights. I think we will be rewarded for it as a province in terms of more reasonable legislation that supports an educated, modern society that understands the need for governments to lead.

In any event, thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Certainly, I rise with great interest in speaking to these amendments. It's an unprecedented series of events, I think, that we saw here on this first day of the spring session. I think it's a tribute to the evolution of an idea, where it is born from, I would say, hard work by activists right across the province, with many associations recognizing the psychological and social benefits of having GSAs in schools and then taking that concept and slowly working it through to today, where we are in fact building substantive law that really will, I think, help to establish the positive effects of GSAs right across the province.

I am grateful to have done some small part of that. Certainly, our New Democrat caucus has been working over many months, and I can see the amendments and some of the language that we brought forward over the last number of months in these amendments. Again, I'm grateful that we have an opportunity to perhaps pass them into legislation here in the very near future.

Now, I spoke to the hon. Education minister just briefly here this afternoon to look for some clarification on concerns that I have, talking to people about getting GSAs in their schools. Some of the concerns that I had certainly were as a teacher, that a teacher has responsibilities to students and responsibilities not just to curricular subject areas but also to extracurricular clubs and so forth. So a practical concern that was always in the back of my mind was: well, we could be all high and mighty here in this Chamber, advocating for GSAs, but a teacher somewhere in some school has to be the sponsoring person for that, right? That's the way schools function.

The principal has a part in that, too. I certainly saw some positive direction here in regard to these amendments to ensure that a principal has decision-making powers over creating and maintaining a GSA in a school. Then, of course, a co-operating teacher can put their name forward to sponsor these clubs without fear of retribution and/or other compromising potential situations, right? But I also would just like to venture further to say that in the interests of ensuring that a school board – a given school board might have some second thoughts about this legislation – would not be able to compromise the capacity of their staff to in fact sponsor these places, would not send, you know, a memo around to dissuade the staff from actually sponsoring a GSA in a school and thus try to somehow subvert the process as we move along.

Another concern that I had was in regard to private schools and charter schools and so forth. Again, it seems as though these amendments do compel those bodies to participate in this process – again, we've talked about this so much – but, I mean, it's not as though we are imposing the mandatory establishment of a GSA in a school. It's a process by which students and staff are looking for this to exist in a school, and then it's much more organic than top-down in regard to the establishment of a GSA although, certainly, when students and staff express their interest in doing so, then the authorities cannot step in the way of a GSA being established in the school.

Otherwise, another concern that I did have in regard to the amendments is just to, I think, ensure universality, as I said before, but also to ensure that the focus of the GSA not be watered down by, again, usually, school boards' maybe changing the definition of what it can be – right? – you know, like a social justice club or a culture club or something like that. I mean, this is a very specific intention with GSAs, to allow people to speak freely about concerns they have and to not just talk about problems but to celebrate diversity and sexual orientation in a very specific way. Again, it seems as though these amendments do define a GSA in a very specific way and do not have this watered-down process of turning it into a culture club or a political club or something of that nature.

Another issue that I had, just reflecting as a teacher, is to ensure that, yes, you are creating a positive place for GLBTQ students to have a place to speak about issues that concern them but also for the larger positive educative effects that a GSA can have on the overall student population so that it is being accepted in the most positive way possible. The mere existence, I would say, Madam Chair, of a GSA in a school or the past existence of a GSA will serve as a moderating influence to help educate and create and foster an environment of acceptance amongst both the students and the staff and parents in a school.

4:40

You know, after all, to revert to first principles, why we have public education in the first place is to educate young people at that most influenceable age, and it's remarkable how fast they will learn if you set up a positive social justice framework that is equal and so forth and is reinforced by the administration all the way up to the provincial Legislature here. Then they know that it's the right thing to do and, in fact, will help to educate the larger population on issues of equality and social justice.

Madam Chair, I'm very interested in this whole afternoon and, really, the last few months that started it. I thank the member. I know exactly when this first entered the Chamber here, with the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo bringing this forward and then later the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, the tumultuous debates that we had last fall around this. But, most of all, it's the public that put out loud and clear that they want a greater degree of equality and social justice in their schools and outside of their schools. Each of the groups, both parent groups and student groups from the university, expertise from inside and outside the province of Alberta, pushed this forward. That's the way, truly, we make progress in our society, and I think that we all can be remembering this day for the rest of our legislative lives as being a positive one.

With that, the one issue that I do want to bring forward – and we've drafted here very quickly – in the spirit of co-operation, again, is a subamendment in regard to the staffing and so forth. You know, we'll talk about that more in very short order.

You know, when I was teaching, one of the very first GSAs that was established, to my knowledge, in Edmonton was at a school I was teaching at. It really had a positive effect among students and staff, not for people necessarily to participate but just knowing it

was there, right? We all have gone through high school, I think, most of us, anyway, and some of us were teaching and working in that environment, too. It's not always that you're accessing all of the benefits of a school at any given time, but just to know of the existence of a GSA in a school really is reassuring, and it creates an atmosphere of acceptance and normalization that I think we all need right now.

It's really important as well to know that when you make a gain in a society, when you make a societal gain to be more equal and just, it doesn't mean that you can let down your vigilance, and it doesn't mean that you can have some backsliding of people's attitudes towards equality and social justice. We know that so often the forces of prejudice and discrimination will come back if we're not vigilant, so establishing something like this in a public school setting and all provincial school settings is really good insurance, because we might think that we're all so progressive here in 2015, but you don't know where your society is going to be moving necessarily 10, 15, 20 years from now. We establish these institutions, these yardsticks, as in GSAs, and we are making a positive investment to probably ensure that the notion of equality and sexual equality between genders and for all sexuality will be ensured over time. Again, it's something that we can look forward to in a longer sense.

You know, I have spoken to lots of different people on this. I mean, it wasn't easy for certain groups and individuals and private schools and charter schools to deal with this. The most important thing was to reassure people that it's not as though they were having something imposed on them but, rather, that we were creating tools by which you can have a healthier society and a healthier population for students and for their own children to be looked after if they might be having some difficulties. As a therapeutic tool, certainly, GSAs are well recognized and recognized through many different cultures, through different socioeconomic groups, and so forth.

So in all ways, really, I'm pretty happy about this. Like I said, we just have a small amendment that we would like to bring forward to ensure the execution of this in the broadest possible way.

You know, I think the appetite for comprehensive GSA legislation is there amongst the general public. I think there are some people that might be dragging their feet a little bit, but as the hon. minister just mentioned to me in my conversation with him, you know, we make these laws here, and other groups and individuals will be compelled to follow, right? I mean, I think that for the most part it will be an easy process, a straightforward process, but certainly at the end of the day, we take the responsibility to create the laws and regulations that govern this province in regard to education. So this is not such a bad thing at all, really, taking responsibility like we are here today.

As the paper moves through the process, I think you've got a couple of things, Rachel, that you probably want to add on to this if you don't mind.

I thank you, Madam Chair, for your patience and for your chairpersonness.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thanks, Madam Chair. I just wanted to stand up and speak for a few minutes. As I indicated when I was speaking earlier, I was concerned about how quickly we're rushing this, and I said that I wanted to have the opportunity to listen to the Member for Edmonton-Centre. She and I had a delightful conversation back there. She reassured me that she is feeling – I guess that “seize the moment” was what she had said.

I guess the other thing that makes me feel a little better is that we've got Dr. Wells up in the gallery, so I have a little bit more security there. I asked about some of the other people when we were discussing this, like Murray Billett, and I understand that he's obviously . . .

Ms Blakeman: Suntanning. Sorry.

Mrs. Forsyth: . . . suntanning. He's here, but I would have loved to have the opportunity to be able to talk to him and, as I explained, some of the other gay friends and activists that I happen to know and cherish deeply.

You know, I'm not going to spend a lot of time. The Twitter world is abuzz, both pros and cons, actually, and there's nothing better than debating. There are some serious questions, Minister, on Twitter – and I don't know if you're following Twitter – that I think need to be answered. I can't answer the questions because I'm not the Education minister. They're talking about the dissolution of the Catholic schools with the bishop, et cetera, and I guess that's something that you're going to have to deal with as the minister. I don't have to deal with that.

I am going to listen to what my colleague has to say. I'm assuming that Dr. Wells has read these amendments and is comfortable with the amendments that he has seen. If he has anything else that he thinks needs to be added, we may have the opportunity to do that in a very short period of time. I understand that the leader of the fourth party has got some amendments that she's considering bringing forward.

I just want it in the House that we'll be supporting moving forward. As I said earlier, I was concerned about the time. I've been reassured by some people that I have a great deal of respect for, so we're going to be supporting this amendment, and I ask people in committee to support this particular amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

4:50

Ms Notley: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be able to rise and speak to this. I think I've already commented at some length on this change and on these changed amendments to Bill 10, so I won't take a lot of time.

Again, if you go back to what Bill 10 looked like when it was first brought in, I believe the plan was for there to be GSAs except where the administration or the school board didn't want them, and then the students could go to judicial review. Having been a lawyer, I know that going to judicial review is not exactly a user-friendly process even for people who've had many years of legal education. Then phase 2 was: “Okay. Well, we won't make it voluntary. They do have to happen, but it may have to happen on somebody else's property.” That sort of took a bad situation and almost made it worse, of course, because at that point we were dealing with the idea of sort of separate but equal. Of course, I don't think that was anybody's intention, but it certainly was the implication, and it was clearly a problem.

Now we have this set of amendments, and this set of amendments basically does what it needs to do. It guarantees the GSAs in any setting where the kids ask for them. It gets rid of 11.1. It deals with gender identity. It's good. It's a good package, so I'm happy with this set of amendments.

There are two issues, though, that I'd like to touch on very briefly, one through a proposed amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, are you moving your subamendment at this point?

Ms Notley: I was going to talk about one other thing before I got to the subamendment, but I'll be there in, like, 30 seconds.

The Deputy Chair: Go ahead, hon. member.

Ms Notley: There is the section of these amendments that talks about: "Okay. Well, what if there's nobody available to lead and to be the liaison for this GSA?" That's a thoughtful section because there are a number of different circumstances in which that could happen. In small communities or in small schools definitely you could have occasions where the teachers themselves are simply not willing to participate in that role. It's good that we have section (4) in there the way it currently exists so that the minister has the capacity to come in and appoint someone else should no teachers be available. Maybe they're, you know, really exhausted because they've got 14 special-needs kids in their class of 40 – it's happened; oh, wait; no, it's happening – those kinds of things, so they choose not to volunteer for that particular project. We know that on a school-by-school basis the access to clubs varies tremendously between schools based on the workload of teachers. Section (4) as currently drafted is great because it provides a solution to that, and I'm happy to see that.

What I have, however, is an amendment because I'm afraid that section (4), without some quick correction, could end up being utilized in a way that was less positive, and I would like to fix that. So at this point what I'm going to do is propose an amendment and have this amendment distributed around for members of this Assembly to review.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, if we could just pause until everybody receives a copy of this amendment. This will be known as a subamendment, and it is subamendment 1.

Hon. member, would you like to proceed?

Ms Notley: Thank you. Before I talk about the merits or the substance of this, let me just walk you through the amendment. Essentially, it's divided into two pieces. The first piece adds a section after section (4) in the part of your amendment which deals with the Education Act. The second piece adds a section (5) after section (4) in the part of your amendment that deals with the School Act. So it's basically doing the same thing in both settings. Really, what you're looking at is adding section (5) twice because you're dealing with the Education Act and the School Act.

What it's doing is that it's building on the analysis that began with the inclusion of section (4), understanding that in some circumstances the school liaisons might not be available because the teachers themselves are unavailable, so the minister appoints somebody. Great. No big problem with that.

The other option, though, could be the case where sometimes you have teachers who want to do this, but they are prohibited from doing it by their administration, particularly in the case where the administration or the board remains resistant to this change. Now, I think that some folks over there would acknowledge that even as we bring forward this legislation, there will be some boards and some school administrations that remain resistant to what we are proposing and what the government is proposing through its amendment.

One of the ways, with the current construction of this amendment, that that resistance might come to fruition is that the principal would be completely within his or her authority to discourage . . . [interjections] I'm not sure what you're saying. [interjections] Okay. Forget it. They want me to talk less and more and louder and longer but quieter, so I'm very confused.

An Hon. Member: Not longer.

Ms Notley: No. I got a "longer" over there, too, so what can I say?

Anyway, you can have those situations. The way it's currently constructed is that the administrator, using their authority as the employer, could construct a number of ways to tell teachers that they're not available, then inform the minister, and then the minister has to bring someone else in. Your first answer might be: "Well, why is that a problem? At least someone is coming in." True, but I think we can all agree that the best-case scenario is for the teacher, who is part of the school community, who is part of the administrative community, who has an ongoing relationship with the kids, to be the person who is the liaison. That's your best-case scenario.

Imagine a resistant school or school board seven and a half hours out of Edmonton, and suddenly they exercise their authority as the administrators to essentially create a lack of availability of teachers. Then the minister is appointing somebody who is flying in on a frigging plane to, say, High Level or something once a week in order to facilitate this gay-straight alliance, which (a) is costly and (b) not best practice because this person is not connected with the community and they're not connected with the schools and everybody else.

Now, that may happen nonetheless if none of the teachers want to do it. But what drives this amendment on my part comes from my own discussions with numerous teachers in the separate school division, in private schools, in charter schools who themselves would love to do this and who have tried to do this, who have been told by the administrations that they cannot do this. This section is geared towards giving those teachers the right to say, "You know what? I want to be the liaison officer" and to make sure that they get to be.

5:00

Now, there still may be those cases where no one wants to be the liaison officer. Then the minister is doing his thing, and he's picking his person, and off you go. But I just want to make sure that we don't create a situation where we're inviting those resistant boards to essentially create a lack of availability and then actually create a much larger obligation on the part of the Minister and the Ministry of Education to fund and transport these school liaison officers around the province. This is a way to avoid that. Again, it reflects best practice, because I do truly believe that the teachers who are a part of the community, who have relationships with the kids, who are interested in taking on this role, who want to take on this role are the ones who are best able to do it, and they're going to do the best job.

That's what this is geared to doing. It's a good-faith attempt to give you an opportunity to potentially work against any resistant boards or administrators that you may have in some small remaining corners of the province. That's what this is about. It's pretty simple, and it also deals with those many, many teachers whom I've spoken with over the last, well, years, actually, but since this particular issue arose. It allows for them to do it should they want to do it and to not have their principal tell them they can't do it, not have their principal assign them to other activities. You know, there are a variety of tools that the administration can use to create the status of nonavailability. So if a teacher is really supportive and wants to help the kids, let's just make sure they can. That's what this is about. That's what the amendment is for. So I hope that my colleagues will consider supporting this amendment to what . . .

Mr. Eggen: I'm voting for it. I'm in.

Ms Notley: My caucus member is voting for it, so that's cool. I've got one.

Anyway, I hope you'll consider it in the spirit with which it was submitted, which is an effort to make this better and to give the government more tools to deal with somewhat resistant boards and administrators.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on subamendment 1.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Madam Chair. As we try and get legislation right and we try and anticipate all of the possible permutations and outcomes, it's hard to imagine where things might go wrong and where we might be able to set it up in the beginning so as to have it move along in the direction that we had hoped.

I think this is a reasonable subamendment, and here's why. Clearly, the writers of the amendments that the minister has brought forward were trying to anticipate a situation where the staff said: not doing this. Then the changes here were going to empower the principal to get someone in place, a reasonable person, some of whom I've discussed here and, unfortunately, can't remember their names properly: Eileen from the Edmonton public school board.

But the other sides of that can also be true. One is the staff refusing to participate, but this is anticipating where the administration – could be a school board; could be the administration, including the principal – wants to make it so that the staff can't participate or they don't want that staff person to do it and makes it difficult. This subamendment is anticipating that particular circumstance, and I know the sponsoring member well enough to know that she's not going to bring this forward on one person talking about this. She's obviously heard it from more than one place, where things get manoeuvred so that a willing teacher or staff member is manoeuvred out of being able to help establish or lead or be the facilitator for a GSA.

I think that's fair. We've got the amendment on the one hand anticipating where staff refuse to participate; this is anticipating where the administration are manoeuvring it, and you have a willing staff member. It's saying that if we've got a willing staff member and they indicate they're willing to do this, the administration can't manoeuvre them out of it. Basically, if someone has indicated that they're interested, the route that's available here is that the principal would say: "Oh, well, sorry; nobody can do this. Would the minister please appoint someone?" This is saying: "No. If there's somebody in the school that has indicated that they want to do this, they should be accepted as the individual who is able to do this." I think that's fair. It's another way of anticipating – it's just coming at it from a slightly different direction. It's trying to ensure that the flow of this continues to go in the direction of being able to establish the GSAs with willing participants. That's why I'm suggesting that it's worth while to pursue this, to take advantage of people that might be in place but, you know, their administration doesn't really want it to happen, so they're manoeuvring it rather than the staff manoeuvring it.

I'm sorry; that sounded more complicated than it actually is. Is that okay? Did everybody understand what I was saying? Work with me, audience.

Mr. Hehr: You're in favour of the amendment. There you go

Ms Blakeman: Yes, thank you. Very clearly I'm in favour of the amendment.

But that's why. The amendments that have been brought forward by the minister already anticipate one scenario where members of a school may not wish to participate and are trying to sort of foul the

spark plugs, if I may use that analogy, and this is just another group of people trying to foul the same spark plugs. It's trying to say: "No, no, no. If there's someone that's available and they say that they want to do this, we're going to accept it." We're not going to let the administration get in the middle here and go, "No, you don't really want to do it," or "Gee, I've just assigned you to coach every single basketball game for the next century," and takes them out of commission so that they can't do it. This is saying that when there's a willing person there, we should take advantage of that and allow them to do it and not be rushing about saying: "No. I've made it so that it's impossible for them to be willing." God, I hope that clarified things.

Thank you very much. I do encourage my colleagues in the House, since we're all getting a bit weary, to pass this. Just think. We have a whole three more weeks just like this. I know how excited you all are. So let's pass this subamendment, and then we can get on to passing the amendment, and then, all things being willing, we could even just take a leap of faith here and pass it out at committee and go into third and pass it out of third. We could do that. We have enough time.

An Hon. Member: Let's do it.

Ms Blakeman: All right. Let's do it. Let's pass her subamendment. Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on subamendment 1?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on subamendment 1 carried unanimously]

The Deputy Chair: That takes us back to amendment A6. Are there any other members who wish to speak on amendment A6?

Mr. Dirks: If there's no one else who wishes to speak, I just want to thank all members for their participation in this debate. I think we've reached a good place, where we can now move to the full bill for consideration. So thank you to everyone.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any others who wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Chair: The question has been called.

[Motion on amendment A6 carried unanimously]

5:10

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other comments in Committee of the Whole on Bill 10?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question, then, on Bill 10, an Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 10 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to move that we rise and report Committee of the Whole.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

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

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports Bill 10 with some amendments. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? If you do, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Those opposed should say no. I hear no "no," so that is carried unanimously and so ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 10

An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children

(continued)

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

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, I'm rising to move third reading of Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, and it feels very good to say that right now.

I want to thank everyone for the support that we've gotten from all sides of the House today in making sure that this bill, Bill 10 in its new and improved form, is moving forward. I'm so proud today to be asking for the support of the House for this amended bill.

In November our government decided to put this bill on pause, and it was the right decision. We paused, and we listened, and we learned, and most importantly we heard from Albertans, and we have responded in the best way possible. We have responded in a collaborative way, with everyone working together, because our kids in this province deserve that collaboration when it comes to their safety, and they got it from all sides of this House today, and it is a wonderful, wonderful thing.

The work we have done here today makes three things very clear about GSAs: that, first of all, students who want a GSA in this province have every right to have a GSA, that that GSA has to be in their school, and that it has to be under the name of their choosing.

Mr. Speaker, it was more than a year and a half ago when I became associate minister of family and community safety, and LGBTQ issues were in my mandate. That's when I met Dr. Kristopher Wells, who is in our audience right now and who has been an amazing support to me on this issue. I went to my first GSA conference and heard from kids about the impact of GSAs, about the fact that for some kids in this province it is the only place that they can feel safe. That is why they're so important. A lot of these kids don't get that support at home. They will get that support in a GSA, and I'm so proud to be able to say that every child in this province who wants one can have one.

You know, Bill 10 in its entirety represents a huge step forward for LGBTQ rights in this province with respect to gay-straight alliances, and that is something that I have stood for in my career proudly. The bill enhances the Alberta Bill of Rights by ensuring that no Albertan will be subject to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. The fact that we are able to talk about those things right now is a wonderful moment in this province in terms of social justice. It is a hugely important piece. It also enshrines the rights of parents to make informed decisions about their kids' education, and that right continues to be honoured in this bill because we believe that parental rights are extremely important and so do Albertans. Finally, Bill 10 makes an important correction by moving section 11.1 from the Human Rights Act into the School Act and, most importantly, removing sexual orientation from this clause because we needed to do that, and we're doing that.

As those in this room and across the province know, I have been a forceful advocate for LGBTQ citizens. I think it's a hugely important issue for us. I was proud to steward the removal of the preamble to the Marriage Act that states that marriage is between a man and a woman. We are a progressive, conservative province, and I am proud that we are, and this shows that we are.

The advancement of the GSA issue is something I take personal pride in because I know how important they are to kids. I know that when we have a province with GSAs, we have kids who feel better supported, better protected, and they learn that that is an important quality to have. They are our future leaders, and they will take that going forward. They will take that inclusiveness. They will take that understanding and acceptance going forward. They are our future leaders. We have to lead by example, and we're doing an amazing job of it here today, everyone in this House.

I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Centre because she has done a fantastic and forceful job on this issue. I think the conversations have been difficult but important ones, and I want to applaud her work on this issue because these are not easy things to talk about.

I want to take a special moment to thank the Member for Calgary-Buffalo because when he brought Motion 503 forward not a lot of us were talking about GSAs. In fact, not a lot of us in this province knew what GSAs were. The fact that we began to talk about them in the place where we make legislation was a major step forward for us, and it is the reason we are here today.

I know that we still have work today going forward on all the inclusive issues in this province that we want to work on. I really hope that the spirit we captured today in terms of collaboration is something that we can embrace going forward, because Alberta kids deserve that, and they got that today. I am so proud, and I thank all of you for your efforts.

With that, I'd like to call the vote.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West has moved third reading of Bill 10. Are there any other speakers at third reading who wish to address the Assembly on this bill at this time? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, briefly.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Just really briefly because I'm getting the sense we're going to seize the moment here. I just wanted to conclude by saying how pleased and proud I am that the politicians in this Chamber have caught up to Albertans. I think that's important, and I thank everyone. I know that sometimes this is really difficult, and I do appreciate this because it's about creating a safe space for kids. In the end, it's about the kids.

5:20

I want to thank my mom for recognizing that this was an issue for kids in schools. As a principal and a teacher she got it, and she made sure that the kids at her school were safe and that the staff were safe. I appreciate the leadership that she showed me.

So thank you very much for everybody's co-operation. We still have work to do, and we will do it. It would be nice if we were as collegial as we've managed to be today, but I don't expect it. But thank you very much, everyone, for helping to move this along so that we have conclusion to it today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

Mr. Kang: Well, job well done. I want to congratulate everybody. This Chamber has made us all proud and has made all Albertans proud. I'm really proud of the work we have done today. Congratulations to the Premier, all the members.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any others?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-North West to close debate if you wish.

Ms Jansen: I'd like to call the question.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a third time]

The Speaker: So it was almost unanimous, and that's good. I would declare this one carried and so ordered, but I do want to make one small observation, and I'll be very brief. Today through your good work on Bill 10 you have demonstrated something rarely seen in politics anywhere. I've had the privilege of being in many Legislatures around the world and looking at and observing debate and so on. Rarely do you see the kind of spirit of co-operation that occurred in this Assembly today and probably what led up to it yesterday and days before, and that is the spirit that moves something forward for the greater good of all. I want to congratulate each one of you for that. With that, I'm proud to declare this particular bill carried and approved at third reading.

Congratulations, and let me recognize the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a little late in the day here, and I would hereby move that we call it 6 o'clock and that this Assembly stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:23 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 11, 2015

Issue 18

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 11, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, hon. members.

Let us pray. As we fulfill our duties today, may we find patience whenever disagreement arises, may we find strength whenever weakness appears, and may we find determination whenever uncertainty besets us. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Election Anniversaries and Birthdays

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we go to Introduction of Guests, may I take a moment to remind ourselves that we have two members today, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, who are celebrating their 18th election anniversary year as members of this Assembly. Congratulations, Edmonton-Centre and Calgary-Fort.

As well, please join me in acknowledging and congratulating a member who received one of the best birthday presents she could have yesterday, the hon. Member for Calgary-North West. Happy birthday.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us move on to school groups for introduction. Let's start with the hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly visitors from Wes Hosford elementary school, located in the heart of my constituency of Sherwood Park. These bright young students, their inspirational teachers, and dedicated volunteer helpers are seated in both the public and members' galleries, and I would ask that they please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some of the brightest students that Alberta has to offer from Saint-André academy in Beaumont. The school opened in September, and it is full. They are accompanied by their teacher, Miss Colette Chamulka, and two parent helpers, Mrs. Trenda Willcott and Mrs. Shauna Reynolds. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, did you have an introduction as well?

Ms Blakeman: I have it in my notes that I do, but I believe they're coming in at 2 o'clock, so if I may, I'll preannounce them, and that is to give a very warm welcome to the students' union of MacEwan University, which is located, of course, in the fabulous constituency

of Edmonton-Centre. Please join me in giving a prewelcome to those members that will join us at 2 o'clock.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other school or university groups?

Seeing none, let's move on to other important guests, starting with Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville and followed by Edmonton-Decore.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Renaye Wade and her mother, Tammy Wade. Renaye and Tammy have come here today to raise awareness on distracted driving. Renaye had her life changed forever when she was struck by a semi two years ago this month. Renaye has suffered multiple injuries and a devastating brain injury. These tragic consequences bring Renaye here today to advocate for awareness and greater penalties. You will never know what it's like to walk in her shoes. I would like Renaye and Tammy to please rise – they are seated in the members' gallery – and receive the traditional warm welcome.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly five very proud guests from the Iraqi Canadian Association of Edmonton, a very active not-for-profit organization established in 2012. My heartfelt best wishes for this organization's important leadership, strength, and the steadfast support given to improve lives and to advance the skills that Albertans and others need in our interconnected world. My guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and remain standing as I mention their names: Mr. Dhiaa Raheem, president, Iraqi Canadian Association of Edmonton; Mr. Ashraf Noor AL-Deen, vice-president, Iraqi Canadian Association of Edmonton; Mr. Sarmad Atalah, past president and founder, Iraqi Canadian Association of Edmonton; Mrs. Salool Alrashed, director and founder, Iraqi Canadian Association of Edmonton; Mrs. Nazik Zaidan, secretary, Iraqi Canadian Association of Edmonton. Mr. Kassm Kassm, treasurer, Iraqi Canadian Association of Edmonton, extended his regrets as he wasn't able to join us today. I would now ask the Assembly to please join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An honour and a privilege today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three very special guests, and I'll ask each of them to rise as I introduce them. Firstly, the reason that I've been able to spend the last seven years representing the people of Red Deer-South: my primary and most important supporter, my wife of 34 years, Jackie Dallas. Please rise, Jackie.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know the importance of the constituency work that's done in our offices, and I've been incredibly blessed to have one constituency assistant for the last seven years. She has done tireless, fabulous work for the constituents of Red Deer-South. Please welcome Brenda Johnson.

Mr. Speaker, finally and not the least of the three is Brenda's husband, Ken Johnson, who is an entrepreneur in our community, operates a company called Techno Solve, which provides LED lighting solutions, and is one of the best sign men in the business. Welcome, Ken.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, I have you down for a second introduction, but I don't see that your guests have arrived yet. Shall we move on?

Ms Blakeman: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have two minutes per statement. Let us begin with Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville and then the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Renaye Wade

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Driving is a privilege. Driving requires our full attention at all times. Distracted driving because our attention is diverted somewhere other than the road ahead can be avoided. Sometimes we need more than a gentle reminder to pay attention and avoid what can result in tragic consequences. Sometimes we need people like Renaye Wade to be an advocate to find a way to encourage others to pay attention. A dancer and dance teacher with a dream of becoming a lawyer, Renaye suffered a severe brain injury and was left in a coma for 34 days as a result of a horrific traffic accident. She has had to relearn to eat, drink, sit, stand, and walk.

Over the past two years Renaye and her friends have endeavoured to raise awareness of safe driving practices. To that end, RADD was formed, Renaye Against Distracted Driving. Friends of Renaye have participated in parades. Renaye speaks to young people in school assemblies. I think she has about half a dozen speaking engagements in the next month, and most recently she has created a petition that calls for demerits for distracted driving. One day in Mundare last week I saw Renaye's petition on the counter at the Esso, on the counter at Stawnichy's, and I regularly see her on Facebook.

1:40

As Renaye's mom, Tammy, says: my daughter will never be one hundred per cent because somebody didn't pay attention in a moment; they were distracted, not focusing on the road. Renaye and her family do not want to see others suffer as she has. She is convinced that safer driving must be encouraged by adding demerits to distracted driving violations, and she is here today to support the MLA for Calgary-East and his private member's bill.

Sunday, March 15, marks the second anniversary of the accident that changed Renaye's life forever. You are all invited to the steps of the Legislature to join her as she marks this anniversary and for awareness for stiffer penalties for careless driving. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you and welcome.

Let us move on to the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Official Opposition

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three months ago I would have never dreamed of becoming the Leader of the Official Opposition. The outpouring of support from every corner of this province has been overwhelming and has brought me to tears at times. The one message I hear over and over again is, "Keep fighting; we're with you, and let's send a message to all Alberta that

we're roaring back," because – and let me be frank for a moment – Albertans are beginning to see for themselves that this Premier is just the same as the old Premier.

They have watched him break almost every one of the promises he's made. He has been running around the province like Chicken Little, floating trial balloons, threatening tax increases, illegal elections, and has damaged the economic growth in this province. He has talked down to Albertans, blaming them, telling them it's their fault and to look in the mirror, and Albertans are beginning to recognize that the ideas that the Premier has said he has brought forward have come straight from the opposition, whether it's the licence plates, selling the planes, keeping the Michener open, sole-source contracting, or outrageous cellphone bills at AHS.

After 44 years this government is out of ideas. Now, I know that pundits and others have been quick to write us off, but, folks, Albertans love an underdog story. The fact is that the Wildrose believes in democracy. Our values, our principles, and our ideas remain just as important and as badly needed as ever. We're conservatives, and we're not ashamed of it. We believe our health care system should be there for Albertans when they need it, that we have a world-class education system, and we treat all front-line workers in this province with respect. Unlike the Premier, who tried to swallow up the opposition in the dead of the night, we are a party that firmly believes in strengthening democracy, and we are the only party talking about protecting taxpayers from tax increases and stripping government down.

Let me end this with a message. While the actions of a few tried to stop us in our mission, we will never give up, we will never stop fighting, and we will be relentless in our goal to put Albertans first. Thank you to all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Fort McMurray Continuing Care Facility

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question that I'm most asked by the constituents of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is: when are we going to have a long-term care centre for the seniors in Fort McMurray? [interjections] This government has committed to investing in better seniors' care, focusing on long-term care beds, sprinkler and safety upgrades, and seniors' lodges.

As members of this Assembly are well aware, Fort McMurray has been advocating for more than a decade for its first long-term care facility. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm thrilled to say that it's coming soon. The Parsons Creek continuing care has just been retendered after previous bids came in significantly over budget. In order to create the most value, the design of Parsons Creek has been simplified while still maintaining 30 long-term care and 70 affordable supportive living beds. The site also allows for expansion in the future.

Mr. Speaker, those in Fort McMurray can rest assured that we are not about to put vital infrastructure needs aside because of the price of oil and that we're ready to build up. Shovels will be in the ground this construction season on a new, 100-bed continuing care centre. Once open, it will also serve to open up an entire floor of our hospital, enabling the renovation of space for other critical health care delivery for the entire region.

Our government recognizes that Alberta's seniors are a valuable part of our province and need strong programs to support their needs. Ensuring that our seniors are well cared for and well looked after is something that I am deeply committed to. With Parsons Creek continuing care opening, our seniors, those very Albertans that helped convert the oil sands from Canada's largest research and

development project to the engine of its economy, are now entering the sunset of their lives and will be able to spend their remaining years in the community they helped build. They will have familiar, homelike settings that provide an appropriate level of care, close to their families and friends. In addition to the continued twinning of highway 63, six new schools, and interchange work, this is a facility that I am truly proud will finally be constructed in Fort McMurray.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, please be reminded that it is not the custom of this House to interject when members are giving private member's statements or to raise points of order. So thank you for remembering that.

Edmonton-Calder, I understand you're going next, in place of Edmonton-Strathcona. Please proceed.

Government and New Democratic Opposition Policies

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This PC government has squandered our prosperity for far too long. They have neglected education, health care, and infrastructure in the good times and are only making more reckless damage now. They have weakened our most crucial public services and are now asking everyday Albertans to pay the price for mistakes the PCs made again and again and again. This short-sighted, panicked approach for slashing funding to our critical services will only make the problems worse down the road. Alberta has had a critical infrastructure deficit ever since the Klein era.

The PCs have lost sight of what makes this country great: publicly funded health care delivered by well trained front-line workers in modern, functioning hospitals; schools big enough to accommodate our booming student population and enough teachers to guide them through their education; and a variety of transportation infrastructure like safer highways and bridges and expanding public transit.

Alberta's NDP are focused on making things easier for Albertans, Mr. Speaker. While the PCs are out of touch with the needs of this province and are only concerned with priorities of privileged friends and insiders, we are concerned with the priorities of everyone. We are dedicated more than ever to making responsible, balanced choices that will build a more prosperous future for all Albertans. With a diversified economy, a taxation system where the wealthy pay their fair share, and a government that focuses on strengthening families and communities, Alberta's NDP will lead a bright, modern province that all Albertans deserve and need.

Thank you.

The Speaker: We have room for one more. Let's hear from Calgary-Southeast.

Social Work Week

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize Social Work Week, which took place last week, March 1 to 7. As a former social worker myself I am honoured to have this opportunity to acknowledge the great work done by my former colleagues and thousands of other social workers throughout the province.

This year's theme was the Art of Cultivating Communities. This is a very appropriate theme as social workers cultivate relationships by working together with schools, contracted agencies, nonprofits, and other organizations. Social workers are often called on to be empathetic, supportive, and patient while dealing with some of the

darkest moments in human life such as addiction, violence, child abuse, and end-of-life support, just to name a few.

As social workers cultivate relationships, they are required to be professional, persistent, and sometimes courageous. They often have to adapt to new situations to help Albertans feel supported and able to make important changes in their lives. Sometimes they are the unsung heroes behind some of the horrific incidents that we encounter. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, social workers are engaged in an incredible profession. They're in the business of changing lives.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Albertans to join our government in thanking those professionals for their exceptional commitment and compassion for serving Albertans. Through their efforts, they contribute to the quality of life of Alberta, making our province one of the best places to live, work, and raise a family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, my script said Calgary-Southeast; with apologies to the hon. member from that area.

Thank you, Calgary-Hawkwod, for your statement.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we begin the clock for Oral Question Period, I would like to advise members of some changes in the rotation to Oral Question Period and to Members' Statements that were necessitated by the changes in caucus membership that occurred in December 2014, while the Assembly was not sitting.

1:50

With respect to the Oral Question Period rotation I would draw your attention to the Oral Question Period rotation document that was placed on your desks yesterday. This rotation is the result of a new House leaders' agreement, which was reached on March 6, 2015, and it replaces the proposed question period rotation that was included in my memo to each of you on March 5, 2015, the memo that went to all members regarding procedures for the continuation, or what we call the procedural letter, for the Third Session of the 28th Legislature. I will table the agreement today at the appropriate time during the daily Routine.

The rotation of questions on day 1 through day 3 for questions 1 through 5 remains the same as it was on December 1, 2014, the last time the Oral Question Period rotation was modified. The Official Opposition retains the first three questions, while the Liberal opposition is entitled to ask the fourth question, and the ND opposition is allotted the fifth question on each of those days.

On day 4 of the rotation the Official Opposition may ask the first two questions, while the Liberal opposition is allocated the third question, and the ND opposition is entitled to ask question 4. The independent member may ask one question in the weekly rotation, and the fifth question on day 4 is reserved for that member.

In addition, the Official Opposition is entitled to ask question 8 on days 2 and 4 along with questions 12 and 14 on days 1 and 3 and question 18 on day 4. The Liberal opposition is allotted questions 6 and 10 each day, question 16 on each day except for day 1, and question 18 on day 2. The ND opposition is also entitled to ask question 8 on days 1 and 3, questions 12 and 14 on days 2 and 4, question 16 on day 1, and question 18 on day 3. The Progressive Conservative caucus is allotted questions 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, and 17 on each day of the rotation and question 18 on day 1. For the benefit of members and those following the ongoing proceedings today is Wednesday, but it is day 4 in terms of the rotation.

On another topic, very briefly, that being members' statements, the members' statement rotation has also been modified to reflect

the current caucus composition of private members in the Assembly. I have not received a House leaders' agreement amending the rotation for members' statements that was included in my March 5, 2015, memo to all members, and therefore that rotation will be followed as outlined. This week is week 1 of the four-week members' statement rotation, and it is otherwise also known as day 17 on the projected sitting days calendar.

Thank you for your indulgence.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Let us move on to Oral Question Period, starting with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

School Construction

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On school construction the Premier said: we cannot delay any further; we will get shovels in the ground. A few days ago the Infrastructure minister announced that 38 new schools are already under construction. Well, you know what? Sometimes they exaggerate, so we decided to go see if any of these actually have shovels in the ground. In Edmonton not a single one, not even close. In fact, most of them remain empty fields. So I'll ask the Premier again: why did the Infrastructure minister tell Albertans that schools are under construction when they're not?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should be, I think, responsible with her statements to Albertans since schools are important and people care about these. Of the phase 1 schools that were announced in 2011 – there were 35 such schools – 30 of them are now complete. In terms of the phase 2 schools that were announced in 2013, 38 of the 120 schools are under construction. So this is the largest construction of school infrastructure that has taken place in our country. We will get it done on time and on budget, and the hon. member should recognize that.

Mrs. Forsyth: What I do recognize is that the 2011 government is the one that you say you didn't like, didn't want to have anything to do with it.

When most Albertans hear "construction," they expect maybe some shovels, maybe some hammers, some nail guns, but not empty fields. In Edmonton alone there are empty lots at Windermere, Terwillegar Heights, Lewis Estates, Lewis Farms, Summerside, Blackmud Creek, and Bishop David Motiuk, nothing but snow and ice. In Calgary at the Auburn site, nothing but grass. Albertans know what construction looks like, but I'm beginning to wonder if your government knows what it looks like. To the Premier: when are you going to stop playing politics with our . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, we have no intention of playing politics with schools. They are far too important for the children of our province. You'll be pleased to know that this week we are opening two new schools, one in Chestermere and one in Airdrie, and this is a continuation of our commitment from phase 1, phase 2, and phase 3, 230-some projects. They will all be built as the Premier said, on time and on budget. That's our expectation.

Mrs. Forsyth: No, they won't, Minister. Pinocchio.

Let's be clear, Minister. At Lewis Estates we did meet a worker who was unloading some fence. When asked if any of these schools were under construction, he replied: nope. Now your Infrastructure minister has said: schools will be built; they'll be built within the

time frame. Well, guess what? The Edmonton public school board themselves are saying that we'd be lucky to have any schools ready for 2017. The fact is that this is nothing more than PC electioneering and empty promises. To the minister: why is your government misleading Albertans on how many schools have shovels at them?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many times we have to tell the member opposite the statistics, that are very clear. In phase 1: 35 school projects with 30 of them completed, four under construction. In phase 2: 120 projects with a number of them in design, a number in tender, a number in construction. In phase 3: 57 projects. Our target is to open schools in '16 and in '17 and five high schools in 2018. I can't think of a better scenario for the children in our province.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second main set of questions, hon. leader.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Minister, you and I are going to go for a drive.

Health Care Funding

Mrs. Forsyth: This morning the government announced that it's taking action on health care for Albertans. Interesting timing. Emergency rooms in Edmonton and Calgary will be renovated at a cost of \$50 million over two years, but here's the catch. Apparently, it's all depending on detailed planning. Now, this sounds oddly familiar to the government's school strategy. Make an announcement, put up a sign, and walk away. Minister, Albertans are tired of empty pre-election promises. If you haven't done the detailed planning, how can you possibly announce that . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're moving ahead as quickly as possible on these plans. You can fast-track with creative people, get things done in a very expeditious way. We plan to move through our redevelopment of our emergency rooms because they're needed, and it will be done in a reasonable length of time because this government wants to see projects move ahead quickly.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Minister, whatever you do, don't get the Infrastructure minister because he doesn't move very fast.

Minister, you claim to be taking action, yet the transition beds you announced today won't even be built till next fall. We've seen how this government's promise evolves over the span of just one week, let alone half a year. Albertans aren't buying it. Last week an entire surgical ward was closed at the Peter Lougheed and nurses were laid off. The spin of this, of course, was that the beds were being converted into transition units for seniors. Good news. But if you're waiting for surgery, well, I guess that's too bad. Where are the 36 surgical beds going to be?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to maintaining their promises. Last fall we committed to 750 new long-term care beds, of which 466 would be available this year, and we will have 303. As to the surgical beds Peter Lougheed is in a position to deliver those services, but they're using some of the facilities for restorative care, which is a really important part of making sure our citizens are taken care of.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, we didn't get where the surgical beds are, so let's try this. It seems like only a few weeks ago the Premier stood up and pronounced to Albertans that there was no more money.

Zero. Nothing. Zilch. Now it seems, on the eve of an election, that the government does have money: money for schools, money for hospitals, money for seniors' beds, money for anything and everything that Albertans need. Now, we've seen this game before. You promise the world, you call an election, and then you break your promise. Premier, one minute there's no money; the next minute, there's millions. Where's the money to pay for these pre-election promises? Show us the money, Premier.

2:00

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the hon. member to stay tuned, and she will in due course see a fiscal plan and a budget and a financial plan that takes this province forward. We've been very clear, both the Minister of Finance and myself, that we will firstly maintain the quality of front-line services to Albertans because that is what Albertans want. We've also been very clear that we intend to get caught up and continue to build the social capital that we need in this province. That is what Albertans have expected from this government, and that's what we will deliver.

The Speaker: We're moving on to Calgary-Mountain View for your questions.

Childhood Immunization

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier and the Education minister helped Alberta take a progressive step forward by finally agreeing to an idea which seemed radical to them at the time but proved to be the right thing to do. I want to give them the same opportunity today. For years public health officials have been telling us that school vaccinations are the best way to protect Martha and Henry's grandchildren, make them healthy, and ensure that our communities are protected against preventable disease. Will the Premier show the same leadership today as he did yesterday and make vaccines mandatory in all schools in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, member opposite and Mr. Speaker. This is an issue that is of concern to Canadians. We have seen the importance of vaccinations over the generations. I have experienced that personally, as I'm sure all members have. We would want to ensure that children are vaccinated; I think that's very important. We would want to have consultations with people across the province if we were going to consider the proposal that the member opposite is bringing forward today.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Public Health Agency of Canada also strongly recommends that children be vaccinated as it not only protects the individual; it protects all the people in their circle. Vaccines save lives. All 50 U.S. states and three Canadian provinces require proof of vaccination or an exemption for enrolment in school. Clearly, other jurisdictions are being progressive on the issue, but Alberta is still lagging far behind. We can change that today. Will the Minister of Education commit to making Martha and Henry's grandkids safer by requiring proof of immunization when a child is registered for school? Yes or no?

Mr. Dirks: I thank the member opposite for the question. Vaccinations do save lives, and they are very important for our children and for our grandchildren, so we want to ensure that children are vaccinated. I take very seriously the member's proposal. We would want to, as I said, consult with school boards,

with parents, with Albertans to see what might be the way forward on this particular matter.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, please.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, only about 72 per cent of children by their second birthday have received the appropriate vaccinations. Alberta Health Services' own goal is 98 per cent. It's understood that not everyone can get vaccines due to medical and other conditions, so bona fide exemptions are understood and accepted. Again, this time to the Minister of Health: given that this would clearly help your department achieve its benchmarks, which we all know has been a major challenge, will you implement mandatory vaccinations for school attendance?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We concur with the Minister of Education. We'd be glad to work with all the institutions to try to find ways to ensure that all our children are vaccinated. It's important. But there are rules and regulations that we must follow and parental positions we must listen to.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, leader of the ND opposition, followed by the independent member.

Health Care Funding

(continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last weeks I've released documents showing a crisis in Alberta's emergency rooms. On one day in September every emergency room in Calgary was so packed that critically ill patients arriving at emergency room doors were not receiving life-saving care in the way Canadian standards demand. Meanwhile this government is telling Albertans to expect a 9 per cent cut to services. To the Premier: why won't you at least admit that your plan to cut 9 per cent out of health care will make the problems deeply, deeply more difficult?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I think it's vitally important to understand that this government is committed to making sure that front-line service is delivered in a most expeditious way. Our emergency departments in the two major cities have had some challenges. But you know something? We have some incredible people working there, who are working through the challenge they face. As you know, this year has been a big problem with the flu season. I believe it's over now. It should take some pressure off the system, which will allow it to be more efficient. Today we announced some changes, and we can talk about those after.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was at that announcement, but I will say that renaming existing hospital beds isn't actually opening new beds. As for the \$50 million that the Health minister announced today, it kind of pales next to the 9 per cent cut. Indeed, a 5 per cent cut to AHS is almost a billion dollars, 20 times more than what you announced today. So if the Premier thinks that his announcement of \$50 million today can help the front line, exactly how does he expect Albertans to believe that a cut 20 times that size will not hurt the front line?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, the intent of this government is to run an efficient, effective government. Our health care system is one of the best in the country. There are ways in which we can do things

more efficiently, more effectively. There are metrics at which we can do more and be more efficient. The \$50 million today is going to open up opportunities in several emergency rooms to begin to expand their ability to deliver services to Albertans as well as to encourage more mental health capacity for the systems. This government is committed to helping every single individual who needs emergency help.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, five years ago this PC government had another celebratory press conference, where they announced that by 2015 they would ensure that 90 per cent of ER patients are admitted within eight hours. Well, the facts tell a different story. Last week the average number of patients in Calgary and Edmonton ERs admitted within eight hours was 34 per cent. Not 90 per cent; 34 per cent. So five years and you're at one-third of your target. Again, to the Premier: why should Albertans trust your government to manage health care at all, let alone trust you to cut 9 per cent without . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, today's announcement of \$50 million will go a long way in helping to improve that. The Premier's announcement in the fall – we're beginning to build more long-term care beds, of which we announced 750; 466 in the short term. We have improved and have put over 300 people in those long-term care beds. As I said earlier, the Minister of Seniors is going to announce tomorrow the ASLI program. We're making tremendous strides in trying to move forward, making sure that Albertans can move through our emergency system but also through our acute-care system.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Changes in Caucus Affiliations

Mr. Anglin: Last December the leader and House leader of the Queen's loyal opposition organized the greatest betrayal of the public trust in parliamentary history. They made use of their positions to influence or otherwise coerce members of their own caucus in a treacherous mutilation of an effective, elected opposition. To the Premier: when you first learned of the proposed offer to merge with the Wildrose Party and the now reconstituted offer to cross the floor en masse, did you at any time advise, consult, or otherwise inform anyone that this was or could be unethical?

Mr. Prentice: Well, there's a collection of language there that, if not unparliamentary, is certainly incendiary, Mr. Speaker. Let me just say that I'm proud of the Progressive Conservative caucus. I'm proud of the people who comprise that caucus. They are, without exception, decent, honourable people who come to work every day trying to do the right thing by Albertans, and I'm proud to call them my colleagues.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. independent member, let's watch our language a little bit here if we could, please. Let's hear what you have for your first supplemental.

Mr. Anglin: I didn't see a point of order, Mr. Speaker, but I'll be cognizant of that.

Before or during negotiations that effectuated the single most treasonous act in parliamentary history, did anyone known to you entertain, discuss, consider, or otherwise debate any offers or

requests for cabinet appointments for these corrupt members proposing to cross the floor?

Speaker's Ruling Intemperate Language

The Speaker: Hon. member, I fail to see how that elevates the level of decorum or debate in this House. Personal attacks are not in question here, please, and they're not in order either. I don't need a point of order to rise and ask someone to retract or refrain or restrain. I'm going to ask if anybody over here wants to offer a comment to that question. If they don't, we'll move on to your final supplemental, which I hope you'll glance at quickly and clean up, if nothing else.

Anybody wishing to respond?

I see no one wishing to respond, so let's hear what you have for your final supplemental.

2:10

Mr. Anglin: Mr. Speaker, I think the public deserves an answer to that question.

To the Minister of Justice: as a member of the cabinet and as a member of the Alberta bar, upon learning of the proposed floor crossing under discussion here, did you at any time advise, consult, or otherwise inform anyone that what was being proposed was or could be unethical?

Mr. Denis: I believe this member is asking for a legal opinion, which I'm not privy to.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let us move on. Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Sexual Health Education Curriculum Content

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Education and I helped the province take a very progressive step forward, and today I'd like to encourage him to come hand in hand with me and take another very progressive step forward by mandating the teaching of consent to young people as part of the school curriculum. Now, consent is fundamental in educating young people on the importance of individual rights, reinforcing gender equality, and reducing sexual violence, especially amongst females. To the Education minister: will he follow best practices and commit to putting the teaching of consent into the sex ed curriculum?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, we certainly want students to learn about healthy lifestyles, relationships, and wellness. Teachers already have the flexibility to discuss topics related to sexual health, including sexual consent, and we encourage them to tailor class discussions and projects to current issues and to student interests. Human sexuality education is currently offered in grades 4 through 9 in the mandatory health and lifestyles program. We're presently engaged in a curriculum review, and we welcome all school boards, parents, and other education stakeholders to share their perspective on the matter of sexual consent.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. I know that the curriculum is certainly about healthy and respectful relationships, but does the minister really think that being taught healthy and respectful

relationships is going to empower kids to know their rights and to keep predators away? This is really important.

Mr. Dirks: Well, I'm sure the member opposite would agree that healthy lifestyles, relationships, and wellness include understanding issues pertaining to sexuality, and that's why we have some of those elements in our curriculum. As I indicated, we are presently engaged in a broad review of our curriculum, and we welcome all school boards, parents, and other education stakeholders to share their perspectives on the matter of sexual consent.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thanks, but it doesn't teach consent. Date rape for high school and university students is way too common, and it happens because kids find themselves out of their comfort zone and not able to deal with the situation. So why can't the government help these kids by allowing consent to be taught as part of sex education?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll simply reiterate what I said, that we are in a curriculum review. It's a broad curriculum review of all aspects of Alberta's curriculum, kindergarten through grade 12, and we welcome school boards and parents and other stakeholders and the member opposite, if she'd like to get involved, to share their perspective on the issue of sexual consent during this curriculum review.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Postsecondary Education Access

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a world-class education system and universities. However, many of my constituents are concerned that access to advanced education is making it difficult for students to enrol in programs they are qualified for, particularly engineering, science, and medicine. Alberta already has the lowest involvement in postsecondary institutions in the country, and they fear that additional barriers may impact this further. My question is to the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. What is the minister doing to accommodate Alberta's students that fully meet the entry requirements . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much. I would like to begin by saying thank you to this member for being such a strong advocate for Alberta's postsecondary students. Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to a system that is achieving accessibility, excellence, and sustainability. Accessibility will be a key part of our postbudget discussions that I'll be having with all of our Campus Alberta partners. In spite of the enrolment challenges, nearly 9 out of every 10 qualified students receive an offer of admission following their applications. We also have a number of delivery options for those who don't receive their first choice.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Young: Given the funding that Alberta taxpayers contribute to universities, our Alberta students may not receive priority for program spots. What is the minister doing to serve these Alberta students before out-of-province and out-of-country learners?

Mr. Scott: Again, Mr. Speaker, Campus Alberta institutions are responsible for setting their individual entrance requirements.

Accessibility for Albertans will be a key part of our postbudget consultation across Campus Alberta. Accessibility for Albertans is important. We also need to keep attracting the best young minds from across the world to Campus Alberta. Let me tell you why they apply to Campus Alberta. In a recent ranking of 2,000 elite universities the University of Alberta ranked 84. Amongst universities younger than 50 years old the University of Calgary ranked 13th in the world and number 1 in Canada.

Mr. Young: Given Alberta's low participation rate why aren't there more grants, student loans, and bursaries available for students who wish to attend postsecondary institutions in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you. Accessibility is a priority for this government, and I'm proud of our record. We invest \$234 million in student aid supports. That includes scholarships, bursaries, grants, and debt management programs. In addition, \$408 million is available through student loans. Any Albertan who's eligible for a loan receives one. Our graduates are successful, and they're successful paying their loans back. We expect that 90 per cent of our student loan dollars issued this year will be paid back, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Stony Plain.

Michael Stanley

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you. In 2013 I asked the Minister of Justice why he did not work harder to put convicted rapist Michael Stanley behind bars. I said that he was at a high risk to reoffend and that we had a moral obligation to put him in prison to keep others safe. The Justice minister disagreed and let Stanley roam free to hunt for his next victim, and recently he found her. Stanley raped a 69-year-old lady in Seattle. Does the Justice minister still think it was the right decision to let this piece of scum roam free?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I'm a little bit confused. Does this member want me to spend taxpayers' dollars to bring a convicted sex offender back to Alberta? As far as I'm concerned, this man is outside of Alberta, and he can stay out.

Mr. Saskiw: According to the King county sheriff's office Stanley is being held on \$1 million bail. At least somebody is doing the minister's job for him. Imagine that: keeping a criminal behind bars. In fact, despite acknowledging Stanley's violent record, the minister's department said that the charges he was facing, and I quote, do not typically warrant engaging the extradition process. Minister, he broke our laws. There should be consequences. Why did you let him go free?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, there were no outstanding charges against this individual in Alberta for any violent offences. I say again that this man is out of Alberta as a convicted sex offender, and he can stay out.

Mr. Saskiw: Apparently it's okay if the person gets raped outside of our country.

Given that it has been reported that Stanley has been in and out of jail since the minister let him free, including an arrest where he had to be subdued with a taser in a nursing home, and now he's being charged with raping a 69-year-old lady, does the minister still think it was the right decision to let him roam freely, or will he

commit today to our suggestion to alter Alberta's extradition policy immediately so this won't happen again?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, it has just come to my attention that this matter still might be under sub judice elsewhere.

Mr. Denis: This is before the courts in the United States.

The Speaker: Thank you. Well, then let's have that clarified and move on. Thank you.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Saskiw: Point of clarification.

Corporate Taxation

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the past few weeks I've met with groups and individuals in my constituency of Stony Plain. They have provided me with valuable feedback regarding what they believe should be included in Budget 2015. Some of the many topics we've covered include arguments for and against the reintroduction of health care premiums; the pros and cons of introducing a sales tax, a progressive tax, et cetera; and raising corporate taxes. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Corporations have benefited tremendously from Alberta's resource-rich economy for decades. If we are all in this together, why are we not looking at raising corporate taxes?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like the hon. member, I've also been out listening to Albertans about our upcoming budget. The members know I can't talk about Budget 2015, but I think it's important to consider that given low oil prices, the slowing economy with slim to no margins, laying off employees, now is not a good time to raise corporate taxes. I also look at the forest industry that's now getting back on its feet. I look at the agricultural industry that's competing world-wide. Raising corporate taxes is not what we need right now. What we need to do is keep Albertans working and protect jobs. Raising corporate taxes would make Alberta a less attractive place to invest and would reduce our competitive advantage and discourage companies from investing . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's hear the first supplemental now, please.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we are facing a massive \$7 billion revenue gap in this year's budget, is there a strategy in place that would involve all Albertans, including corporations, helping to fill the budget gap while at the same time keeping Alberta competitive?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, both the Premier and I have said all along that as Albertans we're all in this together. Corporations are entities large and small made up of people who live and work, raise families, and pay taxes in Alberta. They donate to many social and sports organizations in our communities.

We live in a global economy, and capital is increasingly mobile. Investors prefer to put their money in places where their returns are taxed at lower rates. I would prefer they continue to invest in Alberta instead of other jurisdictions. We must remain competitive on the national and international playing fields.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how about raising corporate taxes in specific industries or sectors that have benefited the most from our low-tax system?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's well known that all Albertans benefit from our tax system. Currently if Alberta had a tax system like any other province, Albertans and Alberta businesses would pay at least \$11.6 billion more in taxes, something that the AFL suggests we might do. I don't believe that now is the time to raise corporate tax. We need to keep Albertans working and maintain our competitive advantage during this economic slowdown.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members to stay tuned for Budget 2015 and to support this government as we deliver a 10-year plan to get us off the roller coaster of oil prices.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, you raised a point of clarification at 2:20 regarding the Minister of Justice's comment about this matter being sub judice, and we will hear about that later. I'll be happy to clarify whatever the question is. I'm sure you know what sub judice is, but I'll hear you anyway.

Let us move on to Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Little Bow.

Health Facility Funding

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, during the last health care crisis this government announced 360 new beds to help relieve pressure on ER departments, but a few years later the transition unit at the Royal Alex was closed even as the wait times worsened. Today the Minister of Health announced the creation of another 300 beds in hospitals. Every crisis, every election the PCs promise more beds just to take them away afterwards. This is another expensive political Band-Aid. To the Minister of Health: why should Albertans trust that this will be any different given your government's pattern of broken promises?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, we did not promise 300-plus beds in hospitals; we promised 300 beds in a new kind of setting, which will allow people to move more rapidly through recuperation.

Ms Blakeman: So where is it? In the parking lot?

Mr. Mandel: It's under the new ASLI program.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, through the chair, please.

Mr. Mandel: Sorry.

The Speaker: No need to take the bait. Let's carry on with the answer.

Mr. Mandel: She's cute.

So we've continued to meet our promises. We did it in the fall. We're doing it now.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, of course, the real problem here is that we're trying to get people out of these institutions and into the community. When will this government build the needed public

long-term care beds and supportive home-care services so they're not getting into the hospitals and ERs?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we're doing. We're building facilities and having people move into these facilities so that they don't have to go into hospitals or, if they are in hospitals, they can recuperate quicker in the proper environment. These are long-term care facilities, and they will make sure that people move quicker through the system so they can be allowed to go home quicker or go into the proper care system.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Swann: This looks like more money for their private friends and donors. Will he guarantee that the ASLI grants will not go to private, for-profit care providers but will remain in the public system?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I take exception to that comment. I want to be clear that the announcement of this minister today is about restorative care for senior citizens. That should be of concern to every single person in this Legislative Assembly. These are restorative beds that will make sure that senior citizens who are ill are in the exact perfect circumstances they should be in and not in an acute-care bed in a hospital. It's compassionate, it means a lot to seniors in this province, and the opposition should support it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Rural Bridge Maintenance and Repair

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Transportation. Back in Budget '13-14 Alberta Transportation zero funded the strategic transportation infrastructure program, which contains local bridge file funds. Alberta rural municipalities demand access to the fund's engineering support and help in the repair and rehabilitation of these bridges in order to ensure the shortest, most direct routes for our products to market. What assurances can this minister provide rural municipalities that dead ends and long detours will not become the norm because the range and township roads are becoming unsafe?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for his questions and for always being such as a strong advocate for rural Alberta. First, I'd like to assure this House and all Albertans that there are no unsafe bridges in this province. My department monitors the conditions closely, and we take appropriate action when necessary if deficiencies are found.

Second, while it has been disappointing to see the STIP program zero funded these last few years, rural municipalities do receive significant provincial funding to address local priorities.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Donovan: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that rural municipalities already receive millions of dollars through MSI funding grants and they can set their own infrastructure priorities, should the government in Alberta be picking winners and losers when it comes to handing out funds for the local road bridge funding program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The local road bridge program is about helping rural municipalities keep up with the maintenance of bridges that don't fall under provincial jurisdiction. The funds are distributed fairly based on the number and condition of local bridges in a given municipality. Again, it has been disappointing to see STIP zero funded in recent years, but the hon. member is right when he points out that municipalities do receive infrastructure funding through the MSI program, the basic municipal transportation grant, and the gas tax fund.

Mr. Donovan: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: does Alberta Transportation have civil engineers able to provide in-kind assistance to municipalities for their bridge projects, or do municipalities have to waste their precious money on grant dollars to give out to engineering services?

Mr. Drysdale: In fact, Mr. Speaker, Alberta Transportation does provide technical advice for our regional bridge staff to municipalities when asked. While delivery of most bridge projects does require site-specific engineering designs, we do provide the appropriate guidelines and standards developed in partnership with AAMD and C. In most cases municipalities as well as Alberta Transportation have been using engineering consultants to assist in delivering bridge projects for the last 20 years.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Support for Postsecondary Students

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to ignore that student debt in this province is at record levels and that Alberta's tuition fees are amongst the highest in the country. This week the minister of advanced education announced that postsecondary students will now be able to pay off their loans using Aeroplan points. This is ridiculous. It would take almost 4 million points to pay off the average student debt. Will the advanced education minister agree to take real action to reduce the financial burdens of postsecondary education on students and their families, or will he continue to offer silly and ineffectual solutions that do nothing?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, let me put some facts on the table about how this government supports our postsecondary students. Alberta universities obtain almost 58 per cent of their operating revenue from government funding. This is 5 per cent higher than the national average and 16 per cent higher than Ontario. Tuition from Alberta university students accounts for a lower proportion of operating revenues, 30 per cent, than other provinces such as Ontario, where it's 50 per cent, and British Columbia, where it's 41 per cent. Alberta invests in our students. Our latest numbers show that Alberta has the third-highest expenditures for full-time students in Canada.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that Alberta has the lowest postsecondary participation rate in the entire country and given that this government appears to want to do nothing to reduce actual costs to students but everything to increase the ways that they can pay, to the minister of advanced education: what is your government's next big plan to increase participation in our postsecondary system? Will it be gift cards from Holt Renfrew?

2:30

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, I'm uncertain why that member would criticize giving students an additional way to pay off their student loans. You know, we want to give innovative ways to pay student debt. That's exactly what we're doing. I spoke earlier about the steps we're taking to make postsecondary education more accessible. We're going to continue that work. Nine out of 10 students who apply to postsecondary institutions get an offer of admission. The record speaks for itself.

Mr. Mason: Well, maybe the minister can get a deal with Tim Hortons.

Given that few students that I know have thousands of Aeroplan points, certainly not those from families of modest means, and given that while some might be inclined to think this announcement is a joke, for those students unable to achieve their dreams, it's not funny at all, Mr. Speaker. Will this minister please knock off the goofy announcements and get serious about making postsecondary education affordable for all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Scott: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Alberta ranks second in terms of providing student loans to cover basic education and living costs. Any student who's eligible for a student loan receives it. We expect this year that of the student loans we issue, 90 per cent of those student loans are going to be repaid. In 2013 and 2014 approximately 60,000 students received \$775 million in federal and provincial loans and grants through Student Aid Alberta. Alberta students also benefit from scholarships and awards. We provided approximately \$72.5 million in 2013-2014 to over 37,000 students.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let us move on to the hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Apprenticeship Training

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The piping industry training program, or PIT, is an excellent training facility to provide training and upgrading to apprenticeships and journeypersons throughout our province. I had the honour of visiting this facility last winter and was particularly impressed by two programs. One is targeting high-risk dropout school kids, and the other is for aboriginals. Those both are vulnerable populations, as we can appreciate. My question is to the hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. Given the current fiscal climate many Albertans...

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. A number of our Campus Alberta postsecondary institutions are actively involved in preapprenticeship training, providing knowledge and skills to individuals interested in pursuing a career in the trades. In addition, I'm very pleased to say that Innovation and Advanced Education supports several organizations such as Women Building Futures and Careers: the Next Generation, that actively work to increase awareness and prepare Albertans to enter into the trades. My department continues to investigate options where we can increase support for programs and partners that help Albertans begin a career in the trades.

Mr. Luan: To the same minister: given that Trade Winds to Success is a program helping aboriginal folks, as you mentioned, has your ministry provided any financial support to this program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Trade Winds to Success is definitely a valuable program, supporting aboriginal Albertans in pursuing a career in the trades. Human Services has provided funding to Trade Winds, and the breakdown is as follows: in 2011-12 it's \$231,303; in 2012-2013 \$492,525; in 2013-2014 \$626,462; in the last year \$246,183. We're continuing to work with Aboriginal Relations, Human Services, and Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour to explore funding options.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Luan: To the hon. Minister of Education: given that the program partners with CBE and has helped at-risk youth, is your ministry in any way or shape supporting this program?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, we're committed to providing our youth in Alberta with every opportunity to succeed in our job market and to gain experience, valuable hands-on learning. It's important. Our provincial dual credit strategy enables students to earn credit for both high school and postsecondary at the same time so they can explore their passions and career options. Of course, we have the registered apprentice program as well, which is very successful in helping them work towards a high school diploma. We encourage our school boards to continue with postsecondary and business and industry partners to provide our Alberta students with great learning opportunities through these initiatives.

School Construction

(continued)

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Minister of Infrastructure how many school construction projects the PC government had misled Albertans about, to which he did not provide an answer. Today we've learned of empty, snow-covered fields where, the government told us, construction was already under way. I guess I'll have to direct my question to the Minister of Education. When will you come clean and give accurate information about the status of these new schools?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many times my colleague or I have to stand in the House and provide the accurate information, which we already did again today: 230 school projects, creating about 78,000 new student spaces. We are moving forward on the tranche 1 and 2 and 3 projects. We're opening a couple of schools this week. Schools are being built, or they are in design phase or in permitting phase. The earthmovers are moving, the shovels are going in the ground, and the member opposite will see that these schools will be built on time and on budget.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pounding a sign in the ground does not count as under construction.

Given that the update the Minister of Infrastructure gave Albertans on Monday stated that 115 new schools will be opened by the fall of 2016 and given that school boards are telling us there is no chance many of these new schools will be open by the fall of 2016, how can you possibly tell Alberta families that you're going to open these schools on time?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, all you have to do is look at the projects that we are working on right now and see that we are making considerable progress on those towards our deadlines, and the fact that we're opening two new schools later this week is a prime example of our commitment to meet our guidelines and meet our goals and meet our commitment to the children of Alberta.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta needed new schools years ago and given that students have had to learn in makeshift classrooms or ride the bus for hours each day to get to school and given that parents and families are tired of waiting, to the Minister of Education: do you actually think that misrepresenting the progress on new schools is going to hide your incompetence for very long?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, last week I was in Lac La Biche, and we opened a new school. Previously I have been in Airdrie, and we opened a new school. We're opening a new school in Chestermere later and in Airdrie within the next week. These are indications of: promise made, promise kept. We're committed on 232 school projects for the children of Alberta. That is visionary leadership.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Temporary Foreign Worker Health Coverage

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maria Venancio is a temporary foreign worker. She came to work at McDonald's and, while going to work, got hit by a car and was rendered quadriplegic. Now she is being deported, and she has no health care coverage at all. To the Minister of Health: why won't Alberta Health provide Maria with health care coverage so that she can get her badly needed medical treatment while awaiting her immigration procedures?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My heart goes out to the individual. It's very sad when situations like this occur. While I cannot speak about the specifics of this particular case, I can tell you that Alberta Health Services will provide emergency care to anyone who is in the province of Alberta, even an individual that does not have an Alberta health care insurance plan. But, like all provinces across the country, we don't do that if you're not a resident. So we need to look to another order of government – maybe it's the federal government – to do the kinds of things they need to do to put proper insurance in for these foreign workers.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the difficult position the minister is in. However, will he then raise this issue with his federal counterparts in Health and Citizenship and Immigration, knowing that Maria is not the only person who doesn't require emergency care but simply needs ongoing medical care while she is awaiting her deportation procedures?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I will do all I can to ensure that this individual gets adequate health care within the province of Alberta with the support of the federal government.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. Mr. Speaker, again, this minister's hands are somewhat tied, but will he raise this issue with his counterparts in Citizenship and Immigration, making sure that this doesn't happen to anybody else, as in this case McDonald's Canada did not provide Maria with her short-term and long-term disability insurance as they should have according to the labour market opinion?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

2:40

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member talks about a case where I think we all feel compassion for the individual. As he rightly points out, this is a federal program. There's a compassionate-care clause within the federal government, as the hon. member says. I'll be happy to connect with him and try to connect the individual with that compassionate-care clause, and we can also talk to the federal government to see if there are improvements that we can make to their program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Energy Industry Environmental Issues

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. We're all hearing about pipeline spills and leaks and the danger to the environment from that. I'm really curious because between 1996 and 2012 over 9,000 environmental incidents occurred, with over 4,000 of them in clear violation of regs and directives. For example, with CNRL's Primrose, the public still doesn't know how this leak began, if it has stopped, and how much bitumen has leaked. To the minister of the environment: why does this ministry have such a bad record on identifying environmental violations and in ensuring compliance?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. As part of our integrated resource management system, that this government has put in place, we take environmental performance very seriously. While one incident is one too many, Albertans expect that the development of our resources is done in a responsible manner. We have the Alberta Energy Regulator in place, that is informed of any of these incidents and performs an investigation to understand why these incidents have happened and what the appropriate action is to take place. What is important is that with any of these incidents, the companies are responsible for the cleanup.

Ms Blakeman: Now, Mr. Minister, the AER's investigations are very limited.

Back to the same minister: how can the minister defend any record when industrial self-reporting has failed so spectacularly on openness and transparency, with 4,000 examples of environmental violation?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, as I reiterated, we need to make sure that our resources are developed in a responsible manner. Albertans expect, when we develop our resources, that the environment is top of mind in how we do that, and certainly our customers expect that as it relates to products that we sell outside of Alberta. What is important is that we have a regulatory system in place, that when these incidents occur, we have an independent, arm's-length body that goes in and does the investigation to determine exactly what is the cause of those incidents.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Back to the same minister, then: given that there is an entire program to compensate farmers for cows that have been killed by predators like grizzlies or wolves, what is the compensation program to Albertans when muskeg or wetlands are ruined and the entire ecosystem dies, as recently happened at the Murphy Oil site? How do we get compensated?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, again, I want to reiterate that we care deeply about the environment and any incident that takes place. We have appropriate rules and regulations, some of the strictest in the world, when it comes to these sorts of things. As I said in my first comment, any environmental damage that is caused by these incidents is the responsibility of the producer to make sure that it is cleaned up and remediated back to its original condition. It is a polluter-pays model, and those regulations are in place.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. The time for question period has concluded.

In 30 seconds from now we'll continue with Members' Statements, and we'll hear from Edmonton-Riverview.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

University of Alberta Research Chairs

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely proud to rise today to speak about the research chairs at the University of Alberta. These chairs are not about a place to sit down; in fact, these chair holders are driving leading-edge research, and they're not doing it alone. Each of these chairs results in many postdoctorate researchers, graduate students who are advancing innovation and their own expertise. The University of Alberta, through partnership with the National Research Council, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, in partnerships with the government of Alberta's Alberta Innovates – Bio, Health Solutions, Technology Futures, and Energy and Environment Solutions – along with industry associations and individual businesses, has been able to pursue exceptional research, development, and commercialization. The patents, spinoffs, business, and innovation that's implemented are impressive to say the least.

The partnership that supports these industrial research chairs attracts and retains the best minds and the world's brightest talent at the University of Alberta. These funding agreements for these chair positions certainly can be onerous, and they address issues of governance, finances, intellectual property. But the value of the co-operation in bringing together academics, research, innovation, and industry continues to produce impressive results. The University of Alberta has been allocated an impressive number of these chairs, each pursuing excellence in numerous highly competitive fields, including engineering, natural sciences, health sciences, humanities, and the social sciences. With these expert teams of researchers and the leading-edge innovation the University of Alberta students also benefit from the interaction of innovation, research, commercialization, and the development of the next generation of innovators.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Clerk: Notices of Motions.

The Speaker: Just before we go to Notices of Motions, I've had a request to revert to Introduction of Guests briefly. Does anybody object to giving consent to do that? If you do, please say so now.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce two young people who have joined us this afternoon. We always encourage people to come over to the House of the people here at the Assembly, so Dan Rose and Andrea Urbina, friends of many here in this Assembly, are here. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, you had a notice of motion that you wish to give.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice that at the appropriate time I'll be rising on a point of privilege concerning the fact that I believe that my ability to participate as a member of the independent Standing Committee on Legislative Offices was breached, the work of the committee was obstructed by actions which reversed a decision already made by the committee, and that a contempt of privilege has taken place.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 12

Common Business Number Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce Bill 12, the Common Business Number Act.

Our government is committed to ensuring that Albertans have a business-friendly environment through initiatives that reduce red tape and improve services for businesses. This bill is new legislation that will authorize Alberta to enter into a partnership with the Canada Revenue Agency to adopt a common business number identification system. The common business number is based on a one-business, one-number vision where businesses are provided with a single unique identifier that they use when dealing with any participating federal or provincial government programs.

Adopting the common business number in Alberta will enable our province to improve service delivery and simplify how businesses interact with participating provincial government programs. This will allow businesses to easily and accurately identify themselves using this common identifier already issued by the Canada Revenue Agency. Implementing this bill will position our government to modernize services, enhance the province's business environment, and support Alberta businesses to operate on a level playing field with businesses elsewhere in Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move pursuant to Standing Order 75 that Bill 12, the Common Business Number Act, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

2:50

Bill 13 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and request leave to introduce Bill 13, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015.

Alberta's waterways are in danger of imminent zebra and quagga mussel infestation, and it's imperative that our legislation reflect the seriousness of this threat. Bill 13's proposed amendments include mandatory boat inspection on major highways in the province; adding a controlled invasive-species list, including aqua-invasive species of concern; enhancing the authority of the law enforcement to ensure compliance with aquatic invasive-species prevention measures. These amendments will help protect Alberta's vulnerability to mussel infestation, which would have severe and far-reaching economic impacts across our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move pursuant to Standing Order 75 that Bill 13, Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Bill 14 Agricultural Societies Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to request leave to introduce Bill 14, the Agricultural Societies Amendment Act, 2015.

The proposed amendments will serve to modernize existing legislation and ensure that it is well aligned with the Societies Act. The amendments will also ensure that all agricultural societies have effective bylaws in place to maintain good governance while recognizing that large and small agricultural societies need to have flexibility in how they are structured to meet their individual needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a first time]

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

Bill 15 Securities Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce Bill 15, the Securities Amendment Act, 2015.

The proposed amendments will further modernize, harmonize, and streamline Alberta's security laws and relate to four topic areas: enforcement-related amendments, point-of-sale related amendments, amendments that support the continued harmonization of derivatives regulation, and housekeeping amendments of a technical nature. Ongoing review and regular amendments to Alberta's Securities Act are required to keep pace with industry developments and to support the ongoing reform of the Canadian regulatory system. The proposed amendments will ensure that Alberta honours its commitment under the 2004 memorandum of understanding to ongoing reform and to satisfy our international commitments in the ongoing harmonization of security laws and regulations across Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Bill 16 Statutes Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce for first reading Bill 16, Statutes Amendment Act, 2015, on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's legal system continues to evolve, and it's imperative that our laws are kept up to date. Bill 16 provides amendments to several acts to ensure that Alberta provincial legislation is clear and consistent. A number of amendments will also be approved to access justice and enhance services for Albertans. The bill includes amendments to a total of six acts: the Provincial Court Act; the Court of Queen's Bench Act; the Police Act; the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation Act; Land Titles Act; and Post-secondary Learning Act.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments follow the consultation with a number of stakeholder groups, including the judiciary, Alberta legal communities, and members of the public. These stakeholders support these changes.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move pursuant to Standing Order 75 that Bill 16, Statutes Amendment Act, 2015, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, I'm watching the clock as well. Let me recognize you.

Mr. Denis: Yes. I do have a couple of tablings, but I first would like to request unanimous consent of this Assembly that we continue with the Routine past 3 o'clock notwithstanding rule 7(7).

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Members, you've heard the motion. We have just a few items of business to tidy up. Unanimous consent has been asked for. If anyone objects to giving unanimous consent, please say so now.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Let me hear from the Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just have two tablings here. I first would like to table the appropriate number of copies of the Law Enforcement Review Board's annual report for 2015. The Law Enforcement Review Board is an independent body that is an appeal body for public complaints concerning police conduct. It also hears appeals from police officers who have been the subject of discipline arising from a complaint and peace officers who have had their appointments cancelled.

Secondly, I also have five copies of the Chair-Initiated Complaint and Public Interest Investigation into the RCMP's Response to the 2013 Flood in High River, Alberta, which I have read with interest.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Other tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of tablings today. The first one, that I am just so pleased and proud to table, is a document called *We Are Listening: Sparking Public Conversation on GSAs*. This report is a summary of what was said on January 31, 2015, at the event that took place at the Winspear Centre in Edmonton, Alberta. This was the GSA hearing or listening event that was sponsored by the Edmonton Social Planning Council, the City of Edmonton Youth Council, and Public Interest Alberta. So I'll table that for you.

The second is an open letter to the Alberta government, which is essentially an article from the *Red Deer Advocate* signed by Leeanne Willoughby from Benalto. She is writing with great concern about the wolf killings that are this government's bizarre way, I think, of dealing with some declining caribou populations: so we'll kill the coyotes. I'll just table that as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the five requisite copies of a sample of thousands of letters that were presented to the government of Alberta by some of my constituents in Leduc county. They're asking that a very dangerous intersection at highway 625 and highway 21 be improved and that it be made a top priority for the Minister of Transportation. I'm very pleased to support their efforts.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices and in accordance with section 19(5) of the Auditor General Act I'm pleased to table five copies of the report by the Auditor General titled *Report of the Auditor General of Alberta*, March 2015.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings here. Both of them are the articles that quote the Premier in the matter that we will deal with in short order with the question of privilege.

3:00

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I would take the liberty of making a couple of tablings myself. Hon. members, in my capacity as chair and pursuant to section 39(3) of the Legislative Assembly Act, I would like to table with the Assembly five copies of the following orders approved at the February 4, 2015, meeting of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services: one, the Executive Council Salaries Amendment Order 11, being Order 1/15, which took effect February 1, 2015; two, the Members' Allowances Amendment Order 29, being Order 2/15, which took effect February 1, 2015; three, the Constituency Services Amendment Order 29, being Order 3/15, which comes into force April 1, 2015; and four, the Members' Allowances Amendment Order 30, being Order 4/15, which came into force on April 1, 2014.

My second tabling, hon. members, is five copies of my letter, dated December 23, 2014, to the leader of the Wildrose and the leader of the Liberal opposition respecting the designation of the Official Opposition following the changes to caucus membership last December.

My third tabling is five copies of the House leaders' agreement signed March 9, 2015, regarding Oral Question Period rotation, which I referred to in my statement earlier this afternoon.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Denis, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, a book entitled *A Silent Cheer: Against the Odds* by Dr. Emily Roback and Faye Roback-Jones.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we'll move on to points of order here first. Let me begin, please.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: Before we get into points of order that were raised today, specifically one point of clarification, I want to address one point of order, that was raised yesterday, March 10, 2015, by the Official Opposition House leader, on which I promised a ruling once *Hansard* became available since the Blues were not available to me yesterday.

As a reminder, the Official Opposition House leader expressed concern that the Minister of Infrastructure had suggested that language used either by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview or someone was unparliamentary. In his argument, which is found at page 534 of *Alberta Hansard* for yesterday, the Official Opposition House leader noted that it was up to the Speaker to make the determination as to what is parliamentary language or not. While I appreciate the hon. member acknowledging the importance of the Speaker's role in that regard and, in fact, for other measures in this Assembly, this does not constitute a point of order, so we will move on.

Point of Clarification

The Speaker: Speaking of today's points of order, no points of order were issued, but a point of clarification was requested by the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, so I want to read something into the record. The Official Opposition House leader requested clarification under Standing Order 13(2) of my intervention during the Minister of Justice's response that a particular issue was in fact sub judice. The situation, as we all heard, is difficult since the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills' question referred to the Minister of Justice's actions with respect to an individual who is apparently facing serious charges in the state of Washington in the United States.

I let the main question go, and I let the first supplementary go, thinking that the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General might say something about the appropriateness of the question in the context of the sub judice rule. However, as members may know and might need reminding, the sub judice rule is codified in Standing Order 23(g). With respect to criminal matters the rule in the standing order applies

from the time charges have been laid until passing of sentence, including any appeals and the expiry of appeal periods from the time of judgment.

Quite specifically, 23(g) says:

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

(g) refers to any matter pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination.

And then it goes on.

I called the Minister of Justice to order with a question, which he responded to in the affirmative. I did not interrupt the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, who feels that I did, but I did not. It was the Minister of Justice that I intervened on and asked the question for clarification purposes because I must enforce the rule of sub judice, as you all know full well.

The rule itself, in fact, is a self-imposed rule by this Assembly to respect the judicial process, and nowhere is this restraint more important than when an individual's liberty is in jeopardy. While members enjoy freedom of speech in this Chamber, it is not in the best interests of justice for comments in the Assembly to interfere with an individual's ability to have a fair trial. I admit that the situation is complicated further when the person in question is in another country, but given the link that the member made to offences committed in Alberta and the charges that are now apparently laid in Washington state, I wanted to ensure that the rule was applied in this case, in this House, respecting the Standing Orders, to which we all have agreed. So that clarifies that.

I also would note in respect of the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills that he had requested that his point of clarification be withdrawn. But I wanted to make it clear because other people also asked me about it, so I put the comments on record, and I encourage you to read 23(g) so you'll have that knowledge.

Now we have a point of privilege. I believe that's the next item on the agenda, so let's hear from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, please, with that point.

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise on a point of privilege under Standing Order 15(2). It's based on the grounds that the independence of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices has been obstructed by actions outside our committee by members of the Executive Council.

Because the work done in that committee is vital to the independence of several officers of the Legislature and, as such, to their ability to properly ensure government is working in the best interests of all Albertans, the committee itself must be allowed to work independently of undue influence by external bodies such as the Premier's office or facets of the Executive Council. As such, any actions that bring the independence of this committee into question should be seen as impeding the independent work of the committee and impinging on the dignity and respect of members of the entire Legislature.

I'd like to briefly outline why it's necessary and appropriate to raise this point of privilege here today in the Assembly before moving on to an explanation of the facts of the case. Why is it necessary and appropriate to raise the question here? While I have also presented the case related to parliamentary privilege elsewhere to my fellow members of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, it's important to note the reasons why it is necessary and appropriate to raise the point of privilege in the House here to you, Mr. Speaker.

First, because of the method of addressing questions of privilege in the committee settings, detailed on page 149 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* as well as in your ruling as the chair of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services dated February 27, 2013, this case has not appeared before an authority empowered to decide whether it constitutes a prima facie breach of privilege. So while the chair of the standing committee has been empowered to determine whether the matter does touch on privilege, only in the House are we able to deal with matters of privilege, and only you, the Speaker of the House, is empowered to decide whether this constitutes a prima facie case.

Second, while there is no provision in the Standing Orders of the House that explicitly bars a member of a committee from bringing forward a point of privilege, there are precedents that this House will hear questions of this nature without such a report. I would call to your attention, for example, *Hansard* beginning on page 3166. On these pages we see that my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona brought forward a point of privilege quite similar to the one I'm raising today. Further, the aforementioned ruling that you made in your capacity as chair for the Members' Services Committee is silent on the question of whether or not a vote of the said committee is to report on a question of privilege.

Finally, as members of the Assembly our rights are derived from the standing orders that govern the proceedings of this place. We all have certain privileges that are bestowed upon us to allow us to freely and independently make decisions that we believe are in the best interests of Albertans, that have elected us to serve.

The facts are as follows, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday, February 10, both the office of the Child and Youth Advocate and the office of the Auditor General came before the committee to ask for additional funds for their annual budgets approved in December of 2014. At this meeting the request for additional funds for the office of the Child and Youth Advocate was declined, but the request for additional funds for the Auditor General was approved. The following day Premier Prentice and the Minister of Finance held a press availability, saying that this decision of the committee would not be respected, effectively overturning the decision made by the committee.

3:10

In regard to timeliness, according to the rules, the standing orders, privilege must be addressed at the earliest possible juncture. I believe this is the case here today.

Then, breach of privilege. *Erskine May* describes privilege as “the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively” and each member of the House individually, from page 75.

As you are aware, at the commencement of the first session of each Legislature a number of committees are established, and the origin of this committee goes all the way back to November 1977. To help to ensure the independence, this committee consisting of nine members was established on March 20, 1978, and so forth. As will be shown below, the tradition of the Alberta Legislature to date is to treat these committees as if they are populated by private members. As such, it is understood that members are free to consult with anyone, including their fellow caucus members, but also are free from partisanship or the influence of Executive Council.

There are numerous examples, Mr. Speaker, by which there have been rulings on the proceedings of the committee that cannot be directed or represented by the government. A good example is May 14, 1992, when the Speaker ruled out of order a question posed by a member pertaining to whether or not the Premier would agree to direct the proceedings of a Members’ Services Committee in a certain direction, and in the ruling the Speaker said, “The government cannot answer on behalf of the whole committee ... the government ... cannot direct what happens to all the committee.”

Again, on December 1, 2011, a question by the Liberal leader at that time asked the Premier about the decision to appoint Justice Major to evaluate MLA pay, and that was ruled out of order given that it was a committee decision to appoint a judge and, therefore, should not involve the Premier. The ruling there by the Speaker was: “That question is out of order. The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly appointed the panel as per the direction of the Members’ Services Committee.”

At the same time the Premier as well as numerous government ministers and MLAs have also maintained that the committees of the Legislature are independent. During the widely publicized choice of the Leg. Offices Committee not to renew the contract of a Chief Electoral Officer, at that time the Premier, Mr. Stelmach, was widely reported as saying that it was not his choice to get rid of this Chief Electoral Officer. On February 17, 2009, he said in the House, “Again, I don’t make the decision on the employment of the Chief Electoral Officer. ... He’s responsible and answers to the Legislative Offices Committee ... they make that decision.” The *Globe and Mail* quoted him at the time saying, “The decision was made ... by the all-party ... committee, and that’s what we live by.”

On April 23, 1992, the then Premier, Mr. Getty, maintained that the Premier has no influence over the Members’ Services Committee. He said:

I also can’t anticipate what the Members’ Services Committee is going to recommend to us. We don’t know. They ... recommend ... solutions, some proposals that none of the members here are currently contemplating. Those are things that I really appreciate. It’s an all-party Members’ Services Committee. I’m pleased that they are going to be meeting ...

and helping with the matter of MLA pay.

So there are lots of instances like this as well as the lack of precedents in parliamentary authorities. As I described, in the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* parliamentary privilege can be extended to both individuals and to the House as a whole. In regard to individual rights this includes, for example, freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation, and molestation. At the same time privileges extended to the rights and powers of the House include the ability to regulate its own internal affairs.

As seen above, the Legislature of Alberta has seen fit to establish special and standing committees of the Legislature to work in a way

that is independent. This concept of independence is especially held to be in the case of the Leg. Offices Committee given its power to make policy decisions on behalf of all MLAs. It could be said that the notion of independence of this committee, whereby the MLAs on the committee are expected to act as private members, has been accepted as a rule. As such, it could be argued that the dignity and respect of the House is on occasion hinging on the idea that these committees make certain decisions on behalf of all MLAs and not in the interests of the government.

On February 19, 2009, the Speaker also injected the following statements between the above passages:

Questions to the Ministry on legislation or on a subject matter that is before a committee, when appropriately cast, are normally permitted as long as the questioning does not interfere with the committee’s work or anticipate its report.

These procedures are in place to protect the work of committees and to maintain order in the House but have not been crafted in order to maintain how committees work without the influence of Executive Council and other political interference. However, they have been used in our Assembly to find that questions that allege the interference of Executive Council in committee were in fact out of order.

This raises an important question. While interference by Executive Council in the affairs of the Members’ Services Committee can be seen as an important issue, rules contained in parliamentary tradition detailing the parliamentary authority prevent us from asking a question along these lines in the Legislature. So this is a very important issue to look at.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, while the authorities may be limited in their ability to define and to take a measure to protect the independence of a committee, they do of course offer insight into the matter of parliamentary privilege and contempt. *Erskine May* states:

Generally speaking, any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency [even indirectly] to produce such results, may be treated as a contempt.

However, *Maingot*, second edition, also notes that “as a working rule it can be said that when an offence is not identifiable as a breach of known and enumerated rights and immunities, then the offence is a contempt of Parliament.” He goes on to describe how contempt is “described as an offence against the authority” of the House. *Maingot* also states that “disobedience to rules or orders represents an affront to the dignity of the House.”

So when the Premier gathered media to announce that a decision reached by our independent committee of the Assembly was to be immediately disregarded by this Executive Council and the government more widely, it is my contention that the Premier was acting in contempt of both the privilege of the Legislature and the individual privileges of the Members’ Services Committee.

With concern to the privilege of the Legislature, by immediately invalidating a decision already made by an independent committee, it brings into question the independence of the committee itself and, therefore, acted as an affront to the dignity and respect that should be afforded it. While it’s said that the agenda of a political party rules the day, inside the committee, as shown above, it is always maintained by the government that decisions are not government decisions.

With concern to the individual privileges of members the Premier can be seen to have interfered with and obstructed the work of every member of this committee. As an independent committee it should

be seen to involve honest and full debate before decisions are made on important issues.

As such, I respectfully request that you find that we have made a *prima facie* case of a breach of privilege and that you allow us the appropriate time to bring forward a motion to remedy this case.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I have the Government House Leader, followed by the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by the independent member, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Centre, and perhaps even Livingstone-Macleod. We've not consumed a huge amount of time, but that was approximately 14 minutes or so.

Let's get to the cut of the argument if you would, Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not known for my long speeches, and I won't go offside that reputation. There is a process for dealing with these points of privilege when they arise in committees of the Assembly, and this process can be found in Standing Order 65 and in a ruling which was given on February 27, 2013, at the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services.

As far as I'm aware of the process that was followed at their committee meeting on February 17, 2015, members of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices debated extensively on whether a possible point of privilege should have been referred to the Assembly. I have reviewed these documents today. If you don't have them, I'd be happy to pass them over to you as well as to the other members. The vote determined that it should not proceed, and it's my understanding that it closed the particular matter.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as you're well aware, more than me, there are many rules and precedents which allude to the fact that Assemblies should not spend time debating issues that have already been decided.

I also refer you in this vein, Mr. Speaker, to *Beauchesne's* 558, which says:

An old rule of Parliament reads: "That a question being once made and carried in the affirmative or negative, cannot be questioned again but must stand as the judgment of the House."

Those are the words of *Beauchesne's* and not the words of myself that I'm quoting.

I therefore would respectfully suggest to you that because a point of privilege on this issue was debated and voted upon by the Legislative Offices Committee, it is not appropriate for the Assembly to debate on that same point of privilege, it's been pointed out to me, the Latin term for that being *res judicata*.

Thank you.

3:20

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler is ceding his spot to the Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Strankman: Yes.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand and speak in support of the point of privilege raised by the Member for Edmonton-Calder. What we have here is a particularly bad example of disrespect shown to the Assembly as a whole and to the role of individual MLAs in particular. This is certainly not the first time that we've seen interference by the Premier's office in the functioning of a committee and government committee members who then appear to carry out the orders of the Premier. This is not the first time the House has faced questions about the independence

of committees, committees which always have a majority of government members.

In the past we have seen the appearance of interference in the hiring or firing of a particular officer of the Legislature. In one example from 2009 a member stated that the government had fired the Chief Electoral Officer. This resulted in a point of order, and the Speaker in his ruling explained that the decision to appoint someone else was clearly the decision of the committee. In his ruling the Speaker stated: "The committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly, not a committee of the government . . . If there's going to be misunderstanding about this, then why have these kinds of committees?" That can be found in *Hansard*, February 19, 2009.

Here are the facts of the point in question. On February 10, 2015, both the office of the Child and Youth Advocate and the office of the Auditor General requested additional funding for their annual budgets after 2 per cent reductions in December of '14. At that meeting the request for additional funds for the office of the Child and Youth Advocate was declined, but the request for additional funds for the office of the Auditor General was approved. Yet following the February 10, 2015, decision of the committee to approve the funding request of the Auditor General, the Premier and the Finance minister held a media availability and announced that this funding would not be extended.

The independence of all committees is important, but the severity of the issue is very clear. Here we are talking about the committee tasked with appointing the independent officers of the Legislature. These offices were established to watch the activities of the government, report on them, and make recommendations to the government. The announcement by the Premier shows that there's not even the appearance of impartiality when it comes to the budget of this office. This heavy-handed and shameless control of the budget of the Auditor General by the Premier is an insult to the dignity of the committee and the members who serve on it.

An issue about the independence of the Members' Services Committee also came up in 2012. In response to a question Premier Redford at the time said:

My understanding is that the work of that committee was to review the recommendations of the Major report. I understand that that's what they did, and I don't understand that it's my role to direct the members of the committee to do anything.

That's from *Hansard*, October 23, 2012, Mr. Speaker.

She went on to say:

Mr. Speaker, as you have so rightly said . . . this is not a committee of the government. This is a committee of the Legislature that at some point will make a decision that we as MLAs will consider . . . That's why we have a Members' Services Committee. It is the job of MLAs, not the government.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, the Official Opposition also had concerns about the composition of the committee at the time. We did not have a voting member on the committee, yet the committee business went ahead.

The Standing Committee on Legislative Offices is supposed to represent all parties and make decisions free from interference from the Premier's office. In this case neither happened. If decisions of the committee can be overturned by the Premier or announced in advance by the Premier's office, there is very little reason for these committees to meet. By immediately invalidating a decision already made by an independent committee, this government brought into question the independence of the committee itself. As we've seen, it has always been maintained by the government that decisions of the committee are not a government decision but that of an independent group of MLAs. By immediately reversing a decision arrived at by this group of MLAs, the Premier has interfered with the autonomy of this body to debate and make decisions.

Maingot, second edition, notes that “one of those matters of privilege is the right of the legislative body to control its internal affairs and proceedings free of interference from the Crown or executive, the courts or the public.” That’s on page 293.

To sum up, the Premier has interfered with and obstructed the work of every member of the committee in this case. This shows contempt for those members.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that you find in this action a breach of privilege. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I tabled earlier two documents quoting the Premier on this matter. One is dated February 12, from the *Edmonton Journal*, where the Premier is quoted as saying, “I respect the discussion of the committee but there will be no increase in funding to the auditor general’s office.” Then it goes on to say that “the committee is now expected to meet again next week,” leading a reasonable and prudent person to believe that some sort of instructions were given to tell that committee to go back.

Now, on the 18th of February in the Canadian Press the Premier is quoted. When asked if he was overturning the decision of the committee, he replied, “Yes.” He was overturning the decision of the committee.

Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of citations given to you, but I’ll point you to *Beauchesne’s*, page 3, which is just the overview talking about the principles that lie in the basis of English parliamentary law, where it talks about the opposition if the electorate so chooses is to have an opposition that is ready and willing – and this is the quote, so I’m not giving inflammatory language – “to protect a minority and restrain the improvidence or tyranny of a majority.” Now, what that states is that the role of the opposition has a very important position in our government to basically do its job in the best of the public’s interest. That has to be protected by our own rules of this House and parliamentary rules, which basically stipulate that these committees are independent.

It leads to another question here, which was raised by the member earlier, the one of contempt. We have a *prima facie* case here of the preponderance of evidence that the Premier basically is quoted as saying that he’s overruling the committee. He doesn’t have that authority. He has the authority – the government has the jurisdiction to come down with the budget. That’s their jurisdiction. But the jurisdiction of this committee is to make the recommendation, and the Premier doesn’t have the authority to overrule the recommendation. That’s a recommendation. That’s the independence of the committee.

Now, if the government doesn’t have the money in their budget, so be it, but they don’t get to tell that committee to go back and rescind a decision of the committee. There’s no such right of government to do that, and this is about the fundamental respect.

If you turn to page 83 in the *House of Commons Procedures and Practice* – I have the second edition in front of me – it talks about “while our privileges are defined, contempt of the House has no limits.” It gives the Speaker here a lot of latitude in making this decision, and it talks about “deliberately attempting to mislead the House or a committee (by way of statement, evidence, or petition).” Somebody here, by the preponderance of the evidence of a reasonable and prudent person, is not being clear or not telling the truth. Was this committee told to go back into a meeting to rescind its decision? Who misspoke? This is really important because we’re

still dealing with the very fundamental issue, in which I say the *prima facie* is made, that the Premier has interfered in the independence of the committee. The government has interfered, and they should be found in violation of that.

Going on further, it talks about this contempt being “interfering with or obstructing a person who is carrying out a lawful order of the House or a committee.” The opposition is carrying out that lawful order. The Premier or any member of the government does not have a right to interfere with the opposition members’ responsibilities on these committees.

3:30

In closing, the decision that is made here is not based on evidence that is beyond a reasonable doubt; it’s preponderance of the evidence. When you look at the evidence, it is basically saying that the Premier has an admission he’s overruling the committee, and then you have the contradiction between the chair of the committee and the Premier, that raises more questions. I would submit to you that a reasonable and prudent person would conclude there were some shenanigans going on here and that the committee was indeed ordered to go back to rescind the decision of the committee.

With that, I will leave that in your care to make a decision, but I believe that the government should be found in violation of the committee’s independence. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

We’ll have one final speaker, and that’ll be the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think everything that my colleagues previous to me have said is quite true and right, but, you know, I’m just looking at my crystal ball, and I betcha what’s going to happen here is that the government is going to get up and say, “Hey, those members of the government caucus could have gone in and made any decision that they wanted to, and they happened to make the one that the Premier was hoping they would make,” and this will all be dismissed as not a point of privilege.

But there’s something much worse going on here, and it’s really critical to the election, so I hope people are paying attention. This is what happens when there is a ginormous majority. We are in a position as opposition members right now where we can bring no issue to the floor or to a committee without the approval of a government Tory majority. Nothing. We can do nothing. We can’t get an agenda up on the issue. We can’t get something in front of a committee. Nothing. When you have majorities like this, the government has the power to be able to move forward and indeed make a declaration like the Premier did, that this was going to happen, and then sure enough it happens.

You know, can we directly prove that this all happened as a result of the Premier saying it? Well, no, because they will say: oh, each and every one of them made this decision independently. But we know this isn’t true. I’ve sat on these committees for 18 years. I see people come into the room with scripts that are written for them by the minister’s staff that tell them exactly what to say word by word. How is that independence? It’s not. It’s definitely – you know, they get their marching orders. I know that members get their marching orders to come in and do a certain thing. Otherwise, it’s magical, Mr. Speaker, that every single government member turns up and wants to see exactly a 2 per cent cut in every legislative officer’s budget, not 1.5, not 5 per cent but 2 exactly, every one of them. Magical how they all come up with that on their own.

Mr. Mason: It’s a miracle.

Ms Blakeman: It's a miracle.

I mean, I think this is contempt. I think it's contempt and disrespect for the parliamentary process, but unfortunately it is all completely legit. It is legitimate under the letter of our law, under our parliamentary process. That doesn't make it right, and I don't think the intent is being followed. Members of the government like to get up and say, "Oh, it was made by an all-party committee" as though all parties agreed in this. Well, no, there was one member of one opposition and one member of another opposition and nine members of the government caucus. So what was this, really? It was a government caucus decision.

I have often felt that if we really wanted to be representative, what we should do is have the membership proportion on any of these committees decided by the popular vote from the previous election, and that would give a bit more of a fair fight and a bit more fair representation on these committees. That, of course, is greeted with derision by my hon. members opposite, but I do think that we have a very imbalanced system right now.

It's going to be really important in this upcoming election that we end up with a lot of people in the opposition. Right now there are 14 of us trying to do the work that a few years ago was done by 30 members and the accompanying staff. It's a struggle for us to try and keep this government accountable. This is one of the examples that we face where everything gets skewed beyond what we would like to see, and it's all perfectly legit. But, you know, they get to make the rules, too, because they have the majority when it comes to making up the rules of the standing orders in the House.

So you can see how this all starts to contribute to a disrespect, frankly. I hope that we will see something different soon. I am ever optimistic. I should have my hair in ringlets I'm so optimistic. I could have the middle name "Pollyanna."

I thank my colleagues for bringing this issue up and for making the effort to look up all the detailed references. I am afraid you will be sadly disappointed, and that's why, because we have a very uneven House at this point in time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I've listened very carefully for over half an hour now to all the members who just spoke. I am prepared to rule on the purported question of privilege that was raised by the Member for Edmonton-Calder. As a reminder to all, a point of privilege, as we all know, is one of if not the most serious charges that can be brought by one member against another.

Now, with respect to the formalities the Member for Edmonton-Calder provided written notice to me in the Speaker's office at 12:59 p.m. on Monday, March 9, 2015, and that notice was copied to the House leaders of the other parties and also to the independent member. Therefore, the requirements of Standing Order 15(2) were met.

I would also like to point out that yesterday was a somewhat unusual day in that it proceeded in a manner that prevented the Member for Edmonton-Calder from giving notice of his purported question of privilege. The member, however, was very gracious in agreeing to let this matter proceed today, and I want to thank him for his indulgence in that regard. To be clear, there is no prejudice to the member's application arising from the rescheduling of the matter to today rather than having been considered yesterday because notice had been provided at the earliest opportunity.

It is my understanding that the same member raised a question of privilege on this very same matter during the February 17, 2015, meeting of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, of

which he is a member. I must say that I feel somewhat restrained in talking about what transpired during that committee's meeting since there is no report from that committee to this Assembly regarding the purported question of privilege. It is my understanding that while the chair of the Legislative Offices Committee found that the issue raised by the Member for Edmonton-Calder met the low threshold for possibly constituting a question of privilege, the committee declined to report the matter to the Assembly. So there will be no report on the matter for the Assembly to consider.

As members likely know and should know, members may raise matters concerning privilege as it relates to committees of the Assembly pursuant to Standing Order 65(3). The practice to follow is actually outlined on page 46 of the March 2014 version of the Practical Guide to the Committees of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

It is noted in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, at page 149 that

Speakers have consistently ruled that, except in the most extreme situations, they will only hear questions of privilege arising from committee proceedings upon presentation of a report from the committee which directly deals with the matter and not as a question of privilege raised by an individual Member.

Nonetheless, not knowing precisely where the presentations might want to be taken, I did allow several comments to be made.

I am very aware of the procedure that I've just referred to since in my role as chair of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services I faced a similar situation to the one just faced by the chair of the Legislative Offices Committee concerning a purported question of privilege. In fact, it is exactly the one before us at the moment. On February 27, 2013, I found that alleged interference in the work of the committee met the threshold for privilege, which led to the committee at the time voting on the matter. A motion to send the matter to the Assembly, however, was defeated, and that concluded that matter at the committee level.

3:40

One has to wonder why this matter is being raised in the Assembly when it was already raised and dealt with by the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices. If the committee had voted to report the matter, then it would be before the Assembly. However, as I've said, the committee chose not to do so. Now, as Speaker I am keenly aware that questions of privilege are very serious matters, as I've already said, and that they directly relate to a member's rights and immunities. As such, they should arise infrequently. The time of this Assembly is also valuable and important. As I stated on November 20, 2014, at page 88 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day in ruling on a purported question of privilege that had been raised before, "It is not in keeping with parliamentary tradition to raise a matter that has already been decided."

In this instance, the matter raised by the Member for Edmonton-Calder has been the subject of review, consideration, and decision by a committee of this Assembly. As Speaker I find that the principle of avoiding duplication of proceedings applies here.

In conclusion, this matter was considered under one process and should not be brought up in a different process, in a different venue so as to constitute a de facto appeal of the committee's decision outside of the established practice. Accordingly, I find that the purported question of privilege is not in order and therefore does not constitute a prima facie question of privilege. Under Standing Order 15(7) that concludes this matter.

Thank you. We'll move on.

Orders of the Day

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

Supplementary Supply Estimates 2014-15 General Revenue Fund

The Chair: Hon. members, before we commence this afternoon's consideration of supplementary supply, I'd like to review briefly the standing orders governing the speaker rotation. As provided in Standing Order 59.02, the rotation in Standing Order 59.01(6) is deemed to apply, which is as follows:

- (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes,
- (b) for the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (c) for the next 20 minutes, the members of the third party, if any, and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (d) for the next 20 minutes, the members of the fourth party, if any, and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (d.1) for the next 20 minutes, the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent Members and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (e) for the next 20 minutes, private members of the Government caucus and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak . . .

And any member may speak thereafter.

During the above rotation speaking times are limited to 10 minutes. Once the above rotation is complete, speaking times are reduced to five minutes.

Provided that the Chair has been notified, a Minister and a private Member may combine their . . . speaking times, with both taking and yielding the floor [during] the combined period.

Finally, as provided for in Government Motion 20, approved by the Assembly yesterday, the time allotted for consideration of this matter is six hours. The Committee of Supply has under consideration the 2014-15 supplementary supply.

I will now recognize the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to move the estimates. The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to move the 2014-15 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund. When passed, these estimates will authorize approximate increases of \$730,000 for the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, \$459 million in voted operational funding, \$705 million in voted capital funding, and \$63 million in voted financial transactions funding for the government. The estimates are consistent with the fiscal plan as presented in the 2014-15 third-quarter fiscal update and economic statement.

In addition to the Child and Youth Advocate, these estimates will authorize increases for the departments of Aboriginal Relations, Education, Energy, Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, Health, Human Services, Infrastructure, Justice and Solicitor General, Municipal Affairs, Service Alberta, and

Transportation. The ministers responsible for these departments will be pleased to answer any questions from members of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I will recognize the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler speaking on behalf of the Official Opposition. Hon. member, do you wish to share your time back and forth with the minister? We'd need to clarify that up front.

Mr. Strankman: Well, if he'd wish. It would be in order.

The Chair: Where will you start, hon. member?

Mr. Strankman: Well, I was hoping to start with Energy and the environment.

The Chair: So you're starting with environment, hon. minister?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that we do them just alphabetically and do each department and get it done. Otherwise, we'll be all over the place.

The Chair: Each department alphabetically? Are you prepared to start alphabetically? If you're not, if you're going to skip a particular ministry . . .

Ms Blakeman: If we don't go fast enough, we don't get to stuff, so I think we should be allowed to choose.

The Chair: Okay. Hon. member, do you wish to start, then, with Energy, or is that ESRD? Just to be clear, where exactly are you referring to those numbers?

Mr. Strankman: Well, I wanted to speak about the Energy department primarily.

The Chair: That's fine. The Minister of Energy is here.

Minister, you're willing to share the time back and forth with the member?

Mr. Oberle: Whatever.

The Chair: Proceed, hon. member, and the clock will start.

Mr. Strankman: Well, by the numbers that you've presented here, there is some increase of \$7.7 million, and I was wondering if there is any itemization of that that you could fulfill with me to understand why the increase. It's been purported in the media that there will be budget maintenance at least if not a reduction, so I was wondering if you could . . .

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and address the member's question. First of all, I want to clarify for the member that we're not discussing budget here today. That'll be coming shortly. The budget, of course, hasn't been tabled in this House, and whether or not there's a reduction in the budget or maintenance or anything else will be subject to a budget debate at that time.

Today we're here to discuss supplementary estimates at third quarter, Mr. Chair, which involves spending within the current year's budget, and I'm pleased to address that. The member I thought said \$7.7 million. Actually, there's \$57.7 million in supplementary supply related to the Department of Energy. So I can

tell the member in complete detail that \$57.7 million in compensation was for lease agreements cancelled under the land-use framework.

Mr. Chair, in the Fort McMurray urban development subregion, which was development around Fort McMurray, \$49.9 million is for what is known as UDSR, the Fort McMurray urban development subregion. Those are leases that are cancelled in accordance with that development proposal. That's compensation for 27 agreements held by 10 different companies. In the lower Athabasca regional plan there are a number of agreements that were cancelled in order to establish new conservation and provincial recreation areas in the region, so \$7.8 million is for leases cancelled under LARP. That's the full summary of the compensation that we provided.

3:50

Mr. Chair, the mineral rights compensation regulation is a strong and solid system that ensures fair compensation of incurred costs to companies affected by lease cancellations. It's the process that was applied here. Ultimately, actions taken by government such as deliberate land-use planning resulting in lease cancellations show how we guide resource development in Alberta to meet the triple bottom line of environmental protection, economic benefit, and social licence.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Yes, sir. I'd like to apologize to the minister for my quote regarding the numbers. I guess it could be related to my age and my eyes. It's well received.

Can you also explain, sir, how that funding was arrived at? Was that the money that was actually spent by those companies for those leases? Is there any actual physical value related to their purchase of those leases?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chair, I was not actually privy to the negotiations that happened with the individual companies. I of course delegate that activity to the department. I can assure this House that it was done in full compliance with the mineral rights compensation regulation, which allows for the repayment of land purchase costs, the cost to purchase a lease, and certain sunk costs. It does not accommodate future or opportunity costs. I'd invite the hon. member to look up the regulation. It's quite comprehensive.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my understanding, too, that the single energy regulator bill, Bill 2, allows for complete discretion of the minister in this regard.

I'd like to move on to Environment and Sustainable Resource Development and talk about the additional costs there, the supplementary. I understand there are additional increases to wildfire hazards and the mountain pine beetle surveys. Can you explain to me how the \$41 million for mountain pine beetle survey assessments, control, and rehabilitation was arrived at?

The Chair: I recognize the minister of ESRD. The question around mountain pine beetle . . .

Mr. Strankman: I'll repeat, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Fawcett: Sure.

The Chair: Please.

Mr. Strankman: Mountain pine beetle surveys, assessment, control, and rehabilitation worth \$41 million: could you fill me in a little bit on how that was achieved, how that was attained, how that's brought forward? I understand it's somewhat of a seasonal event.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This is money that has been expended probably for the better part of the last decade on controlling mountain pine beetle. Obviously, many members of the Chamber are aware of the financial risk that mountain pine beetle poses, particularly to the forestry sector, as well as some of the environmental health risks to our forests. This is money that has been invested year over year. This is the same amount of money that was put into the budgets of previous years. One of the challenges that we faced was that for whatever reason we typically have not budgeted for this expense, like I said, but it's been expended over the last decade.

I could tell you as minister that it's something I'm advocating for with the current Finance minister, getting it as an ongoing expenditure. The reason why it hasn't been budgeted in previous years and why it wasn't budgeted this year is that the hope, I guess, was that eventually we would be able to completely or substantially reduce the expenditures in this particular area because we'd successfully thwarted the risk from mountain pine beetle. I could tell you that the work that this \$40 million does essentially keeps it at bay and prevents it from progressing even further. This will be ongoing work that is not only done this year but will have to be done next year and the following year.

There is a good part of the story with this particular budget item, and that is that we signed an MOU with the government of Saskatchewan. They're contributing \$1.3 million as part of our mountain pine beetle program because they definitely have an inherent interest to try to keep that particular species from moving further east. So we are getting some money from another jurisdiction to help offset some of the costs in this area.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks again, Mr. Chair. I also wanted to ask the ESRD minister: in regard to flood infrastructure recovery measures my understanding is that it's some 14-plus million dollars. Have some of these funds been allocated, or what's the position? I know that in my constituency of Drumheller there's still a question about the timing of that. If you could go on further to the flood hazard identification program, there are some greater funds brought forward there, too. I don't know if you want to do it singularly. I'll be happy to oblige.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of ESRD.

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah. We are spending an additional \$14 million, as the member correctly identified, for continued implementation of infrastructure recovery measures. This is specifically in regard to putting together what is essentially our mitigation and resiliency team, that is going through and doing all the work in assessing all of the different proposals for flood mitigation. There are a number of projects that were put on the table. We've had to assess, look at which ones might be feasible, may not be feasible over the last year. There have been a number of decisions made. We're still working through some of those decisions. For some of these projects – these are very large projects. For example, with the Springbank reservoir project we're in, you know, the couple hundred million dollars area.

This money is going to work in trying to get the information we require from those decisions, not to mention that we also have the Alberta community resiliency program, of which we've had over \$700 million of requests from municipalities. Those need to be assessed and looked at and prioritized, and that's what this money is for.

Mr. Strankman: To be clear, Mr. Chair, the Alberta community resiliency program is also included in this?

Mr. Fawcett: Just to be clear, this is operational funding; this isn't the capital money that will be provided to municipalities. This is money that pays for staff that will work on assessing those applications.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks again, Mr. Chair. Also, I find in here some \$969,000, approaching \$970,000, for flood hazard identification. I was wanting to know if that would include communities like Drumheller, where I believe they've flown the area with lidar to understand if there are going to be continuing issues there. Would that be part of this funding?

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah, that is part of this funding. Shortly after the floods in 2013 a decision was made to invest I believe it was about \$8.7 million over three years in enhanced flood hazard mapping activities. After looking at what was needed to be done and the priorities, there was an additional million dollars that was asked for for that, and that's what this additional expenditure is for, to supplement that.

The Chair: The hon. member.

4:00

Mr. Strankman: Thanks again, Mr. Chair. The hon. minister is well aware of constituency issues that I brought forward. I don't see it directly related in the allocation of funds here, but there is the issue with the management of the elk herd in Suffield base, and I was wondering if any funds required are brought forward here that aren't specifically shown. This may be a new issue that's going to be brought forward in this next fiscal year, but I want to know if some of that – because that has been an ongoing problem.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah. I thank the member for his question. The issue with the elk population within the CFB Suffield area is an ongoing issue, and it is an issue that we're addressing. However, as far as the resources required to deal with this issue, it is part of our ongoing wildlife management budget, and there are no additional resources that are required for this. It is merely some different policy decisions that need to be made, and that is not going to require any additional money.

The Chair: Thank you.

Back to the hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to roll over to Health here, where there seem to be also some other improvements or increases in the supplementals, so to the minister. I understand there's \$157 million for operational spending – it was lower in other areas; totally, it increased to \$206 million – \$54 million more for physician services, \$39 million more for primary care physicians. In my constituency of Drumheller-Stettler the physician population is dropping, so could you give me some sort of an idea of how this

is spread to urban and rural? Is there a future program to increase? Like, why are these numbers being increased?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Thank you for the question. One of the challenges is that in Health we aren't able to stop doctors from billing. Doctors who are in greater prevalent areas are continually billing, so the numbers go up. Where you have fewer doctors, unfortunately in some of the rural areas, billings go down. We're trying to encourage, through various programs, doctors and PCNs to expand into rural areas, but that is a challenge. The increase in physician cost is made up, really, of two numbers. One is the higher anticipated number of physicians, and then the number of undergraduate and graduate physician development programs. So it's really a matter of supply and demand that has the greatest impact on our program.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Strankman: I also see that there's \$120 million more for labour agreements at AHS. Is that ongoing? I had understood that a lot of those contracts had been settled.

Mr. Mandel: No. Unfortunately, there were new labour negotiations and new settlements that happened, and this is one of those. I think it could be the UNA agreement that was settled, and that caused a dramatic increase in our costs.

Mr. Strankman: I also see that there's \$170 million for pharmaceutical costs, and \$124 million is for seniors' drug benefits. Could you explain to me how that's allocated there, pharmaceutical costs? In the rural areas the allocation of benefits to the pharmacies is being reduced, actually, so how could those pharmaceutical costs be rising?

Mr. Mandel: A lot of it is the cancer drugs. There's an incredible increase in the cost of drugs to fight cancer, various specialized drugs, and that's made a big difference. The seniors population is growing, so there's more allocation of drugs. People take them, and we pay for them.

Mr. Strankman: I'd like to now rotate over to Human Services, please, Mr. Chairman. It says that there's some \$46.8 million in additional spending – of that, \$38.7 million is being redistributed – with \$43.4 million for employment and income support programs. Can you explain to me how the funding is transferred?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you. I'd be happy to answer your questions. There is \$47 million in operating in the sup estimates and \$500,000 in capital funding for Human Services. The \$43.4 million of this allocated to employment and income support includes nearly \$41 million approved in the first quarter and \$526,000 approved in the third quarter. This extra funding is for costs to support unemployed clients who are not eligible for employment insurance and other clients with low levels of literacy and essential skills. As well, \$1.9 million was also approved for the targeted initiative for older workers. So this \$43.4 million total was offset by a transfer from the federal government under the Canada-Alberta job fund and the targeted initiative for older workers, and there is no net effect on the province's fiscal position with those transactions.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Strankman: The hon. minister said that there was a transfer, that there is federal government involvement here. Can you explain to me what percentage that is?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you. That would be under the Canada-Alberta job fund, and that was offset by the amount of \$43.4 million. No, that's not right. Sorry. I am actually not sure of the exact portion. But of the \$36 million of supplementary funding – well, that's another matter, support to persons with disabilities. I would suspect that of the \$43.4 million, the transfer from the federal government – I would have to get back to you, but I suspect it's a portion of that amount.

Mr. Strankman: I just wondered if you knew what percentage it was. Is it 5 per cent or something along those lines?

I see here it has \$36 million to support persons with disabilities for the Michener Centre operating costs. Could you explain to me why there is a wage disparity between agency employees and equivalent public-sector employees for the Michener Centre?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you. I'll deal with Michener. We know that \$36 million was allocated for support to persons with disabilities, and of that, \$12.4 million was approved in the first quarter for agency wage funding. That was the increase that we gave to part of the commitment that was made in terms of increasing the wages for persons that are working in the caregiving area with individuals with disabilities, so that's where the wage is from. Then \$10.7 million of that was approved in the third quarter to keep the Michener Centre open as well.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to jump over to Infrastructure if I could for a minute. For the numbers that I have in front of me, \$15.25 million in new funding as well as \$8.8 million in reorganized funding to come forward, can the minister explain exactly what projects are involved there?

The Chair: Thank you.

I believe the Minister of Health will speak on behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mandel: Yes. What was the number for the first one? [A timer sounded]

The Chair: That's just indicating that your first 20 minutes are over, hon. member. We'll continue for another 20, and you'll still get your hour if you choose to use it.

Mr. Mandel: So the first number was?

Mr. Strankman: It was \$15.25 million in new funding as well as \$8.8 million in reorganized funding.

Mr. Mandel: Okay. The \$8.8 million was made available from lower than budgeted expenses in other programs: \$4.7 million in savings identified as part of the cost-containment measures in December of 2014 and \$4.1 million for the reallocation of the operational vote to amounts not voted to reflect a more accurate classification of the asset term provisions for the Swan Hills Treatment Centre.

And did you say \$50 million or \$15 million?

Mr. Strankman: One five.

Mr. Mandel: One five. Okay. Thank you. I have that here.

The Chair: I believe the Minister of Energy wants to supplement what you're offering, hon. Minister of Health, or were you finished?
The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: I rise, Mr. Chairman, as Deputy Government House Leader. I guess I'll call it a point of order although it's not actually what it is. I wonder if I might beg the indulgence of the committee to address an obvious difficulty that the Minister of Health is having, that he may be able to address the committee from a seated position. The committee extended the same courtesy to me at one time when I had a broken ankle. I believe the Health minister might find it a bit more comfortable to speak from his chair.

The Chair: Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, I believe that's quite reasonable. I have observed all day the minister's difficulties.

So, yes, we will allow you to address the committee from your chair.

4:10

Mr. Mandel: The \$15.3 million includes \$3 million for planning funds, and then there was \$20.9 million for the 2013 Alberta flood recovery program. That was offset by \$8.8 million in funding available from lower than budgeted expenses.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I find it quite ironic that the Minister of Health is in a debilitated position, especially in this province.

Mr. Mandel: Well, we all have issues.

Mr. Strankman: Most certainly we do.

The \$20.8 million for flood recovery: that's an additional program? Can you give me some idea of the direction of that? Is that to the broad DRP program, or is there any specific location? It says \$19.9 million for relocation.

Mr. Mandel: My notes say \$20 million for floodway relocation programs. That's what it says, just relocation to various locations. It does not say specific sites.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to move now to Justice and Solicitor General. It says that there's an extra \$16.7 million requested, \$5.5 million for legal aid and \$11.4 million for labour agreements in the adult remand and correctional centres. Can you explain to me if that's a new contract or if that's some continuing negotiations?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Human Services will give you an answer on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah. Thank you, hon. member. I'll just reference the \$16.7 million. The minister has provided me with the information. The \$11.3 million is an increase for costs associated with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees and management agreements that were ratified in July 2014. In March 2014 the government offered a one-time lump-sum \$1,850 payment to all staff for the '13-14 increases, which required an expenditure accrual with payments pending ratification of the agreement. This

unforeseen cost caused the ministry to overspend its '13-14 voted appropriation. Consequently, the estimates were encumbered by \$11.3 million to cover this shortfall.

Second, there was a \$5.5 million increase in grant funding to the Legal Aid Society of Alberta, and the additional funds will ensure Legal Aid Alberta maintains current service levels as well as increasing the financial eligibility guidelines so that more applicants, including individuals receiving AISH, have greater access to full legal representation.

Finally, there was a \$120,000 reduction in expense from lower than budgeted expenses in other programs.

Mr. Strankman: So to be clear, I understand that there is a certain amount of funding that was required from an overallocation of money. Is this a common occurrence? Is that money taken from future allocations to that department, or is that removed from some other funding source?

The Chair: Hon. minister, have you got that information?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, hon. member. I think that when you look at situations like this happening, especially when there are unanticipated costs for employee wages, that's something where when those agreements are made, we have to abide by them. We can't control when they come out. Then the \$5.5 million increase in the grant funding for the Legal Aid Society was something that came later in the year. It was really important to do, and that is why it's been brought forward now as a supplementary estimate.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Not to miss anybody, I'd like to speak to the Minister of Municipal Affairs with some questions if I could. The information that I have in front of me says that the supplementary amount of some \$400 million was – and we discussed that, I understand, yesterday to some extent in the House – for municipal sustainability initiative grants. Can I be apprised as to how you arrived at the increases there?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, and thank you for the question. It's an important question. As you know, it's an extremely important program for our municipal leaders. The \$400 million is an amount that we're looking at so that we can make sure, as the economy is slowing down with \$50 oil, that we're still putting money towards municipal sustainability projects on the infrastructure side so that they can build out projects now while we're starting to see prices come down. Very, very important for our municipal leaders with regard to that. The actual amount is \$398 million but, as you say, hon. member, right around the \$400 million piece. Very important not just from the fact that prices are coming down, but also creating jobs, creating the economy going, and a lot of these projects. The RFPs have been out, and they're ready to go, so certainly important for them. As I said yesterday in the House to your colleague, another hon. member in the House here, with regard to – AUMA and AAMD and C were with us as were the reeve and mayor of the city and county of Red Deer. MSI is an extremely important program for our municipal leaders, as you know and have spoken about as well. Again, this is to help move existing municipal infrastructures forward as well.

Mr. Strankman: To be clear, this MSI funding – we have heard in the House even today that there are issues regarding bridge funding, et cetera. Could that funding allocation, MSI funding, be allocated

differently within the municipalities for those needs, or is that something that's directly required by the MSI grant or bridge funding to be used only in that area?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you. That's a very good question, hon. member. The MSI funding: I was actually at the table as a vice-president for AUMA when we actually designed the program. The program was so that municipalities would have the flexibility on the capital side – there's a small amount that's operational as well – to pick the projects that are important for their communities because they know, dealing with their constituents and in their communities, what's more important. As the Minister of Transportation said earlier today in a question, the municipalities can choose to use capital funding for what they want. That might be for a bridge; it might be for a waste-water project or recreation centre. We have roads. We have numerous things that they can use it for. But the purpose of MSI is to have long-term, stable funding and to give the municipalities the opportunity to choose the programs and projects that are most important to them. So, yes indeed, they could use it for bridges.

Mr. Strankman: I'm sorry, hon. member, with your voice I was surprised you would take that length of time to answer the question so simplistically.

Mrs. McQueen: I just always want to give you the full amount of information, sir. We're always working so hard on this side to please the opposition.

Mr. Strankman: Well, I completely respect as a farmer that it's always important to haul a full load.

The supplementary amount of \$6.1 million is requested with \$51 million made available by lower budgeted expenses from that; \$32 million approximately is for disaster recovery and municipal wildlife assistance programs. Is that up or down from – I understand that in other jurisdictions we have the disaster recovery program. Is this 32 point some-odd million dollars part and parcel of the flood mitigation?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you very much. Those were interesting comments you made as a farmer. I was a farmer's daughter for many, many years. Haven't really heard those comments before. You could take them many ways, but it's good we're having a little bit of fun here in the House as well. Now that we've all let each other know our agriculture backgrounds, I'll get to your question.

The answer to your question is, of course, that when disaster hits, we don't know from year to year what those may be. With Municipal Affairs the disaster program as it relates to wildfire is much different than the disaster program that the Minister of ESRD has as it relates to wildfire. His are on Crown, and ours would be on municipal land. So \$32 million for this year for the supplementary estimates is provided for several disaster recovery and municipal wildfire assistance programs as we assist our municipalities in that. It includes with this the DRP for the 2014 southwestern DRP of \$30.7 million. The DRP for the MD of Taber is \$0.7 million as well, so with regard to that that's where make it up. In addition, in 2013 we still had some outstanding costs for Slave Lake, \$0.3 million for municipal firefighting emergency operation costs in addition to \$0.4 million that were related to the

costs to convert the town ball diamonds to interim housing sites, that was still left over from the 2012 Slave Lake fires.

4:20

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks again, Mr. Chair. I see here on a line-by-line thing that there's some \$700,000 for Alberta emergency alert broadcaster units. Can you give me some understanding of why that funding would be required? Are there updates involved there, or are there greater areas required to be broadcast to? I would think that modernization may reduce the costs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, hon. member. [interjection] The Minister of Energy is adding his thoughts into this conversation, so I apologize; I'm not laughing at the question. It's a very good question. It's the Minister of Energy that's quite amusing these days. [interjections] No, no. It's fine. I didn't catch it all, so I'll leave it.

As you know, certainly, Alberta emergency alert certainly saves a great deal of lives, and it's the emergencies that are unpredictable. There's the amount being requested, \$700,000 to pay for broadcaster units. These units enable Alberta's broadcasters to be in compliance with the Canadian radio and television commission's new standards. They have put new standards in. Alberta has put \$700,000 to be in compliance, and this technology really helps us ensure a consistent ability to access across the province to make sure these alerts are there for public safety and that we have our standards the same as the CRTC new standards.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Most certainly public safety is paramount, although my friends who live at the Little Red Deer Store east of Sundre . . .

Mr. Anglin: Hey, hey. Get out of Sundre. You're in my territory.

Mr. Strankman: It would appear that the independent member now from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre feels that I may be cutting some of his grass. It's unfortunate. But I do have some friends in his riding, and they were very frustrated that they did not receive a warning because of the rising flood waters. I just wanted to throw that in for information.

I also have the information of \$470,000 added for the new home buyer protection program. Can you help me to understand why there's extra funding? I thought that with the legislation going forward, that was not going to increase any cost to government for that legislation.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you. That's correct, and I'm glad that you mentioned your good friend, your colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, and that the folks there thought that they were not notified. Now we have a system that will be enhanced to make sure that we're rectifying those issues, so thank you for recognizing that. I'm sure he's grateful for you to be cutting some of his hay over there as well.

So the new home buyer program is part of that commitment. To keep the program running effectively, we are requesting \$470,000 to address increased expenses due to a projected increase in the construction of housing units. These costs, as you did mention, will be offset by additional new home warranty registration fees collected by the government due to increased construction activities, so that's where the offset comes for that request.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks again, Mr. Chair. I also see that the Alberta community partnership is increased by \$30 million for our capital. Can you please explain the reasoning for that?

Mrs. McQueen: Absolutely. It's very important with the ACP, Alberta community partnership, that this is an opportunity for two or more municipalities – but then there could be some other partners as well – to partner for regional projects that bring regions together in collaboration. This is an important amount. As we move forward, \$29,600 will be there so that the municipalities can work on regional partnerships, more collaboration. The deadlines have passed for submission. As you could imagine, hon. member, we would be having way more submissions than we have dollars.

This is certainly a program that I'm actually really excited about because it shows the true collaboration that's happening, whether that be here in the capital region, in the southern region of the Calgary metropolitan area, or clearly across the province. This is something that our municipalities, whether they be urban or rural, are really looking at, the opportunity to partner and to access dollars toward these. So there are some very interesting projects that have been applied for with these funds.

Mr. Strankman: For these funds, hon. member, a member that was from my constituency who previously also sat in this House made comment that in his day the issuance of taxation dollars cost roughly three to four times the dollar that was actually issued as a remuneration to the constituency or whatever cause it might be. I was wondering if the minister might have any idea that – Alberta community partnership has increased by \$30 million, but could you give me any personal insight as to how many tax dollars it takes to collect those \$30 million?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. That's a very interesting question, and I'm so glad that you brought up the hon. member that used to serve in your constituency before you, an outstanding member who did outstanding work across this province and someone who I and I know my colleagues on this side of the House and I'm sure across the way as well were very, very proud to work with. An outstanding member Mr. Hayden was and certainly someone that I have the utmost support and admiration for, who did an outstanding job in so many ministries across this province.

As the \$29,600 is new money in here, and it certainly is – you're asking what's the cost of implementing the program. It's part of the staff that we have with Municipal Affairs under the granting program, so it's being absorbed with the current staff that we have in place.

Mr. Strankman: So just to be clear, hon. member, the money issued is including the administration costs?

Mrs. McQueen: Oh, sorry. Then I wasn't clear on your question, so thank you for that. This is just for the capital piece of it. We already have staff in place that administer grants, so this is strictly the money that is for the capital grants to the ACP.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you. I may not have been completely clear with my question and/or my statement because I still respond to former MLA Shirley McClellan as the Member for Drumheller-Stettler and my MLA. Mr. Hayden has other notoriety.

I'd like to move on, if I could, to Service Alberta and the supplemental...

Mrs. McQueen: Maybe, hon. member, just a last comment just so we can close out Municipal Affairs. Absolutely, Shirley McClellan is one of the most outstanding women, as are many, that have served in this Legislature, and I'm glad that you recognized Shirley. Both Shirley McClellan and Jack Hayden have served this province with a great deal of pride, so thank you for recognizing both of them.

Mr. Strankman: I'd like to move on to Service Alberta if I could.

The Chair: Okay. We'll start your last 20-minute segment, hon. member. Of course, we'll continue in the same format, so please continue.

Mr. Strankman: Well, if that's agreeable to the members opposite, I'm happy to try and continue the discussion.

The Chair: Carry on.

Mr. Strankman: Under Service Alberta I see there's an increased supplemental of \$5.4 million, and \$7 million is for motor vehicle services for secure ID. Would that have anything to do with the potentiality of the government changing the licence plate designation?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Human Services on behalf of the Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you. Thank you, hon. member, for your question. Actually, what this amount does reflect is additional expenses incurred to meet the increased demand for motor vehicles services like drivers' licences and ID cards, and this was associated with the greater-than-expected population growth that we had over the past year. The additional expenses both in terms of transaction volume and the work to increase the activity – and this is certainly not negatively affecting the security integrity of Alberta's information. That's what it was referring to.

Mr. Strankman: Okay. It also mentions \$4.5 million for postage stamps for the registration mail-outs. Is there not some other methodology that could be achieved at doing that?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you again, hon. member. Most certainly, the \$4.5 million was used to purchase postage from Canada Post for renewal notices for vehicle registration mail-outs, and \$9 million was used to purchase inventory such as the occupational health and safety handbooks and safety codes, which are sold by the Queen's Printer.

4:30

With respect to other ways of notifying individuals for renewal notices, we know that there's the technology that we have at our disposal with respect to e-mails. The challenge is collecting all those e-mail addresses, but it's certainly, I'm sure, on the minister's agenda with respect to being more efficient with our dollars. But, again, the way that they have been doing it is by mailing the registration renewals in the mail.

Mr. Strankman: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would think that they could be cycling in a method of electronically notifying the recipients of their renewal date, by e-mail or something. Has there been any looking into that? I think that would reduce the cost significantly.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yeah. Thank you again. Previously, as the former Minister of Service Alberta – we began to look at that whole area to look for savings and efficiencies. It's by the first letter of your last name; you more or less know when to go and renew your insurance. That's something I'd be happy to pass on to the Minister of Service Alberta as that's an excellent suggestion.

Mr. Strankman: Also, I see there's almost \$300,000 for the safeguarding of the registry system. Could you explain to me those increased expenses?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you again for the question. I guess part of it is all the personal information that is collected and stored there in the registry system and by the registry agents, to keep the system robust and safe. You know, thousands of transactions take place on a daily basis across Alberta, so it's ensuring that the registry agents have access and they can serve the clients that come to see them in their offices.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks again, Mr. Chair, and thanks to the member opposite for her responses.

I'd like to move on to Transportation here, where we have 15 and some-odd million dollars for provincial highway preservation. Could the hon. member give me some sort of background in that regard? In the constituency of Drumheller-Stettler and others that I drive in, it certainly wouldn't seem that there is any great amount of money spent on preservation, let alone maintenance.

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Chairman, I thought we were talking about supplementary supply here, not the budget, because we didn't spend over any money in highway preservation. We didn't exceed the budget there, obviously, as you stated.

But if you'd like, I could explain where we exceeded the budget in supplementary supply. Alberta Transportation requires an additional \$11.9 million for supplementary estimates. You know, this request includes \$1 million for a feasibility study for flood mitigation projects in southern Alberta, and it includes \$15.6 million for unexpected repair work on geological hazards such as landslides and floods. This line item is unexpected; it's not budgeted for. It's, like, emergency things; for example, there were extensive stabilization and rebuilding efforts on highway 744 at Judah hill in the Peace River country. There was a major slide there last year, and we don't budget for that.

You know, that was \$15 million out of our \$11 million over, but it was offset by savings of \$670,000 that we transferred to Municipal Affairs for the basic transportation grant, and that was for program delivery and support services. We also had an operational savings of \$4.1 million related to cost containments in the 2014 year, you know. So that shows the difference of our \$11 million dollars of overspending.

I'm not going to debate the budget, about whether we spend enough on highway maintenance and overlay, because as Minister of Transportation of course I'd like to do a lot more overlay in this province. I just need to talk to my friend the President of the Treasury Board.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Yes. Thanks. I may have interpreted my notes incorrectly there, so I apologize for that.

You mentioned in your dissertation there \$4.1 million in operational savings from 2013, I believe it was. Can you explain? Were those savings rolled forward, or did that go back into general revenue, and if so, what was the incentive for those savings, to do that? I think that's an innovative idea and should be continued.

Mr. Drysdale: Well, you know, it was \$4.1 million in savings in our operational budget. As all government was asked to watch their spending and expenses, a lot of it was actually manpower reduction. Like, we have 119 vacancies in Alberta Transportation right now, so that was a big part of our operational savings.

Mr. Strankman: I still don't understand. I appreciate the savings, and I appreciate the reduction in manpower, but were the savings rolled forward in the budget, or were they taken back to general revenue?

Mr. Drysdale: No. It's supplementary supply for this year's budget. It's savings that we've shown in this year's budget. So going forward, you'll have to wait till March 26, and we'll show you our budget going forward for next year.

Mr. Strankman: Okay. I accept that.

I'd like to move on to Aboriginal Relations. I understand that there is a supplemental requirement of \$8.6 million and \$5.6 million that's particularly on one location. Could you give me some understanding of what that was?

The Chair: The Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Dorward: Yes. Mr. Chair, on behalf of the Premier and Minister of Aboriginal Relations I'm pleased to stand and let the member know that there are two specific areas of work done in that regard.

One is a really good news story, Mr. Chair, in Lubicon Lake, where, many will know, there was a critical shortage of housing. There was the opportunity to get 19 units of the trailers from Slave Lake and move them into Lubicon to address those critical needs, that were in fact identified by the Minister of Energy, which at the time was the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. Kudos to the present Minister of Energy for identifying that and working with Billy Joe Laboucan, the new chief there, to take care of some of the absolute, critical needs.

The total in that regard is \$5.6 million. That included much more than just moving trailers on site. It included as well setting those trailers up, which needed to include water and sewage arrangements. Also, there was a small portion of that that allowed the start of water delivery into the community, and that invigorated the community a lot, Mr. Chair.

Having been there twice, I can tell you that the chief and the people of Lubicon are absolutely invigorated by this demonstration on behalf of the people of Alberta towards their needs in that community. As you know, they don't have a land settlement there yet. It's under way, and that's something that the federal government is involved in more than Alberta. So I'm glad to see that this situation worked together, and we're able to help the people of Lubicon.

The second one, Mr. Chair, is \$3 million, which makes up the total amount, and that was under a long-term governance and funding arrangement, the LTA, for the Métis settlements . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, if I may, the side conversations are making it a little hard to hear the member speaking. So if you could keep it down just a little bit, I'd really appreciate it.

Please proceed, hon. Associate Minister.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Three million dollars was allocated to absolutely critical infrastructure needs on Métis settlements. There is a long-term agreement for funding by the province of Alberta to Métis settlement areas similar to a municipal situation where there are dollars allocated for infrastructure. This \$3 million was absolutely critical to get done in this last fiscal year, so we're pleased to be able to assist on that. There is in place under the LTA an \$85 million long-term arrangement over 10 years, so this certainly fit into the parameters of that program.

I thank the member for these great questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. member, you have just under nine minutes left.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Back to the member. He used the acronym LTA. Could I use the acronym LTA? Could I be understanding of that?

Mr. Dorward: Yeah. The LTA, Mr. Chair, is an acronym for long-term arrangement, which is an arrangement with the Métis settlements whereby they will have access to capital funding in their areas, as I said, similar to an MSI kind of arrangement, where the province assists and supports programs that they have in their areas that are selected by the council of elected representatives of those Métis settlement areas.

The Chair: Thank you.

The hon. member.

4:40

Mr. Strankman: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I had the fantastic opportunity to have the gathering of the Métis organizations in my constituency in Stettler last summer, and it was an enlightening experience.

You mentioned again the LTA. Can I be understanding of whether that's a provincial-federal partnership along with the Métis settlement, or is it simply a relationship with the province and the local Métis? The Métis are far more diverse in their settlements of the prairies than First Nations.

The Chair: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Dorward: Yes. I thank again this member opposite for these informed questions because it allows me the opportunity to address the Committee of Supply and let the committee know that there are two distinct areas, which is the Métis Nation of Alberta – that would be Métis individuals who are self-identified that are not living in settlement areas. Those are distinct and separate from the eight Métis areas that are designated in Alberta and have for decades been the only place in Canada that has set-apart land for individuals, Métis individuals, who wish to live in a settlement area.

There are eight settlement areas, Mr. Chair. This is a provincial program. There is no federal component of that, so it's us supporting the eight Métis areas – we call them settlements, Métis settlements; they're generally in the north – and that's completely separate and distinct from individuals who are self-identified as Métis but do not live in settlement areas. This LTA arrangement is only with the settlement areas.

The Chair: Hon. member, do you wish to continue?

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to move on. It's unfortunate; it doesn't appear that the Minister of Education is here. Is there anyone willing to . . .

The Chair: Is there someone that will speak on behalf of the Minister of Education?

Mr. Strankman: I have information that \$215 million is being added to the capital budget for Education, and this is an increase of 32 per cent. Can I have some understanding of how this 32 per cent raise was arrived at? Is there a list of priorities that we could see?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy on behalf of the Minister of Education.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise again for the supplementary estimates that we're discussing here today to give an overview of the Ministry of Education's supplementary request of \$215.7 million in total requests. The majority of the request relates to reprofiling of funds for projects.

As everyone knows, the government has a number of school projects currently under construction, both new and modernizations. The majority of the funding request, about \$137 million, was to reprofile funds from one fiscal year to the next, Mr. Chair. Of that amount, \$42 million was reprofiled for Alberta's 35 phase 1 school capital projects announced in 2011; \$65 million was reprofiled for phase 2 school projects. These are the 50 new schools and 70 modernizations announced in 2013 and 2014. Approximately \$30 million was needed to reprofile various other school and modular projects in the '14-15 fiscal year. These adjustments better reflect when the money will be spent within project schedules.

Mr. Chair, I'm sure you're aware and I suspect the member would be aware that when working with large and complex projects such as this, variance from initial schedules is not unexpected. We are required, of course, to book the expenses when they occur. The government also wants to make sure that the right planning is done at the front end of any project in order to ensure that projects are completed on budget.

Another large portion of the Education request was to address student accommodation pressures, Mr. Chair. Education approved \$30.6 million for the Calgary board of education to address urgent enrolment pressures identified in its interim capital plan. This included four starter schools, planning for a new high school, and eight modular classrooms.

Education also approved \$19.4 million for emergent needs in the rest of Alberta, Mr. Chair. This funding was approved in order to address urgent student accommodation pressures identified by several school boards. The funding was for eight new starter schools, the completion of an existing starter school, and modular classrooms for several high-growth areas. Just as a reminder, those 12 new starter schools just mentioned are now moving forward as fully built schools so more students can be accommodated in classrooms sooner.

In addition, Mr. Chair, to help address the deferred maintenance needs in all school jurisdictions, an additional \$20 million was approved to supplement the infrastructure maintenance and renewal program.

Also announced in the fall, \$10 million was approved to allow planning work to begin on 57 new schools and additions and 20 modernizations and replacement schools. These projects are urgently needed to address enrolment pressures in aging school facilities, Mr. Chair. By providing planning funds earlier in the process, government is enabling these projects to proceed much more quickly once they are approved to go to construction.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, Education has also had one other small change, a decrease of \$963,000 as a result of lower than budgeted capital spending in other programs.

That summarizes the supplementary request of the Department of Education, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks again, Mr. Chair. I'd like to question the hon. member. He made a comment that pressures determined by the interim capital fund led to a \$30.6 million expenditure for the Calgary board of education. But below that we have a \$10 million expenditure for phase 3 announced during a certain period of the by-elections. Can you explain to me how the \$10 million planning expenditure was actually arrived at? Was it interim capital funding, or what was the methodology? That's what I wanted to drive at.

The Chair: Hon. minister, do you have that information, or is that something you might have to provide to the hon. member?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chair, I will repeat that the \$10 million was approved to allow planning work to begin on new schools and additions. It was approved in the normal process of capital approvals within the government, through the Department of Infrastructure and the Department of Education, and the spending was booked when it was done.

The Chair: Thank you.

The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks again, Mr. Chair. I want to also mention to the member that in my constituency I hear about a lot of rural remote fuel tax benefits that were taken away from some of the rural remote school divisions. Are there any allowances for that? Because in the rural areas a lot of those distances are becoming greater between residents, and I don't see any particular increase or decrease in relation to that.

Mr. Oberle: Again, Mr. Chair, the estimates before us are supplementary estimates, so they represent spending supplementary to the government's 2014-2015 budget. There are many, many programs contained within that budget that were spent and allocated as planned that would not be reflected in the supplementary estimates for this year. The member may want to engage the Minister of Education once we get into Budget '15-16 to discuss what the program is going forward.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. member, you still have 30 seconds.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the time.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will move on to the members from the third party. I would recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre. Before you start, hon. member, would you like to have your time combined with the minister's?

Ms Blakeman: Yes, please.

The Chair: I'm assuming that the minister is – unless they tell me otherwise, then we will proceed as such, so you may begin.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much.

The Chair: You have 20 minutes.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you. I'm very aware of the 20 minutes. It actually makes me kind of crazy that we are working under this particular budget process, which was never what was intended when we started into this because, you know, the opposition

members are trying to debate \$6,820,677.77 per opposition minute. That's, you know, a lot to cover in a minute.

An Hon. Member: And you just wasted two of them.

Ms Blakeman: Well, the wasting would be in your opinion, then, I take it. It's a poor process, and it doesn't serve this place well at all.

Let me talk a bit about the disservice that's going on. In the Department of Education there has been a refusal on behalf of the government to tell us where these schools are. This entire presentation is odd, to say the least, because we keep talking about – wait for this – \$65,161,000 for 50 new schools and 70 modernizations reprofiled.

4:50

Reprofiled: what's that mean? Like, moved? Well, I thought: "Okay. I'll go to the dictionary. What the heck." Reprofiled. Profile is the outline or contour of a human face; a picture or representation of the side view of a head; an outline view of a city or a mountain; an outline of an object, as in a moulding, formed on a vertical plane passed through the object at right angles to one of its principal horizontal dimensions. I'm thinking: are you guys making up words now because you can't think of another way to not tell us something? Reprofiled? What is that?

I mean, what the minister has said in English is that there's money that's been moved, I assume reprofiled, to 2014-15, but when we keep asking, "Where are these schools that you claim are built?" we get no answer. Nobody over there will tell us. So please tell us exactly where the schools that are completed and have children sitting in desks looking at a teacher who is teaching under the Alberta curriculum are located.

I know this is amusing to the Minister of Energy, that this is a big tee-hee joke, but I'd like to know because I listened to the questions today during question period, and all I heard was a bunch of numbers about: we've got 35 schools in development. Even listening to the minister today – you know, it says "\$19,400,000 for emergent needs in the rest of Alberta." The Minister of Energy explains that on behalf of the Minister of Education as eight new schools and a certain number of starter schools, but then he says that the starter schools are fully built.

So what's a starter school exactly, please, by definition and by location? Where are these starter schools? Where have these starter schools now been fully built? Exactly where are they located, please, and in what district? Now, you've got that the planning for 57 schools is under the \$10,000,000, planning for phase 3 new schools and modernizations. Where are those 57 new schools? We'd like to know.

The Chair: Were you hoping to get an answer at this point, hon. member, or are you still going to make some more comments?

Ms Blakeman: Oh, Mr. Chair, I'm just hoping to get any kind of an answer that actually makes sense, and so far I haven't had it. So I live in hope.

The second question you can answer for me is: what is \$41,766,000 for 35 new schools and modernizations reprofiled to 2014-15 due to project delays?

Sorry. One more question, Mr. Chair. Where are the schools that were promised to be finished in 2011? Where are they? These schools that are coming due: when were they started? You really are doing yourself a disservice. It makes it look like you're deliberately trying to hide what you're doing when you can't answer really simple questions about where these are and when they were started and when they were finished. It doesn't serve you well.

I'll let the Minister of Energy answer for the Minister of Education.

The Chair: So, hon. member, in the context of the supplementary supply, the hon. Minister of Energy on behalf of the Minister of Education.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The member doth protest too much, I think. First of all, we're not in a budgetary process. The government through the course of the year spends in accordance with the budget, and in the event they spend supplementary to budget estimates, we're required, of course, to debate the supplementary spending. That's what we're debating here, supplementary estimates.

Now, the government, of course, is required to spend in accordance with the timing of the budget, and in the event that that doesn't happen, we need to move funds. It's not unusual that a four-year construction timeline, for example, might involve budgetary spending within four years, and the movement of those funds between those four years would require that we properly book them. That, of course, is what reprofiling means. The member is cute with the definition of reprofiling although I had never ever thought that reprofiling could mean some change in the shape of my head, Mr. Chair, which is intriguing indeed because of my German heritage and the size of my head. It's something that's of obvious concern to me. I'm well aware that if this head was a planet, it would have several moons orbiting it.

The construction of schools. I understand the member's obvious concern. Where the schools are: well, first of all, they're all in Alberta, Mr. Chair. I can assure her of that. Second of all, every single one of them is listed on the website by name, by location, the phase of construction, when they're finished, how many tiny children's parts are occupying the chairs within those schools if she would just go look them up.

We're here to discuss supplementary estimates. I've fully described the spending of the government in accordance with the rules of spending, and I'll take my chair, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. Well, I'm going to try and look this up and see if I actually get this information. I'm doubting it, but I'll try.

Reprofiling still isn't a word that appears in the dictionary, so I do congratulate the government on developing new language as a way of describing the movement of money between a four-year period of construction. That's pretty good. But the questions that I was asking were about where the schools were that he actually described that were part of this supplementary supply request. How does one go from building a starter school, which he mentioned as part of I believe it was the \$19,400,000 for emergent needs in the rest of Alberta – how does it go from being a starter school to a fully built school? That is a perfectly legitimate question to be asking given that he himself referenced it in the supplementary supply money that he offered previously.

I would also like to know: what is the current deferred maintenance budget, or debt, I guess we should call it, that \$20 million is being applied toward it in this supplementary supply budget? What is the remaining amount of money in that deferred maintenance debt, again using exactly the words that the Minister of Energy described, the \$20 million for capital maintenance and renewal as deferred maintenance? Taking a chunk out of deferred maintenance, what does that leave the deferred maintenance debt at?

That's two more questions. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Yes. I apologize to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre for not addressing the starter schools question. Mr. Chair, the conversion was done in accordance with a couple of public announcements that the Minister of Infrastructure made, to begin with that we would build starter schools, which was a concept proposed by a particular school board that was under some pretty significant growth pressure, the thinking being that we would develop the core of a school sufficient to put children in, but perhaps it would be lacking in a few facilities, one of them being a gymnasium, and that as time progressed, we would add facilities on while the school was occupied. That was made in accordance with a public announcement. The funding proposed for it was also made public.

Subsequent to that, the minister also announced that we were converting those to fully built schools, I guess a reversion to the more traditional model of constructing a school. That was done, again, in consultation with a school board and also in accordance with the fact that the particular way of proceeding afforded us some cost savings. I referred to the starter schools because that's how they were referred to in the budget, but in fact they've been converted, as I said in the presentation.

Secondly, Mr. Chair, we are in supplemental estimates, and I described \$20 million that was approved to supplement the infrastructure maintenance and renewal program. The infrastructure maintenance and renewal program is a line item in the '14-15 budget. It was approved by this Legislature last spring, as the member is well aware. I don't have the budget in front of me, but if she would flip to the appropriate page, she would find what the budget number is for the deferred maintenance and renewal program.

Ms Blakeman: I know that this Minister of Energy is a bright man, and I know that he's very capable of understanding the questions that I'm asking. The fact that he's not giving me the information is making me think that he doesn't want to give me the information, so let me try again.

5:00

To the minister: what is the deferred maintenance debt? You should be able to tell me that if you are standing in for the Minister of Education when there is an additional \$20 million going towards it. Yes, there is additional money in the budget – aha; true enough – but you're adding \$20 million to it, so that should be taking money off your total deferred maintenance debt. What is the end number from that? That is part of the supplementary supply budget. I know the minister is capable. I know he's very capable of understanding and giving me that.

The second question I have for him now is: what is the additional number of students that we are having to accommodate under the \$30,600,000 for the Calgary school board of education, and how many additional students are we accommodating under the emergent needs in the rest of Alberta? How many additional students are being accommodated and/or anticipated? If you know you're spending that money, you must know how many additional students you're expecting.

I'll let him answer those questions. Thank you.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chair, I am not, in fact, privy to a total infrastructure deficit amount. As I pointed out, if the member were to refer to the '14-15 budget, she would find the number for the infrastructure maintenance and renewal program. Obviously, \$20 million beyond that budget number is what we spent and what we're speaking to today, \$20 million. I cannot tell her what the total number is. I'm not sure that that's available.

I also cannot tell her the number of students that the spending pressure is addressing. I would be more than happy to refer that question to the Minister of Education on her behalf, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Hon. minister and hon. member, you have six minutes and 15 seconds left.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I look forward to receiving that information. It would be preferable if I could receive that information before I had to vote on the supplementary supply bill itself, which should help me actually do that.

Can the minister tell me whether the total amount of \$30,600,000 for the Calgary board of education and the \$19,400,000 for emergent needs in Alberta, those being additional and/or anticipated additional students, is all being used for capital? It's under a capital budget. Is any of it being used for anything besides bricks and mortar? Is it being used for desks? Is it being used for Smart boards? Is it being used for supply budgets? Is 100 per cent of that money going towards building schools? I'll look for that answer.

Thank you.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chair, the money is going to capital or operational as identified in the budget, and I believe the money she just referred to is identified as capital in the budget, which would mean it's going towards capital expenditures, which would be the construction of the schools. It's not going to Smart boards as supply as the hon. member asked. It's booked in the supplementary estimates in accordance with the rules of our spending, which, I think, are quite clear. So if money is booked as capital, it's spent on capital.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Yes, that's true. But there is a certain amount which any department will not expense out of the year. It becomes a capital expenditure. Computers is one that often comes out as a capital expenditure, especially if they're replacing a number of them. If they replace one, it's going to be expensed out in the year. If they replace 20 of them, it's going to be expensed out as capital. What is the dividing line in this particular ministry between operational and capital? Is he able to tell me that or if it's consistent between departments? I know that it used to be about \$5,000, but the last time I was on Public Accounts was a few years ago, so perhaps it's higher than that.

Mr. Oberle: I'd be out on a limb here to share a line that I'm not aware of inside the Department of Education. Again, I'd be more than happy to refer the question of the hon. member to the Minister of Education.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thanks. I look forward to that.

The flood money out of 2013, appearing on page 24 of the supplementary supply document under vote 6, 2013 Alberta flooding, it has a credit back of \$963,000, so just under a million dollars. Can I get specifics about where the credit came from, in which part of vote 6? Vote 6 is a big number, so specifically where did that number come from in order to be able to be used as a credit towards some of the other overexpenditures that happened?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chair, the information I have and shared with the hon. members is that \$963,000 is the result of an accumulation of lower than budgeted capital spending in other areas, so it was transferred capital expenditure to use as a credit in other areas. It

was \$963,000 underspent on other capital projects, and I don't have a detailed list thereof.

Ms Blakeman: Well, it says in vote 6 that it's 2013 Alberta flooding. Does he have no additional information about where the savings were in connection with Department of Education capital spending and the flooding? Or maybe he could get the minister to send us that information as well.

Mr. Oberle: I'd be happy to ask the minister that question as well, Mr. Chair. I suspect that when it's related to capital spending of the Department of Education and flooding, it relates to individual flood recovery projects in schools funded by the Department of Education. I will refer that specific question. If the member wants a list of schools, I'm sure it's available.

Ms Blakeman: Great. Thanks very much.

I'm a little curious why the number for debt servicing program under vote 3, school facilities, is appearing in this document when there's no additional money. The current estimate and the final estimate is exactly the same amount of money. Are you able to explain why it's appearing on the budget page, again page 24? It's showing the capital programs at the top of the page under three programs – school facilities, basic education programs, and 2013 Alberta flooding – and then it references debt servicing program, also under vote 3 for school facilities. It's curious to include it when there's no change.

The Chair: Mr. Minister, can I ask you to maybe provide that information later to the member.

Mr. Oberle: Yeah.

The Chair: Thank you very much. The time has expired, so I think that's fair.

I'll go to the member of the fourth party. I see the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Would you like to combine your time as well, hon. member?

Mr. Mason: I think we can try that. Yeah. It seems fair to me.

The Chair: Try that? So you will have 20 minutes starting now.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thanks very much. Well, Mr. Chairman, I've been going through the document, which we've just received not too long ago, and I guess I'd like to start with the Environment and Sustainable Resource Development budget. In this budget – and I'm just sort of going from front to back, no particular order other than it's the order that they're presented – there is under operational on page 30 \$8 million to maintain the operational infrastructure and grounds at the Kananaskis golf course during rehabilitation of the course. Then you go down to capital, and there's another \$1,170,000 for the Kananaskis golf course.

5:10

Now, Mr. Chairman, we've heard from the Premier that there is no money in the budget for the Auditor General or the children's advocate – and these are small amounts by comparison – yet, as I see it here, there is over \$900 million for the Kananaskis golf course. I'd like to ask the relevant minister why this is a priority for this government and, you know, why the Kananaskis golf course isn't able to sustain itself from green fees and operate pretty much on a break-even basis. Who is going to answer that, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: That would be the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour on behalf of the Minister of ESRD.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On the funding for Kananaskis, it's obviously for flood repair. As the hon. member asked the question, "Can it maintain itself?" I guess that after the repairs are done, it can. Certainly, there will be a part of that funding that will be requested of the federal government, but in the meantime the repairs have to be done. This represents those additional expenditures during this year to do that. I think the other part of the question was: can it maintain itself? I'm not sure that – my understanding is that the course can more than maintain itself once it's repaired. But at this point the government's intention is to fulfill the promises to put it back into workable condition so that all Albertans can enjoy it.

Mr. Mason: Hon. minister, right above the \$8 million there's another \$14 million to continue with the implementation of flood infrastructure recovery measures. So I'm not sure that it's for flood rehabilitation. But I guess the question is: if it is as a result of the flood, being heavily damaged and it needs to be repaired, why didn't the government have insurance?

Mr. McIver: Again, some of the insurance is actually through the federal government and disaster recovery.

Mr. Chair, I think the Minister of Municipal Affairs has something to add if . . .

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you. I'd be happy just to supplement to this as well, to the hon. member as well. This is part of the disaster recovery program, which is also 90 per cent eligible from the federal government. So it meets that eligibility criteria. If anything under these floods had insurance, of course then they couldn't be eligible for the DRP. So in order to access the 90 per cent federal funding, this is the avenue that we're able to make sure.

Mr. Mason: So is this \$8 million our share? Is that our 10 per cent?

Mrs. McQueen: What you have to do first is you have to actually pay out, and then you apply for up to 90 per cent with the federal government.

Mr. Mason: So you're saying that we're going to get 90 cents back on the dollar on this?

Mrs. McQueen: We could receive up to 90 per cent. As we know from other disasters in the province, when we applied to the federal government, we can receive up to – doesn't mean we always receive, but generally as a rule, yes, we can receive up to. But it takes awhile, a few years by the time all of the accounting and everything goes forward, once the federal government also reviews all of that, to receive that money back.

Mr. Mason: Why is this a higher priority than the children's advocate?

The Chair: One at a time and through the chair if you would, please.

Mr. Mason: Oh, yes. Sure. I thought she was done.

I wonder why this is a higher priority than the children's advocate.

The Chair: Hon. member, we're dealing with supplementary supply here. I don't know if the minister might be able to answer that.

Mrs. McQueen: You know, we have to deal, I guess, with apples and apples. The disaster recovery program, which is 90 per cent

federally funded, is different funding and a different – this is about supplementary estimates on that. This is not about the overall budget in different ministries.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. member, you may continue.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, I'll just let that go because I have a number of other things to ask.

This question is for Justice and Solicitor General. There are 5 and a half million dollars for legal aid to maintain current service levels and to increase eligibility guidelines. Now, there have been a lot of issues that have been raised around legal aid in this province in the past. I guess my question is what specifically this money will accomplish in terms of legal aid and whether or not it will address the outstanding issues that have been raised repeatedly in this House.

The Chair: The Minister of Human Services on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, hon. member. With comments from the hon. Minister of Justice, the commitment to legal aid is certainly shown in the \$5.5 million in additional funding that was provided, and appropriate funding of legal aid was in the Minister of Justice's mandate letter as well. Certainly, making sure that we ensure that the vulnerable are protected and ensure that the AISH clients can continue to use services of legal aid is very important.

In the 2014-15 budget, as you're well aware, legal aid received a total of \$64.3 million in funding, including \$53.5 million from the government and \$5.5 million in additional funding and \$10.8 million from the federal government.

We know this is a priority for this government and, as well, the continuing challenges with the federal government and the amount that they put in versus the amount that we put in.

Mr. Mason: How does this 5 and a half million dollars specifically help those vulnerable Albertans who require legal aid?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, I think, as the hon. member has noticed, it will ensure that they have greater access to legal representation; that's what it's going to be doing. At the end of the day, it's absolutely necessary to do this, and that's why the Minister of Justice brought this forward.

Mr. Mason: Is this for additional caseloads or additional compensation for legal aid lawyers?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you. I would indicate that what we have been told here is that it's maintaining current service levels and increasing the financial eligibility guidelines so more applicants, including individuals receiving AISH, have greater access to full legal representation.

Mr. Mason: Moving along, Mr. Chairman, to Service Alberta, I have a couple of questions relating to that and, specifically, around the \$7 million for motor vehicle services such as secure drivers' licences and ID cards and increasing transaction volumes and another \$277,000 to safeguard information systems. My question is whether or not this amounts to a subsidy of the private registries in our province and why additional transaction volumes are not paid for by the fees that we all pay now whenever we renew our registration or driver's licence or do other transactions at these privatized registries?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, hon. member. Certainly, we know that the registry agents across Alberta do incredible work. We also know that the fee that is charged per transaction, the \$9 fee that is charged, helps them to defer the expenses for their own costs. With the increased population growth that we had this last year, the almost over 100,000 people that have come to Alberta, we know that there's additional demand for drivers' licences and ID cards. So that is what the additional expense is about, the transactions and the volumes. It's also about the security and integrity of the IT system, the updating that's required on a regular basis to ensure that the information is accurate and to ensure that the registry agents have access to that information to do their good work.

Mr. Mason: Is this money paid directly to these privatized registry offices?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, hon. member. No. This money would go directly to – it's within Service Alberta in terms of what they're doing with the ID cards and the drivers' licences, so that's where the money would be flowing from Service Alberta.

Mr. Mason: It's an indirect subsidy of the privatized directory rather than a direct subsidy.

The Chair: Do you require an answer to that one, hon. member? I guess not. Okay; carry on then.

Mr. Mason: I was just simply summarizing what I thought the minister said, so thank you very much.

Now I want to go to Health next if I can. This is a very large area. First of all, there's a supplementary amount of \$157 million, which is combined with \$206 million that are made available from lower-than-budgeted expenses in other programs. I'd like to ask the Minister of Health, and I don't mind if he just wants to remain seated when he answers. First of all, I guess the question is: where did you save this money? Was this all in your department? How did you not spend \$206 million given the pressures that the system is clearly experiencing now with respect to waiting times and other types of pressures?

5:20

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you. Our need for additional funding would be even greater if we didn't have the \$206 million from this year's budget. Surpluses include lower-than-anticipated operating cost requirements of the South Health Campus in Calgary, grants and initiatives related to continuing care strategy, lower-than-expected demand for flu immunization, and reduced requirements of some children's health initiatives, revised implementation plan for family care clinics, lower-than-expected use of allied health services, cost efficiency and favourable exchange rates in the purchase of blood and blood products, savings from outpatient cancer therapy drugs due to lower-than-anticipated usage and demand for these drug therapies, and a prior-year surplus in health services provided at correctional facilities, and cost savings in frozen information technology projects.

Mr. Mason: Would the minister be prepared to provide to the committee of supply in writing a detailed breakdown of where these savings have been found?

Mr. Mandel: You want us to put numbers beside them? I'd be more than pleased to do that.

Mr. Mason: And break it down. That was quite a long list of areas, so I'd be very interested in seeing that.

There's \$170 million for higher-than-anticipated volumes and costs and for not implementing the pharmacare program in drugs and supplemental health benefits. Now, I'm very curious about this. How come it cost you money to not implement a program?

Mr. Mandel: The program was supposed to be implemented. It was placed into the budget, but it was not implemented.

Mr. Mason: Why did that cost so much money to not do it? Usually when you implement a program it costs you money.

Mr. Mandel: Well, when you put a program into the budget but you don't gain the revenue from it, you're short the money from the revenue.

Mr. Mason: I see. Well, how does that balance against the projected costs of the program, then? Where does that go?

Mr. Mandel: Well, the problem is that a pharmacare program was to be implemented. The 2014-15 budget included that pharmacare program, the potential revenue from it, but then they did not implement the program, so they were short the revenue of \$137 million.

Mr. Mason: Didn't they save on costs as well?

Mr. Mandel: They didn't do it.

Mr. Mason: Did they not project costs for the program as well as revenue?

Mr. Mandel: No. I'm not explaining myself very well. At the time the government made the decision that they were going to have a pharmacare program. They put that as a potential revenue source into the budget, but they never implemented the pharmacare program to collect that revenue. So you have in the budget a hundred and X numbered million dollars that you're expecting, but you didn't implement the program, so you have no money to cover it back.

Mr. Mason: I understand that part, but surely the program had some costs that were planned as well, that were anticipated.

An Hon. Member: It was a money-saving program.

Mr. Mason: So this was a way to make money on drugs?

Mr. Mandel: Well, it was a way to generate revenue. Yes.

Mr. Mason: Why didn't you do it?

Mr. Mandel: I wasn't there at the time. They made a decision not to do it.

Mr. Mason: I see. Okay.

The Chair: I'm thinking the minister may need to send you a summary after this, or a short summary, because back and forth might be a little hard to try to – it sounds like there's an explanation, but I think it might be a little hard to garner that right here.

Mr. Mason: Yes. I would appreciate that because I'm using up my \$6 million minutes quite quickly here.

The Chair: If you would continue with the rest of your question.

Mr. Mason: There's a \$15 million reduction to operating costs for new facilities, resulting in a net increase in grants to Alberta Health Services of \$105 million. I would really like an explanation for how you reduce something by \$15 million and it gives you a net increase of \$105 million, because you may have solved your budget problem right there, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Mandel: Where did you . . .

Mr. Mason: It's page 34, right near the bottom.

The Chair: Item 11, hon. member, on that page, I believe, is what I'm following.

Mr. Mandel: I'm trying to find it.

Mr. Mason: It's \$5 million for support services.

Mr. Mandel: Well, there's \$15 million for diagnostic and therapeutic services and \$5 million for support services. Now, that's partially offset by a \$15 million reduction in operating costs for new facilities. So our new facilities were costing us less. The South Health Campus cost us less money, resulting in a net increase in grants to Alberta Health Services of \$105 million. You have to add them all up. The \$120 million is the gross amount, and then you take away the others ones, and you end up getting the \$15 million, and the \$105 million gives you the \$120 million.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you.

I'm just trying to find my section here on Education. Under capital on page 22 there is \$65 million for 50 new schools and 70 modernizations, reprofiled to 2014-15 to accelerate some projects and address other delays. I know the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre dealt with this a little bit. Reprofiled really means putting it in a different budget year, doesn't it? Doesn't it usually mean, you know, the same project. It could be earlier, but it usually means these are being delayed.

The Chair: Hon. Minister of Energy on behalf of the Minister of Education, you're acknowledging that?

Mr. Oberle: Yeah, I acknowledge it.

The Chair: Okay. Carry on, then, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Then there's close to \$42 million for 35 new schools and modernizations, reprofiled to 2014-15 due to project delays, and then \$29,740,000 for various other schools and modular projects, reprofiled to 2014-15. As I see this, there are 50, 85 – how many schools have been delayed?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chair, I don't have that specific information in front of me. Again, I'd point the member to the website, where school by school, location by location the status of each school is clearly on the website of the Minister of Infrastructure. The member would be able to access that information.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Chairman, we're here to approve a very large budgetary amount and to ask the responsible ministers to explain why. Telling me that I should go and look it up on the website when I just got the document just an hour ago is not particularly helpful. The question really is that we're being asked to spend here, I add it up, pretty close to \$125 million for delayed schools. I'd like to know how many schools are being delayed and why it costs so much to delay them. If you postpone them, why does it cost you money?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chair, I'd be happy to refer the question to the hon. Minister of Education. These are not all delays. They're reprofiling it. The money that was needed to be spent on school projects was spent at a different time and outside of the regular budget, so we need to repost the spending. Now, a school-by-school list, while it is available, I would be honoured to forward the question to the hon. Minister of Education. However . . .

The Chair: The time is expired for this segment, hon. minister, but you did make a commitment to forward that last bit of information to the hon. member, so I would imagine he'll be looking forward to that.

I will recognize the next member, the independent Member for Rimbe- Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. You, sir, have 20 minutes. You have the option, if you would like, of going back and forth as the other members have. Is that your wish?

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To go back and forth I think would be a more efficient use of time if that's okay.

The Chair: Wonderful. You may start.

Mr. Anglin: Well, my caucus got together, and the discussions are lengthy and very confusing sometimes, but I think we're going to try to get some clarity. How's that? My question – this is somewhat difficult because I need to make sure it falls within the proper ministry, because it's going to be dealing mostly with flood mitigation. I suspect most of the responsibility is going to be ESRD although some will go to Infrastructure and other to Municipal Affairs.

5:30

Page 31 on ESRD. I'm hoping the minister can tell me the monies allocated for parks flood recovery in the community stabilization, under flooding, and the infrastructure recovery. Is this money that's being spent not just the responsibility of the ministry, but is the ministry assuming the liability for the recovery program? So if something goes wrong, are they there to ensure that it is done right? Can that be clarified for me?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Chair, the government after the flood took it upon themselves to do some of the repairs. I guess when we do the repairs, by default we take some of the responsibility for that, so it's kind of part and parcel of what we do. When we do work, we're accountable for it. I guess if I heard the question correctly and understood it correctly, the short answer is yes, and I just finished the longer answer.

Mr. Anglin: I presume from that answer, then, when I go to Infrastructure on page 43, that when we look at \$891,000 for reconstruction and accommodation and for the \$19 million for floodway relocation – I'll get to the \$19 million in a second. On the \$891,000 for reconstruction and accommodation it is the province that assumes the liability for not just the spending of the funds but for the outcome, which in other words is: whatever they build or whatever they reconstruct, they assume the liability.

Mr. McIver: That was a Transportation question.

The Chair: Oh, Transportation, then. The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Anglin: Do you want me to ask the question again?

Mr. McIver: Yeah.

Mr. Anglin: Okay. Page 42 of the estimates.

The Chair: That's Infrastructure; 42 is Infrastructure.

Mr. Anglin: I can't hear you.

The Chair: Page 42 is Infrastructure, hon. member. Just rephrase your question, and I'll get someone on behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Anglin: Do you want me to go with the question?

The Chair: Just rephrase your question, hon. member.

Mr. Anglin: Okay. The question is simply this. The \$891,000 that's allocated for reconstruction and accommodation: I just want clarity again that whatever this money is spent on is something that the provincial government takes liability for, that it's done right, and it's done properly.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health on behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mandel: So let me just get the . . .

The Chair: This is about the \$891,000.

Mr. Mandel: Yes.

Mr. Anglin: Do we got an answer?

Mr. Mandel: I'm looking.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chair, if I could weigh in on the question.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chair, the member seeks, it seems, clarity around the apportionment of liability, and I would assume he's talking about in the event that there's a failure, which then I would assume he's talking about in the event of some future flood. Certainly, if there was any liability attached, that would be a decision most likely of the court of law in the province of Alberta. There's certainly no budget for a liability assumed in the supplementary estimates that we're discussing today. It's possible that as a result of the works of any party that some subsequent event happens that causes damage. That's always a possibility when people do works of any kind, and the liability is often determined after the fact. We have not booked any liability in the operations.

Mrs. McQueen: Do you want me to add . . .

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. The Minister of Municipal Affairs would like to supplement.

The Chair: Minister of Municipal Affairs, please supplement.

Mrs. McQueen: If the hon. member is okay with that, just as a supplement. So if a homeowner is choosing to have the property replaced, then they are choosing that once and once only. If another event happened, if they chose to have their house reconstructed, they could not have that happen again, so further down the road Alberta taxpayers would not be responsible for that. As is, we're moving through the ministries, and the public safety committee is really talking about making sure that we're not allowing – and the legislation was put forward last year by the then Minister of Municipal Affairs ensuring that municipalities cannot rebuild in those areas. We're actually doing in our ministry the regulation in consultation with our partners and stakeholders on that piece. But rest assured, if a home is rebuilt now, it's one time, and it will not

be funded. I think that's the essence of your question if I'm not wrong.

Mr. Anglin: Actually, you're way ahead of the curve on me on that one. I'm going to get to that one. But I think the Minister of Energy was closer to the point. What we have here is – did I just get that wrong? [interjections] Okay. I was going to say that I see you guys laughing. You guys move portfolios around sometimes. I gotta keep up.

The question I have is: as we implement these flood mitigation measures – and in the case of the mapping, of course, that's a different set of liability because the province now will designate what is a floodway, what is not a floodway. What I'm looking at is that when we're doing things like the dredging, the armouring of the banks, and any type of change in waterways, you can affect downstream, you can affect upstream, depending if you inhibit the flow.

What I'm looking for here is – and I've been asked this question by the communities. As you know, I have the community of Sundre. Here we are again. We're in March, and clearly we're facing another flood season. There are issues, and the issue that we're facing is one of liability. Once work is done to any floodway, to any flood fringe, who is responsible for that liability? Is it going to be downloaded on the community? Is it going to be downloaded onto the municipality, the county, or does the province assume that liability because it's a provincial project?

Mr. Oberle: A curious line of questioning, Mr. Chair. I guess what the member is trying to get at is that if the province spends some money here, we're creating what could be quite a large liability. We could in fact do that if we in some way negligently planned or approved a project to be put on a waterway, which subsequently . . . [interjection] No, that could never happen.

The Chair: The member has the floor, hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: The member correctly points out that that could never happen, Mr. Chair. If, indeed, in the event that that could happen, that the province did somehow negligently construct or plan some facility, where later the facility itself caused damage, I guess there could be some liability owing. That, of course, would be determined in the court of law. But in actual fact what is happening here is that the province and municipalities in concert with a lot of planning and registered hydrologists and engineers and all the people that normally approve these plans have put out structures within streams or along stream banks that hopefully will prevent flooding. Some future flooding event doesn't create a liability there. It certainly creates future damage, and, as this one was, it would be covered by the federal disaster recovery program in accordance with the rules of the federal government.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Minister. Let me sort of narrow right down to the point here. The community of Sundre has roughly \$3.1 million, \$3.2 million. I'm not sure if it's the community of Sundre as much as it's the county of Mountain View that has been allocated the funds, and I'm not sure how much, if any, funds come from the federal government for a flood mitigation project. I'll let you determine – if someone could point me if it's in this estimate or if it was in last year's budget that still has not been spent.

The problem is this. The liability for a community, as the minister just points out, High River being a perfect example, is that it is the province as the last resort or the federal government. The community has been wiped out. What we have in the situation in Sundre is that we have the money allocated. It's there. They need to build a berm to protect against future flooding. It's been

designed, and SRD has been involved in this. One thing is holding it up. Nobody can answer the question as to who's going to be liable if somebody says: you built that berm, and that caused my property to be flooded out versus your property. The community is scared to death to move on building the berm, and it's driving me crazy because we know one thing is going to happen in this community. It's not if there's going to be a flood; it's when there's going to be a flood.

5:40

If we could start building – by the way, this berm is actually going on SRD land, so that's one of those issues. We can't resolve the liability issue to move forward so we can build this project when the money is there and it's allocated, and that's what I'm trying to drill down to right now. And when you answer that, if somebody could point out to me where that money – is it coming out of Municipal Affairs or ESRD? I think it's ESRD, but I'm not sure.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Chair, the hon. member I think is asking a good question in a way, but he's asking a question trying to assign liability to something that has not happened yet. I'm not sure you can assign liability to something that has not happened yet. While I think it's a terrific question, it's not necessarily a supplementary estimates question. I would hope, very respectfully . . .

The Chair: That's where I was going.

Mr. McIver: . . . would suggest that the member send a note to the minister with that question. I think it's a good question; I just don't think it's a supplementary estimates question. I would love to see you get your question answered in the appropriate arena.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. member, yes, you have another eight minutes, but if you wanted to focus more on the supplementary request, it might . . .

Mr. Anglin: I'll make my argument that it is a supplementary request because you do have a number of funds in the supplementary budget going to the same types of projects. That question that I've asked is: preventing a project from going forward. So you can allocate this money, but if that same issue of liability that plagues the community of Sundre plagues any of these other issues – allocating the money is fine, but you know as well as I do that building the project is what gets the job done. In other words, the completion is what provides the mitigation, not the money, although we need the money to build the project.

My concern is this: I'm looking at the various recovery projects and the money put forth to the various projects for flood mitigation, and what I want to see is the flood mitigation projects finished, particularly in the small towns. I'm going to use Sundre as my example. It is the liability of the unforeseen that's holding up the project, and I don't know how we deal with that, particularly in the smaller communities, to move forward so the projects get built. That's the key.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: In the event that some future flood condition causes damage to any property along the river, whether that damage was caused upstream because there's a berm downstream or anywhere else along that river, the landowner will be compensated like all the landowners that were flooded out – terrific damage in the 2013 flooding event – under the disaster recovery program. Beyond that,

the hon. member is asking for a legal interpretation of a hypothetical situation. Nobody in this Legislature can provide him with that.

He is also providing us with a specific example, a specific issue, in his constituency that specifically involves the Minister of ESRD, Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. I would invite him to work proactively between his municipality and that minister to see if resolution can be brought to that issue. But, ultimately, if his municipality feels that they are at risk, I suspect they won't proceed with the project, and there's not much we can do about it. It's really not a discussion item for supplementary estimates.

Mr. Anglin: We'll move on. I think we beat this horse, and it's not moving anymore. Minister of Infrastructure, in dealing with the \$19 million floodway relocation program, how much of this money is designated, if you could tell me, to the Sundre area now that it has been remapped and people find themselves in the flood fringe, the floodway, and the various places where their property values have now dropped?

The Chair: Hon. minister, on behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure can you provide that, or is that something you may have to get back to the member on?

Mr. McIver: The hon. member didn't give a page number or a line number, so if he could just give me that, that would give me a fighting chance to know what he's asking.

Mr. Anglin: I don't want to arm him, but page 42 under Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Thank you.

Mr. Anglin: It's the second-to-last bulleted item, \$19,956,000, and it's allocated for floodway relocation program. So what I'm looking for is: how much of that would be applicable to the community of Sundre now that the flood mapping has been done and the various individuals there have found themselves available for this?

Mr. Mandel: We don't have a specific breakdown of where it all went, so we will get back to you as to what it is when we talk to the minister.

The Chair: So you have a commitment on the record that that information if it's available will be provided to you.

Mr. Anglin: Okay.

The Chair: You can carry on for another four minutes and 24 seconds.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Could you assure me that at least Sundre qualifies for a part of or any or all of that money? I won't go for all of that money, but I want to make sure that the community of Sundre is qualified for that money. I really would like that answered.

Mr. Mandel: Well, I don't have that information, but I will also request that the Minister of Infrastructure – that's not a supplementary question. But, anyway, we will ask the minister and see if we can get an answer for you to that.

The Chair: Okay. You've got some more time, hon. member, unless you're finished.

Mr. Anglin: You read my mind, Mr. Chair. I am actually finished.

The Chair: Thank you.

This time is now available for government members should any government members choose to ask a question.

Seeing none, then I have to start the rotation over again, and I would start with the Official Opposition. If there are no members from the Official Opposition, then I would go to a member from the third party.

The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. Sure.

The Chair: You are up, sir.

Mr. Hehr: Well, then I'll keep asking. Here we go. Now, we have the Municipal Affairs minister here, so I'm looking at your budget. Can you tell me what, if any, of the budget money is allotted to flood recovery and how that money is distributed throughout the various jurisdictions and the like?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly, with regard to page 50 of the supplementary estimates you see as it relates to flood recovery the \$1.358 million with that, and the disaster recovery program transformation is on there as well. Those deal with community flood mitigation projects in the High River area as well as can be seen on page 51. Are you okay, hon. member? Okay.

Mr. Hehr: Was any of that money going to Calgary and areas around there?

The Chair: To respond, hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Yeah. So specific to those ones, Mr. Chair, the Calgary ones were in the 2014-15 budget. This is not dealing with that piece. This is on the flood recovery piece. But the budget certainly does deal with it in the overall budget but in supplementary estimates does not. If you would like specifics with regard to Calgary, I'd be more than happy to follow up with you on that, and if you actually want to follow up with a specific question on that, I'm more than happy to help you.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Then let's ask: where are we at? Is any of this money going out to speed up DRP claims or anything of that matter?

Mrs. McQueen: With regard to the DRP claims, first of all, with regard to appeals, as you know, we tripled our staff in October to deal with the appeals not just in Calgary, of course, but in all of the 2013 floods, to get those appeals completed. We had a target of completing them by the end of December, which we did.

Then we've added now another 15 staff members to deal with the DRP so that we could actually have caseworkers for files. What we did on the appeal side worked, so we wanted to make sure we now have caseworkers assigned to files. We have about 2,000 files left out of the 2013 floods. I think around 1,200-ish are in Calgary, but I could get you the exact number. What we've committed to is that by the end of June 2015 we would complete the majority of those cases if not all. Some of them may then go into an appeal hearing. They have the opportunity to appeal cases and appeal to myself, which goes to the Municipal Government Board, but we've added additional resources so that we can have staff as caseworkers to move these files along more quickly.

5:50

Mr. Hehr: So of these 1,200, would these be more complex cases that don't easily fit within a correct or an easy to solve area? I'm just trying to generalize here. Is it conflicting sort of views on floodway, flood path and what the legislation actually says it's going to fund and what is within the spirit of the rule and the actual rule itself? Is that sort of your understanding of where the last 1,200 claims are and why the necessary steps continuing on?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We had over 10,000 cases, 10,800 cases, in the 2013 disasters in southern Alberta. Of those, we have approximately 2,000 left. We've added those additional staff so that, two things, we can work quicker to resolve those for those people because we want to make sure that we're looking after their files but also take away some of the frustration – and since I've come on to the ministry, I've talked with people – so that they could have the same kind of a pod of caseworkers so that every time they pick up the phone, they're not dealing with someone separately.

The 2,000 that are left are some of the harder ones, and that's why we wanted a caseworker approach to help them through this process. We're also, with the caseworker approach, actually contacting people so that they know that we're doing this and doing everything we can so that we reduce these files by the end of June.

Mr. Hehr: Is any of this money that we're dealing with right now earmarked for some of the projects on either the Bow or the Elbow in terms of future flood mitigation on the capital side?

Mrs. McQueen: Any of the mitigation is through the Minister of ESRD, and the minister would be happy to answer those if you have questions related to that.

Mr. Hehr: Then I'll ask the Minister of ESRD. Is any money being asked for in this budget due to the upstream mitigation projects that are currently going on and being directed by the province?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour on behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Yes, that is. If you look in the ESRD budget under capital, there is 4 and a half million dollars for the Springbank off-stream reservoir project to help control the Elbow. You're asking specifically about the Elbow and the Bow?

Mr. Hehr: Yeah.

Mr. McIver: Okay. All right. There is a general flood recovery erosion program primarily to reinforce riverbanks. I guess I don't have anything from Calgary or from Elbow or Bow broken out of that. Again, \$3 million is for the watershed resiliency and restoration program, and I don't have that broken out. But the big project – of course, some of the Kananaskis golf course repairs will likely include the riverbanks in some of the riparian areas because, of course, the golf course bridges that. I think that is the answer to your question.

Mr. Hehr: Now, it appears that most of this money is operational. Can you explain why that is and the process of what that operational account looks like?

Mr. McIver: You know what? No. I can only tell you that on the operational side – you're talking about the Kananaskis golf course if I understand your question correctly.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah.

Mr. McIver: Okay. There is \$8 million there on the operational side to maintain the infrastructure and grounds during the rehabilitation of the course, and there are obviously costs involved in that. Then, I guess, if you're looking for specifically, you know, moving off of one hole and onto another, I don't have that order of detail here for you. But it's \$8 million for operating. Again, what is eligible from federal funding will be applied for and with a maximum of 90 per cent returned to the Alberta taxpayers, at the maximum. Up to 90 per cent is the correct terminology.

Mr. Hehr: I guess in terms of the flood mitigation projects going on along the Bow River side of things, you said you didn't have the details of where they are or what they're doing. Could I get that information?

Mr. McIver: We will ask the minister to provide you with that in whatever detail is available, sir.

Mr. Hehr: Okay.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. It's my understanding, too – and we can follow along in the paper, I guess – that there have been some new reports out that Bow River flooding could also happen in the future. I'm wondering if any of the money earmarked in this allotment that you're providing is going towards looking at any additional upstream mitigation projects that may have to go on in the Bow or anything of that nature.

Mr. McIver: Respectfully, Chair, the supplementary estimates are what the government has asked for money to do, not for what may be asked for in the future. While it's a great question, I think the hon. member might even agree with me that it's not necessarily a supplementary estimates question.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hehr: I have the hon. Minister of Health here, and I think I may have time for one question here before we run out of time. Line 12 is primary health care, addictions and mental health. There is a \$62 million cut to addictions and mental health, and that seems to me like a pretty severe reduction given the need. I don't think our gambling addiction rates are going down, nor are there any calls for fewer supports for mental health. Can you tell us what services will be closed or reductions that are going to happen in mental health as a result of this cut?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Yes. I'm just getting to my notes. The biggest reason for that is the family care clinics, the FCCs. We didn't go ahead with them, and that was the savings. So, really, it was in that category, but it was the family care clinics.

Mr. Hehr: It was money that was earmarked that you didn't spend.

Mr. Mandel: That we just didn't spend. It's in the category of primary care, mental health and addictions, but it really is for the family care clinics. We didn't spend the money.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Was that money then transferred into any other projects on mental health or addictions counselling or things to that nature?

Mr. Mandel: It was offset into the overall need for surplus versus added needs for expenses as a result of increased costs.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you.

While I have the minister here, just an explanation. In line 7 human tissue and blood services is being cut by \$11 million. What part of the program is being cut? Can you explain that cut?

Mr. Mandel: The wording is a bit misrepresentative. The surplus is due to aggressive contract negotiations by Canadian Blood Services for the purchase of blood and blood products as well as an effective U.S. currency hedging initiative. So it's really a savings

because we got a better deal than what we budgeted for. We didn't actually cut buying any of it; we just got it for a less expensive price.

Mr. Hehr: It was just less, and you transferred it over. Okay.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. And then it all went into this imbalance of what we spent versus what we saved.

Mr. Hehr: Okay.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but you can continue your line of questioning after.

The committee will now stand recessed until 7:30 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 5:59 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, March 11, 2015

Issue 19e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 11, 2015

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

Supplementary Supply Estimates 2014-15 General Revenue Fund

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply back to order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo was speaking, and I believe he had eight minutes and 34 seconds left.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, and it's great to be back here. I'm just trying to get, if I can borrow a clerk here, back to the Education section, page 22, I believe that is. That's where I'm going to go to.

We had some discussion earlier on reprofiling and the like, and I don't want to revisit that debate on what reprofiling is or isn't and the like. Nevertheless, I look at the \$65 million for 50 new schools and 70 modernizations reprofiled to 2014-2015 to both accelerate some projects and address other project delays. Well, as the hon. member who will be answering this question knows, I don't know how in the world some projects need to be accelerated or how they got delayed given that the promises for these schools were made in 2012 and there is a clear need for those schools as, you know, we haven't built schools in a generation.

Just to keep up with population growth alone, we would have needed 87 schools, just to pick a random number. But it's not a random number. It's actually based on population growth. Maybe he could tell me how in the world these projects need to be accelerated at this time given that the need was clear in 2012 or how projects were delayed. Were they delayed by school boards or other people of that nature, or was it delayed by this government? I'd like to hear what these were that necessitated this change in our budgeting here at this time.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I laid out in the notes relating to the supplementary estimates for the Department of Education, there were a number of reprofilings because of changes in timing of projects over a long construction horizon here. I'll point out to the hon. member that the fact that money was spent in the third quarter meant that projects were actually happening. Obviously, the money was spent on projects.

The Minister of Infrastructure the other day in the House laid out a number of reasons why projects had been delayed and why other projects have been accelerated. I invite the member to visit the *Hansard* record of the Minister of Infrastructure's comments. If that's insufficient to answer his question tonight – and I'm not sure whether that will be or not – I'd be happy to refer questions to the Minister of Education or the Minister of Infrastructure on his behalf, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Hehr: I guess, to refer to these questions, what were the delays? I've been in these budget debates and now this supplementary budget, where every minister of both Infrastructure and Education told me it was their job number one to build these schools. They told me that point blank, Mr. Chair. I'm not kidding. I went through the budget debates from last year, and the hon. minister of SRD now was the one

who told me that it was job number one to get this stuff up and running, so I'm confused about what these delays were. I'd be interested in hearing what they are. You know, nevertheless, it appears to me that the government of the day had every plan just to get the money started on these in this calendar year and were just simply paying lip service to the fact prior to that.

But let me try another question in regard to these line items. The money to go to the Calgary board of education to address student accommodation pressures: is that on an increase in student enrolment numbers, or is that on actual infrastructure, or that will be on capital as well because it says "capital"?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy on behalf of the Minister of Education.

Mr. Oberle: Yes. As the member just answered his own question, that's capital.

Mr. Chair, the hon. member points out that he's talked to Education ministers in the past and Infrastructure ministers who assured him that the construction of schools was job one in our province. That is, in fact, the case. It remains the case. That's why we're in the middle of the largest infrastructure build in the country's history in terms of schools put together by a province. That's where we are. We're building. It's a complex environment. The minister laid out a number of reasons for delays or in some instances advancements. I could summarize for the member that he talked about the difficulties in getting development permits, siting issues, contract issues, redesign issues. It's a very complex environment when you're building this many schools. Nonetheless, we are building. It's job one, and the spending in here indicates that there are, in fact, jobs under way.

Mr. Hehr: Could the hon. minister give me a little more clarity around the \$19.4 million that is proposed for emergent needs in the rest of Alberta? What are some of those places, and what are the needs?

Mr. Oberle: I can't give him much more detail than that. That, obviously, would be growth pressures and other pressures that school boards feel, that the minister felt that it was necessary to provide extraordinary funding. Those were pressures that were not evident or made aware to the minister at the start of the school year, Mr. Chair. In most cases those are population pressures. If the member needs more detail than that, I'm happy to refer the question to the minister.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hehr: You know, according to the government's own figures as of August 28, 2014, deferred maintenance for Alberta's public, Catholic, and francophone school jurisdictions totalled just shy of \$852 million, and I believe there's \$20 million proposed to help with capital maintenance and renewal. Was this money going into the deferred maintenance projects listed or these other projects that are up and going? Can you provide some clarity around that?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Chair, obviously, capital maintenance renewal is for maintenance projects, so whether an individual project was on the list that formed the maintenance backlog I cannot answer. Either it was or it's an emergent need, some damage done, and a school board identified a need to fund some maintenance immediately. Again, if the member wants individual school project information, I'll refer that to the minister.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. If we can go back to Municipal Affairs, it said in a March 6, 2015, news release that the government announced a third-quarter funding increase of \$400 million for the municipal sustainability initiative. However, on page 50 of the supplementary supply estimates it says an additional, I believe, \$400 million is being requested for MSI capital grants. Why is there this discrepancy, and what is with the additional amounts of money there?

The Chair: Hon. member, I believe the minister answered a similar question earlier, which might be available on *Hansard*, or maybe we could ask that the minister provide that for you later, but your time has expired. So thank you very much.

At this time I will go to the fourth party and recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I just wondered if you wish to have your time back and forth with the ministers, hon. member. If you do, then we should say that now.

Mr. Bilous: This is my only opportunity to have a dialogue with the ministers regarding sup supply?

The Chair: There's a potential for a combined 20 minutes back and forth between you and a minister or various ministers, so if you choose to combine the times, it affords the back and forth just like the previous member had.

Mr. Bilous: Sure. I'll combine my time and go back and forth.

The Chair: Wonderful. So you can have 20 minutes starting now.

Mr. Bilous: Great. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 17, to supplementary supply. You know, I can appreciate that, obviously, the government needs to get approval from this House for spending for the interim here. Going through it, some of the spending here that ranges over a variety of different bills and ministries I quite understand, and others I have questions for. I'll try to go through, and I apologize if some of my comments are repeats of what other members have said, but the purpose of that, if I am bringing up a point that was brought up earlier, in my opinion, speaks to the importance of what we're debating and the amount of dollars that this House, should the budget or supplementary supply bill pass, will be spending.

7:40

When I look at this bill, you know, major concerns for me jump out, and they'll be in a couple different categories. One of them is health care and a lot of the cuts that I read when you look at the numbers, and I'll go through and explain my position on this. As well, you know, looking at the area of legal aid, I know that that is something that my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has been very passionate about as far as ensuring that there is adequate funding for this. Then, of course, getting into infrastructure, again, as my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has asked some questions regarding education. The current maintenance deferral price tag that exists versus the amount of dollars that are in the sup supply are quite incongruent, Mr. Chair.

Starting off with health care, I mean, the estimates, from what I read, are basically telling us that the health care budget has been cut by over \$130 million, and I'll break that number down because it does look as though we're approving about \$157 million, but when you look at the numbers, the numbers tell us that there is \$206 million available because it wasn't spent on other programs. For me, I have questions around this and concerns with the fact that, you know, health care is probably one of Albertans' and Canadians' top priorities, and the fact that there's money that is being cut because it wasn't spent raises some alarm bells for me.

In the sup supply there's a need for \$170 million for not implementing the pharmacare and \$120 million for collective agreements with AHS, but I just want to flag that these aren't new services being offered to Albertans. When you do the math on that, all that should be needed is \$73 million for new health spending, but again when you look at that \$206 million that was supposed to be spent on health but wasn't, in fact, it means that there is a cut of about \$133 million to health care.

The concern comes from, you know, that over the last while you look at emergency department wait times, and I know my colleague mentioned today that the goal that this government set out years ago for this year was that 90 per cent of the people who visit the emergency room are seen within the targeted period of time. In the first week of March only 19 per cent of people who visited the emergency room at the Grey Nuns were seen within that target. That's quite a large difference between under 20 per cent and 90 per cent as the goal and where we should be. In the same week, as well, at the Peter Lougheed Centre in Calgary only a third of patients were seen within that targeted time.

You know, I appreciate that although the government has recently introduced some measures to help address capacity issues in our emergency rooms, these are issues that have been ongoing not just within the last year but have been ongoing for quite some time. To me, how this looks is that instead of dealing with these issues and spending the money that they had, the government chose not to, which, again, is a bit of a concern. So I guess I'll start with: where did the \$206 million of unused initial supply come from in terms of lines in the 2014-15 budget?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy on behalf of the minister.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chair, I'll try to address the questions, and then I'll make my best of efforts, but I'll advise the member up front that I'd be more than happy to refer questions to the minister. For those in the House this afternoon it was becoming increasingly obvious that the minister was having a little bit of difficulty and has asked that I accept questions on his behalf.

The budget of Health was not cut. When you do a line item budgeting process, it's very typical that you're over in some areas and under in other areas, and you reallocate dollars appropriately. The minister has identified that they overbudgeted in a couple of areas, and that's where the savings come from. I can't give him details beyond what he has on the page in front of him. The minister was unable to share his notes with me. I offer our sincere apologies. But I'm more than happy to refer the questions to the minister as I'll advise all hon. members in here tonight.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bilous: I thank the hon. minister for his comments. I obviously quite understand that the Minister of Health was not feeling well, and I appreciate his attempts to answer the question.

I'm just curious, and I do understand, you know, that if money wasn't spent, then you can slide it over. I guess I am just looking for a few more details as to why those certain line items weren't spent, but I won't go back to the minister. I appreciate that we can clarify that at another time.

I will move on from . . .

The Chair: I encourage you to look at *Hansard* from earlier as well because there was some similar questioning.

Mr. Bilous: Right.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. Bilous: I will. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will definitely review *Hansard*.

I'd like to talk a little bit about education. You know, I appreciate that there is a significant amount of spending in this that is going towards especially the capital side of our projects. I do have some concerns with, again, the fact that you have project delays. I know it's been discussed in this House and outside of the House as far as where initial targets were and where we are now and that we are quite behind as far as the initial targets, which is why we're seeing them move further ahead and we talk about project delays.

I mean, the importance of infrastructure and critical infrastructure like our schools and hospitals is such that I can't help but mention that this is a situation that we shouldn't be facing the way we are today. I mean, had for a number of years the government invested adequately in new schools, with the growing population and knowing, you know, the birth rate of our province and the number of folks moving here – we're trying to play a big game of catch-up. I get that there are significant program delays. However, not building new facilities for a significant number of years has really placed a burden on families and schools and classrooms and on our students. In my opinion, much could have been avoided had we started building many years ago.

The other thing that I need to flag is that there are schools throughout the province where, you know, the timelines that the government has laid out are quite inaccurate, Mr. Chair. The one example that I spoke of was in Red Deer at the Inglewood elementary school, which was supposed to begin construction next month, and we learned that that hasn't even gone to tender. There are other examples as well.

I don't know how much detail – and I know my colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo had inquired a little bit as far as some of the specific line items. I would like to at least get it on record – and I don't know if the minister can answer to that \$19.4 million for emergent needs in the rest of Alberta. I'd love to get that fleshed out a little bit more. I mean, it's just shy of \$20 million. I know that there are significant pressures in cities like Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, but, you know, as well there are some pressures in other parts of the province. I don't know if the Minister of Education has some more specifics as far as that line item and if he could share them with us, please.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chair, I don't have specifics beyond – and the question has been asked already, so it's on the record. I'll refer that to the Minister of Education.

I do want to talk about the overall build, Mr. Chair. The member says that, you know, we haven't kept up, that we should have been building a long time ago, and that we haven't spent enough. Another party in here says that we spent too much. The fact of the matter is that schools are a pressing item in our province. There's absolutely no doubt about it. We're in the midst of the largest provincial infrastructure build ever in the country. Very obviously, in your timeline some things go faster; some things go slower. The Minister of Infrastructure has been absolutely open about the progress of those. He promised a report card; there is a report card. He has been open and honest about the reasons for delays and the progress of every single school project by name, updated regularly. It was just updated again on Monday of this week, so we fully understand the need for schools.

We're in the middle of a build. We have for some time now had the largest per capita infrastructure spend in the country, and in some circles we're criticized for that. But the fact of the matter is that in my time in this House the province, our province, has grown by more than 30 per cent, from 3 million people to over 4 million people, and that growth rate continues. It's over 100,000 people per

year, every year. Obviously, it's a lot of work to keep up to that, and that's what the minister is attempting to do, Mr. Chair.

7:50

The Chair: Thank you.

The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. You know, I can appreciate that we've had a very rapid growth rate in this province, but again it needs to be noted that there was a significant period of time in the early 2000s when there were very few new schools built, and those pressures continued to mount until we've gotten to a point where it's toppled over. An example I often use: when you look at maintenance, let's say, by homeowners. If they refuse to look at replacing their roof, replacing their boiler, their hot water tank, any kind of maintenance, over time eventually all of it will come back to bite them, and suddenly they're replacing all of them simultaneously, which, of course, means that it's much more costly, and it's much more difficult to do it all simultaneously. So, you know, I appreciate the fact that trying to do – what is it? – 150 projects in a very short period of time poses its challenges.

My point here to the House is that had we been building all along in a timely fashion, we wouldn't have our backs up against the wall. Those were conscious decisions that were made by the government not to invest in infrastructure. We look at conditions of our hospitals and health care facilities around the province. We've heard of numerous examples this year where roofs are collapsing – there's mould; there's water damage – and injecting money now into it obviously is necessary, but, again, prevention is probably the smartest use of dollars in ensuring that we never get to this point where we're putting lives either in danger or at risk. Also, leaving it to the point where – you know, it's like the example with the roof on your house. I mean, if you don't replace those shingles, eventually you're going to get water damage, and now you're going to be replacing a whole bunch of things in the interior of your house versus just replacing the roof when it was needed.

I do think it's also important to note that a FOIP on deferred maintenance, when we're talking about schools, shows that throughout the province there's more than \$850 million in deferred maintenance, or an \$850 million price tag. I appreciate that there's money that's being pumped into modernizations and new schools, but, again, when I look at \$20 million for capital maintenance compared to the \$850 million price tag, I mean, all we're doing is kicking the can forward and hoping to get by a few more years before another school either has to be shut down or gets too expensive to repair.

You know, Mr. Chair, I don't think that that is the most fiscally prudent and smartest way to be planning for a province that is growing and moving forward, especially when we look at something as important as education, the future of our province, the future of young Albertans. I personally take great issue with having them either learning in broom closets or being bused long periods of time each day, which has a negative impact on the education of our children.

So a question that I'll ask the minister is – I appreciate that the Calgary board of education has quite a long list of needs and dollars that are needed, and I see that just over \$30 million is here in the line item. You know, I appreciate that that's for CBE, but I'm wondering about growth pressures in other parts of the province as far as the dollars that are going to be allocated outside of just the Calgary board of education. I know that Edmonton is facing a similar crisis. Are we adequately addressing the needs outside of CBE?

Then I'll ask as well – you know, this is all under capital – if the minister can comment about dollars for other teaching resources. I

understand that this is going significantly for growth pressures, so it's important to build the facility, but it's equally important to have adequate staffing. So I'm wondering if the minister can comment on that.

Mr. Oberle: Well, there's a number of things in the question and the preceding comments that I would dearly like to comment upon. Where to begin, Mr. Chair? The member said that in years gone by we haven't spent. I'm pretty sure that in my whole time in this Legislature we spent above the national average on a per capita basis for infrastructure, in most years well above. During that time I don't actually remember any hospital roofs caving in. I do remember an issue where some ceiling tiles came down because a water pipe burst in the ceiling above the tiles, but no roofs collapsed that I recall – maybe I'm wrong on that – and certainly no lives were threatened in the case of some ceiling tiles coming down. I stand to be corrected, but I read the newspapers. I suspect that I read further down the column than some members opposite.

Mr. Chair, the fact of the matter is that we are in the middle of the largest infrastructure build in Canadian history. We're working very hard at that. There are a lot of Albertans pulling together to do that. So some of the numbers that the member bandies around – for example, \$20 million – are absolutely inadequate for the infrastructure backlog in this province. I wholeheartedly agree. I would point out that that's the supplementary spending, which means it's over and above the budget envelope that was approved in this House in the spring of this year. So it's not the full maintenance spending that we're doing this year; it's \$20 million over the original estimated full maintenance spending that we're doing in this budget year.

I would also point out that the \$30 million for the Calgary board of education represents emergent needs over and above what was approved as a budget in this budget year. This is not atypical. School boards' budgets are approved in this Legislature in the spring. As they go into the fall, enrolment numbers often don't line up, and Calgary felt some significant and extraordinary pressures both in this year and going forward. So they've identified a budget, and the minister funded an additional \$30 million. The same is true for the rest of Alberta, and the funding is there, \$19,400,000, which addresses the pressures over and above this budget year for the rest of Alberta. Those are all capital dollars, which means they're going into infrastructure, Mr. Chair.

I would assume, as there are no operational overspends or supplementary estimates in this department, that the spending was kept within budget on the operational side. As we fill chairs and blackboards and other things – I guess they don't use blackboards anymore in schools. You know, as we resource our schools going forward, as we build them, the operational dollars will be reflected in future budgets, not in supplementary estimates tabled in the third quarter, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Hon. member, you have another 33 seconds.

Mr. Bilous: Another 33 seconds. Well, time flies when you're having fun.

Okay. Well, I will read some quick questions here. I'm curious about the Kananaskis golf course and why it's not in parks, recreation, and tourism.

Looking at Human Services, where is the additional \$38.8 million made available from lower than budgeted expenses and other programs? Where is that being saved?

Let's see here. In Energy I've got several questions which . . .

The Chair: I would hope that those questions could be provided at some point later, or, again, hon. member, some of those questions

were addressed earlier. So if the ministers don't have the ability to provide those, certainly *Hansard* will allude to those questions that you raised earlier.

At this point, hon. members, we have concluded the first round of questioning. This next portion allows for five minutes each or the potential for five and five combined. I would next recognize the independent member, who's not here.

Then I would ask for any government member – and I'll chastise myself as your chairman for referring to the absence of any member, which I did not intend to do. I will now offer the opportunity to any government member who chooses to ask some questions.

Seeing none, then I would go back to any member and the potential for another five and five. The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, would you like to do a five and five with the minister?

8:00

Mr. Stier: That will be fine. Thank you.

The Chair: Wonderful. Please proceed, starting now.

Mr. Stier: Yes. Well, good evening, and thank you very much for the opportunity. To the Minister of ESRD, if I could, I would like to just address a few questions with respect to the flooding. He was a big participant in the past couple of years with that, and I know he has a lot of knowledge. He wasn't here earlier. Just a few things popped into my mind that I wanted to get out.

Tomorrow I'm attending another meeting for the flood situation in High River, and I noticed that on page 30 of the estimates, Minister, we see that there is a supplementary need here for 32 mil for the town of High River flood mitigation projects, rebuilding berms, et cetera. It's kind of curious to me because we have had a number of reports come in very recently, including a meeting I attended in High River on Wednesday evening last week, with respect to the diversions and all that kind of stuff that are now apparently no longer on hold. They are being, you know, told in the area that there is another report now forthcoming from another company called Deltares. We'll see that tomorrow night.

I wondered, first of all: could you explain the \$32 million in this document here and if that is still needed or not, please?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the question from the member. This is a good question. One of the great things that happened in High River subsequent to the flooding in 2013 was that the town and council there immediately sprang into action and developed a plan to build a number of berms and dikes within the town to protect the town. These berms and dikes were built to the 2013 flood conveyance level plus another metre of freeboard, so you can be assured that currently that town is well protected.

As part of their mitigation strategy there have been conversations ongoing about a potential diversion of water from the Highwood River from somewhere upstream of the town during high-flow periods, and there were a number of options, whether they were looking at going north or south. Ultimately, it was narrowed down to looking at a southern diversion into the Little Bow River.

There were two engineering studies – one done by the province, one done by the town – that had some slightly different perspectives on what that diversion might look like. Frankly, the one done by the province, the initial engineering report, was looking at a massive diversion that would have probably cost a significant amount of

money. The town itself was looking at a bit of a smaller diversion, with some additional protection with some berms and dikes.

We have contracted out to Deltares, which is a firm that does research and assessment of flooding and river morphology when it comes to flooding. They are from the Netherlands, which has been one of the world's most recognized countries in dealing with flooding. That organization has taken a look at these two engineering reports and looked at what the town of High River has done up to this point in time and is providing recommendations. Those recommendations went out for consultation to stakeholders in the area. We're now finalizing that report, and it will be out for public consumption.

I can assure that what's in the report and what the town is looking at is not going with the more extensive, larger diversion. It just doesn't make sense. What you see with this expense here, the \$32 million, was the work that was done on those berms and dikes that are currently in place in the town right now.

Like I said, you know, in chatting with the mayor and the folks there, they're quite proud of the type of protection they've been able to put into the town through the province's financial support, allowing that if there was a flood at the 2013 level, a big portion of that town would now be protected from that. There would be a lot of water running through that channel, but it is there.

There is, like I said, this final piece that we're sorting through with the Deltares report. It will potentially require some additional berms and dikes to be built and some potential infrastructure to be moved and upgraded to allow for the conveyance of the kind of water to go down that river channel. That's what that money was put toward, the current berms and dikes that have been put in place by the town.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Thank you. A supplementary if I could, Mr. Chair. Just to clarify, this is money that has been spent, and this is for that?

Mr. Fawcett: Yes.

Mr. Stier: Okay. If I could just follow up, if we look at the second item down from there, Mr. Minister, we're talking about 4 and a half mil for the Springbank reservoir, or the theoretical one, the project. The question, then: is that money, too, spent, and if so, what has it been for? Is that just for study so far?

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah. That's essentially what it is. That is money that has been spent or is being spent in this fiscal year in the study – engineering, negotiations with landowners, public consultation – for this particular project.

Mr. Stier: Okay. If I could just follow up – and you just mentioned negotiations with landowners – has there actually been compensation paid to landowners in this project at this time? I didn't know it was actually decided that you were at a stage to proceed with that project. It was my understanding that there was another, alternative project and that the actual decision hadn't been made one way or the other. Can you just shed a little light on that if you would, please, Minister?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah. We've been quite clear, actually, since about September that we will be proceeding with the Springbank dry off-stream reservoir project. All initial studies and analysis that have been done are that, of all the factors that we need to consider, which are financial factors, cost-benefit analysis, environmental impact, impacts on landowners, the type of protection it will provide, the impacts on upstream and downstream communities, on balance,

this is the most feasible project, and our commitment is to try to move forward with it as fast as possible. However, you're right. This project will require access to and the purchase of or some sort of agreement for the use of private land from landowners, and we're in that process of establishing terms of negotiation in order to have fair and respectful negotiations with the landowners.

While, you know, I think it probably could be understandable to most here that they're not necessarily enamoured with the idea that this project would be moving forward, they do understand in the conversations that we've had with them privately that government has to make some of these tough decisions, and they've engaged with us in good faith in trying to come up with a framework to establish a successful negotiation. That's the process we're in with them right now.

The Chair: Thank you.

The hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Yeah. Thank you. Just to finish up on that – and I appreciate the minister's patience with my questions on that subject – just as you and, I'm sure, a lot of the members here tonight are aware, with the alternative, McLean Creek, there were some funds spent, I believe, in exploring that particular project. Did these funds, the 4 and a half million, include some of that study work at all, and if not, were there monies spent on exploring thoroughly the McLean Creek alternative? As members here know, a lot of people are concerned about the protection of the hamlet of Bragg Creek and Redwood Meadows and some of those communities. I'm just wondering if any of this money went towards, actually, the feasibility study on that alternative, please.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

8:10

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah. I think that's another good question. What you'll see is what we were referring to, I believe, when you talked about the \$4.5 million that was for the Springbank off-stream reservoir. It was a capital expenditure. [A timer sounded] Am I allowed to continue?

The Chair: No. That has concluded, but I think you gave a concise answer, so we thank you.

I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. You, too, have the potential of five and five should you choose to.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. Five and five. Sure.

The Chair: Proceed.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I've been very interested in this flood discussion, so we can hopefully continue on from there. I note that in January the federal government switched its budgeting on the disaster relief program and what it's going to do in the future to provinces who try to access funds under that program. They move from covering the first \$12.4 million in damages to reducing that to just \$4.1 million. Have those conversations been had in your ministry on budgeting and in light of what we've been through and the like?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah. I'll try to answer those questions. Unfortunately, the disaster recovery program falls under Municipal Affairs. I don't mean unfortunately; I just don't necessarily have the answers to that discussion.

Mr. Hehr: You were the minister of flooding. You know all this.

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah. I do think that there have been changes made to the federal government's what's called the disaster financial assistance program. You know, I don't think that the floods in 2013 were the complete reason for that. I think it was a challenge for the federal government in looking at where some of their biggest costs were coming from and trying to control costs. If they've made changes, it only, actually, emphasizes the need for us to look more intently at flood mitigation because we won't have as much protection, potentially, on a disaster from a financial standpoint from the federal government if it was to happen again.

The minister might be able to answer that question a little bit better.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you. Just to add to it if you would like, certainly the changes that were made with regard to the federal government are going forward, so they will not affect the 2013 or '14 or prior disasters but do affect going forward.

Mr. Hehr: Also, I got into this a little bit earlier. You know, we're talking about some of this money going to projects on both the Bow River side and on the Elbow side, and you've explained sort of the reasons and the rationale behind the Springbank flood mitigation plan. As I don't have access to the depth or breadth of reports that you guys have, I'll take you at your word that it is the most economically feasible as well as probably the best plan going forward.

Nevertheless, can you comment a little bit on the Bow side of things, you know, what you're doing currently on flood mitigation and whether there's any of this money going towards that and the plan on the Bow going forward and some of the concerns that have been highlighted around that side of things? We've concentrated quite a bit on the Elbow River. Are we looking at expenses and potential future mitigation projects on that side?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah. Thank you. It's a very good question. It's actually a pretty complex one. One of the challenges when it comes to flood mitigation is that not all communities and not all watersheds are created equal, right? The kinds of solutions that need to be put in place are unique to (a) the community and what kind of infrastructure is built in the flood areas and (b) the geography and the way that the river goes and interacts with the landscape. On the Elbow River we've been able to identify some potential projects, large projects that we can move forward with that will get us a large amount of the way to the kind of protection that we need for those communities that could be impacted from flooding on the Elbow.

On the Bow River you don't have as much potential to look at doing a larger project to get that protection, you know, so that's one negative. The positive is that you do have some infrastructure already in place, that TransAlta operates as part of their operations. Last year we had an agreement in place, that was in the original budget, that allowed us to help try to mitigate some of the flows potentially during a flood situation through the Ghost reservoir dam.

The challenge is that we believe that we could actually get an even greater level of protection through further negotiations with TransAlta and working with them with not just the Ghost reservoir dam but some of the other infrastructure that they have along the Bow River watershed. It's a fairly complex issue around what exactly the level of protection is and then what that financial agreement might look like. We're in discussions with them.

The \$14 million for funds for continued implementation of flood infrastructure recovery measures: you'll see that our mitigation and resiliency branch is what this funding is for, not specifically for that negotiation, but part of it is to provide the operational funding for us to continue doing this work.

Mr. Hehr: Well, let me ask you this follow-up. Of that \$14 million designated for some of this – let's be clear. Obviously, TransAlta is impacted financially as a result of flood mitigation measures they do on behalf of the province, so that's part of the ongoing thing. What is the price tag around that process and in this budget cycle?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I believe that in the current budget I don't have the exact number, but it was in the order of \$3 million for this last flood season's pilot project. A longer term or comprehensive agreement will cost more than that for sure. We don't know exactly until we get those details worked out.

For this flood year, you know, the intention is to continue to at least, at the very minimum, have the same kind of deal that we had in place last year, and that will obviously be forthcoming in whatever the Finance minister tables on the 26th.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. In light of what we've learned – and we see the feds, you know, moving out of the disaster relief program at least to a certain extent. Given that, I'm wondering if there's any money being spent in this budget, this supplementary supply, and/or if there are any comments the minister might like to make on whether there's been any progress made on discussions with the national government on national flood insurance and/or whether there's talk of actually going alone here, having a provincial flood insurance program, given that we are the natural disaster capital of Canada, given our proximity to the mountains and the like. I note that just because it seems to be a public policy position that is reasonable, that other jurisdictions have taken, that looks like you have competing claims. To me, it looks like it makes common sense. Wondering whether there are any comments on that.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, and thank you for the question. I can tell you that out of our ministry – and I would assume it is the same with the hon. member's supplementary estimates – there are no dollars that are being requested with regard to that issue. That was the question.

Mr. Hehr: You didn't take the bait.

Mrs. McQueen: I know.

Mr. Hehr: I wanted to discuss more broadly the principle. Nevertheless there, they didn't take the bait. I'll pass to let other members ask a question.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Before I recognize the next speaker, I'll recognize the Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Yes, Mr. Chair. I would ask that we possibly revert to Introduction of Guests.

The Chair: Wonderful. The Member for Strathmore-Brooks has asked that we revert briefly to the Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

8:20 Introduction of Guests

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to take this moment to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislature someone who has visited here a few times before, the mayor of Brooks, Mr. Martin Shields, who, I may also add, is the nominated candidate in the upcoming federal election for our Bow River riding.

The Chair: Thank you.

Supplementary Supply Estimates 2014-15 General Revenue Fund (continued)

The Chair: I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Again, you have the potential for five and five if you so desire.

Mr. Bilous: Yes.

The Chair: Hon. member, that's your wish?

Mr. Bilous: That is my wish, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Proceed.

Mr. Bilous: A couple of quick questions that I think the Minister of Energy can answer because he is the former Minister of Aboriginal Relations. I'm curious about what critical infrastructure projects were undertaken and for which additional funding is requested although my gut tells me that this has to do with flood relief and reconstruction. I'm also curious if the minister can comment on how the funding is split between federal and provincial governments.

The Chair: Is that a question for the hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations?

Mr. Dorward: Yeah. I assume the member is referring to the \$8.6 million in capital funding. Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to that. There are two components to that. Some is on *Hansard* from earlier today. I don't want to steal too much of your time. There are two components. Five point six million dollars was for the Lubicon Lake band community to install 19 trailers, that were taken from Slave Lake, and also to provide water and sewage services to those homes as well as to set up a situation whereby the Lubicon community members will have access to a very good waterline. That was part of it as well.

Then in addition to that \$5.6 million there's also \$3 million, which is part of the Métis settlement funding over 10 years in a long-term governance agreement with the provincial government whereby Métis communities will receive funding similar to MSI funding for municipalities, Mr. Chair.

I'll let the member just ask me further questions instead of using up all his time.

Mr. Bilous: I thank the associate minister for his brevity. Forgive me. The \$3 million for the critical infrastructure on Métis settlements: that you had said is split between – is there a portion of that \$3 million coming from the federal government, or is it the MSI but only from the provincial government with the Métis settlements?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chair, I wonder if I could respond to that. The \$3 million is not for a flood response. We've got a long-term arrangement with the Métis settlements that provides for a move toward the sustainability of the settlements, and there's funding that goes to the settlements. It's similar to MSI, for lack of a better word, although they're certainly not municipalities. They're a much, much different government structure, but it allows them some resources in the community. As part of that agreement we agreed on a critical infrastructure list.

The resources they're provided allow them to use seed money to leverage other money. It might be federal money; there could be grants. In this particular case this is the province's contribution on a leverage of that critical infrastructure money to allow us to begin to pick off a list that both the Métis and the government of Alberta agreed to as part of the long-term arrangement.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Minister, for that response. I appreciate that.

I'd like to just move to Energy in my last couple of minutes here and talk about the line item with Energy. I believe the compensation here is a result of land that needed to be bought back from developers and other owners by the Crown for the purpose of conservation under the lower Athabasca regional plan. My understanding is that these payments are governed by the mineral rights compensation act, so a few questions here. Maybe I'll just ask them all, and then the minister can respond as he wishes.

I'm curious to know, if possible, how much of this money was paid to corporations and what proportion of the funds paid out was in the form of initial principal of cash paid to the Crown, development allowances, reclamation allowances, interest allowances, and how much more money will be paid out through the program.

Mr. Oberle: I thank the hon. member for the question. There are two programs here, two issues that caused the government to move to reacquire land. So let's be clear that the companies' proponents of development don't purchase the land although that's what it's called indeed. It's called a land sale. They purchase rights to use the resources. In this case between the lower Athabasca regional plan and the urban development region surrounding the population centre of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, as would be the case in most, these are undeveloped leases. Somebody has purchased the rights to develop mineral resources, and in the mineral rights compensation regulation there is pretty clear guidance as to how we go about purchasing those leases back. We refund the money that they used to purchase the lease – so that would be the land sales, or bonus payment, as it's known – and then improvements on the landscape. We don't fund for lost opportunity, future resource revenue, those sorts of things.

In these cases, if I had to guess, I would say that 100 per cent of the money went to corporations. I'm not aware of anybody that would be developing oil sands leases as an individual. It's certainly not an endeavour that an individual could undertake, so these would all be corporations. All of the money would have been paid to refund them and to reacquire the rights to those leases so that the lands could go to other uses.

In the case of LARP they went to protected areas. I think we established in the neighbourhood of 2 million hectares – I have the number here someplace – a very large area, protected areas in the lower Athabasca region. In the case of the UDSR surrounding Fort McMurray, we of course are providing for municipal development and municipal expansion and had to extinguish the mineral rights underneath. That's what the program was for.

I hope I've answered the member's questions.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'll thank the minister. Just a couple of follow-ups. I appreciate that the government doesn't fund any lost opportunities that the corporation may have with the mineral rights. I appreciate that that's the difference; it's land that's still owned by the Crown. It was just the mineral rights that were sold and then purchased back. Is there, in the repurchasing, an interest adjustment or a value adjustment between what it was sold for and when it's repurchased? I'm not sure if that value changes or if it's determined, if there has been exploration done where, then, the government needs to increase or pay that difference between the original purchase price and the repurchasing of the mineral rights.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. Actually, I think I might want to respond to the member offline, in writing. It's in *Hansard*. I'll respond. I can't actually answer that. You know, obviously, any company would argue that they've got a certain amount of sunk cost in the lease even if it's not developed. If there's not a physical drilled well sitting there, there could be other costs. Often this becomes a bit of a negotiation. I believe it would include an interest adjustment if the land sale had been done sometime prior. But I honestly can't answer that right at the moment. I will get back to the member with that.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member. You still have some time.

Mr. Bilous: Yeah. One further follow-up question. I appreciate the minister getting back to me on that, and I respect the fact that offhand he may not have that information at his fingertips.

I don't know if the minister can respond to whether there will be more money paid out through this program or if this sum is for the total land that is needed, whether it's for LARP or for Wood Buffalo, or if there is more that needs to be repurchased.

Mr. Oberle: Well, the mineral rights compensation regulation exists for a reason, Mr. Chair, and that is that from time to time the province of course makes development decisions that impact the underlying mineral rights, and occasionally the province is required to reassign the use of land. We've made such decisions in the lower Athabasca region, and the number was more than 2 million hectares of conservation land established.

8:30

From time to time those development decisions will happen in our province. We have a land-use framework that brought a lot of stakeholder Albertans to the table to talk about land-use direction. You know, from time to time we establish protected areas in this province, and from time to time our municipalities expand. All of those require a revisit of the underlying mineral rights, and occasionally that requires that we purchase them.

In the case of LARP we've made our decisions there, the lower Athabasca regional plan, and in the case of the Fort McMurray urban development region we've made our decision there as well. But the program exists, and it allows for the fact that we do from time to time revisit land use in this province.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the minister again for his response.

The Chair: Time has expired. Are there other speakers?
Then I'll call the question.

Vote on Supplementary Supply Estimates 2014-15 General Revenue Fund

Agreed to:
Office of the Child and Youth Advocate
Operational and Capital \$730,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:
Aboriginal Relations
Capital \$8,600,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:
Education
Capital \$215,704,000

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:
Energy
Financial Transactions \$57,700,000

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:
Environment and Sustainable Resource Development
Operational \$200,014,000
Capital \$48,085,000

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:
Health
Operational \$157,000,000

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:
Human Services
Operational \$46,872,000
Capital \$500,000

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:

Infrastructure

Operational \$15,256,000

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:

Justice and Solicitor General

Operational \$16,739,000

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:

Municipal Affairs

Operational \$6,116,000

Capital \$431,720,000

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:

Service Alberta

Operational \$5,400,000

Financial Transactions \$5,433,000

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:

Transportation

Operational \$11,853,000

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Agreed to:

Transfer from Capital vote of Municipal Affairs
to the Capital vote of Seniors

\$4,800,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Mr. Oberle: At this time I would move that we rise and report, Mr. Chair.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again. The following resolutions relating to the 2014-15 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015, have been approved.

Legislative Assembly, Office of the Child and Youth Advocate: operational and capital, \$730,000.

Aboriginal Relations: capital, \$8,600,000.

Education: capital, \$215,704,000.

Energy: financial transactions, \$57,700,000.

Environment and Sustainable Resource Development: operational, \$200,014,000; capital, \$48,085,000.

Health: operational, \$157,000,000.

Human Services: operational, \$46,872,000; capital, \$500,000.

Infrastructure: operational, \$15,256,000.

Justice and Solicitor General: operational, \$16,739,000.

Municipal Affairs: operational, \$6,116,000; capital, \$431,720,000.

Service Alberta: operational, \$5,400,000; financial transactions, \$5,433,000.

Transportation: operational, \$11,853,000.

The Committee of Supply has also approved the following amounts to be transferred.

Transfer from Municipal Affairs capital vote to Seniors capital vote, \$4,800,000.

That's my report, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

I would like to alert the hon. members that Standing Order 61(3) provides that upon the Assembly concurring in the report by the Committee of Supply, the Assembly immediately reverts to the Introduction of Bills for the introduction of the appropriation bill.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

8:40

Introduction of Bills

Bill 17

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 17, that being the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Did you wish to describe the bill just briefly, hon. Deputy Government House Leader?

Mr. Oberle: It's the supplementary supply, Mr. Speaker, which allows for the supplementary spending of the government in the third quarter.

The Deputy Speaker: And I thank you for that, hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a first time]

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, it's a little late tonight, and I would move that the House stand adjourned till 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 8:42 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, March 12, 2015

Issue 19a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 12, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone.

Let us pray. Dear Lord, help us to be mindful shepherds of this great province in a manner that protects and preserves it for generations ahead of us, as was done by those generations who preceded us. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

14th Anniversary of Elected Members

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we go to Introduction of Visitors, may I take a moment to bring to your attention that we are celebrating a special 14-year anniversary of members who were elected 14 years ago to this Assembly. After I've read all four names, could we join in a thunderous round of accolade to each and every one of them: the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, and the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. Would you, all four, please rise so we can thank you for your service.

Introduction of Visitors

Ms Woo-Paw: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the delegation from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations: His Excellency To Anh Dung, ambassador from Vietnam; Her Excellency Petronila Garcia, ambassador from the Philippines; His Excellency Dr. Teuku Faizasyah, ambassador from Indonesia, and his spouse, Mrs. Faizasyah; His Excellency Vijavat Isarabhakdi, ambassador from Thailand to Canada; and Mr. Sukri Sharbini, Acting High Commissioner of Brunei Darussalam.

The ambassadors and members of the delegation here today are committed to strengthening the ties between Alberta and Southeast Asia. They are here to meet with various ministers and institutions as well as to have a tour of the Industrial Heartland tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, the 10 countries that make up ASEAN represent one of the most dynamic and fast growing areas of the world, with a combined GDP of \$2.5 trillion and a population of 600 million, with a rich culture and tremendous economic potential. This is a relationship that Albertans value, and the ambassadors' visit is a great opportunity to strengthen our existing ties while exploring new opportunities together.

Our esteemed guests are in your gallery, and I now ask all of my colleagues in the Assembly to give them the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome to all of you. Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism, you have some special guests here in the gallery as well. Please proceed.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of

this Assembly representatives from Alberta's francophone community who are here today in celebration of the 17th annual Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie. Events like today are supported by members of Alberta's French-speaking community, which includes l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta and la Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta.

In the Speaker's gallery today are representatives from those organizations: representing the French Canadian Association of Alberta, Mr. Jean Johnson, president of l'ACFA, and Ms Isabelle Laurin, executive director; representing the Federation of Francophone Parents, Ms Claudine Lajoie, president. With them are some of the staff members from my ministry, the Francophone Secretariat, which continues to support Alberta's French-speaking community: Mrs. Denise Lavallée and Mrs. Julie Lussier, community liaison officers. Best wishes for a wonderful celebration. I ask all of them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Merci beaucoup, et bienvenue à tous.

Let us move on to other important groups, starting with school groups, Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Strathcona Sherwood Park.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great delight that I introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the students from Nellie McClung school. This vibrant community school in Calgary-Glenmore has students who, besides doing their classroom work, write their own plays, and some of them have even interviewed me about the Calgary southwest ring road. They are joined today by their helpers and teachers: Ms Carla Samuelson, Jaclyn Schmitz, Joanna Yu, Gord Hamby, and Rich Baverstock. I ask the students to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, followed by Red Deer-South.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly 61 of Strathcona county's brightest and best grade 6 students from the Fultonvale school. They're accompanied today by their teachers Ms Cindy Jackson and Mr. Jason Jefferies and a number of parent helpers: Mrs. Bonnie Stiegelman, Mrs. Twyla LaLonde, Mrs. Rachelle McElheran, Mrs. Laura Mihailides, Ms Tianna Mapstone, and Mrs. Marnie Veltri. If I could get you all to rise, please – they're seated in the public gallery – and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a group of students, parents, and teachers from Westpark middle school in Red Deer. Unfortunately, they're not in the gallery right at this moment. They're participating in a guided tour of the Legislature, and they'll have an opportunity to observe the members of this House at 2 p.m. today. I really hope that these students are enjoying their Legislature experience. I'd like to thank the teachers and parent helpers here today and would like to acknowledge them: Mr. Norm Howes, Mrs. Laurie Shapka Thiel, Mrs. Kimberly Streit, Mr. Corey Hunter, and Barb Wooff. If you'd please join me in welcoming them here to the Legislature.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

Seeing no one indicating that there are, let us proceed with other important guests, starting with the Minister of Environment and

Sustainable Resource Development, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. Your guests are not here yet?

Let us move on, then, to Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Calgary-Lougheed.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Nick Chrapko, Mrs. Ruby Kassian, and Li Giebelhaus. These individuals are from Vegreville, right in the heart of my constituency. They are here today to advocate for a petition to end daylight saving time that I will be tabling later in this House, and it's the most appropriate week, of course, to put this petition forward. This group is led and inspired by Ruby and was developed because of concerns about the detriment that it can have on people. I would ask that they all rise and that they would be greeted with the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to introduce three inspirational Albertans representing 1835 House, Recovery Acres Society, in Calgary. I first visited 1835 House a decade ago as chair of AADAC and last year as Associate Minister of Wellness, so I've seen first-hand the miracles that these fine people work every day. Gerry Melsted became the executive director of 1835 House last October, after serving for well over a decade on the society's board. Rob Laird is the director of fund development, a former RCMP officer, a champion of those struggling with addiction and homelessness and other social issues. Rob was instrumental in the start-up of the Calgary Dream Centre and the Calgary drug treatment court and has travelled internationally to speak to youth about the perils of addiction.

1:40

And, finally, everyone will recognize Jamie Salé, 2001 world champion, 2002 Olympic gold medalist, and inductee into the Skate Canada and the Canadian Olympic halls of fame. Jamie and her husband, Craig Simpson, enjoy supporting the work of many Alberta charities, lending their star power, including to 1835 House. Mr. Speaker, our guests are indeed in the members' gallery, and I ask them now to stand to receive the traditional thunderous ovation of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let us move on to the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and all the Legislative Assembly a very extraordinary Edmontonian, Mr. Harpreet Gill. Harpreet is a 28-year-old professional, a graduate in business administration, an advocate for his community, cofounder of a community magazine. He is an active volunteer on social, humanitarian, and political issues. He has organized fundraisers for humanitarian causes and supports progressive public representatives. He is fluent in five languages and is a committed Liberal. He has served as Edmonton regional chair for the Alberta Liberal Party and is still serving as Edmonton regional chair for the Liberal Party of Canada. Now he is the Alberta Liberal Party candidate for your seat, Mr. Speaker, Edmonton-Mill Creek. Please give him a warm welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two gentlemen with the Alberta Irrigation Projects Association who are here today to show the support of the irrigation community for Bill 13, an amendment to the Fisheries (Alberta) Act. Invasive aquatic species, if they were to get into our irrigation system, would cause untold damage to both the infrastructure and the well-being of Albertans, to agriculture, and to our quality of life.

Mr. Ronald McMullin from Lethbridge is the executive director of the Alberta Irrigation Projects Association and has served agriculture for more than 20 years, working to strengthen Alberta's irrigation community and ensure that Alberta water sources are used wisely. With him today is no stranger to many of you long-serving members, Mr. Jim Dau, who, among the many hats he wears, is the project manager of AIPA's thanks-to-irrigation program. Jim worked here in the Legislature for many years as a communications director for the late Premier Ralph Klein. Ron and Jim are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them now to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Ms Tammy Burke, councillor for the town of Rocky Mountain House. I've had the pleasure to know Ms Burke for some time, and we caught up again this morning at the AUMA's MLA breakfast. Rocky Mountain House is fortunate to have such a hard-working and passionate representative. I ask the members of the Assembly today to give the traditional warm welcome to Ms Burke.

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

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two exceptional members of the community, very accomplished gentlemen, and this is their first time watching the QP. I will introduce to you Mr. Mansoor Hussain, who is a petroleum engineer and working in Dubai, accompanied by his father and my dear friend, Dr. Naqvi. I would ask you to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, as with everyone else, will be given two minutes for his statement, and I believe there is a translation on your desks. Please proceed.

Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie

Mr. Goudreau: Merci, M. le Président. Chaque année, au mois de mars, nous en profitons pour mettre en évidence l'un des peuples fondateurs et l'un des groupes linguistiques les plus importants de notre province, la communauté francophone. Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie est une célébration de deux semaines qui reconnaît et célèbre notre patrimoine francophone, qui fait partie de notre province depuis les premiers jours de la colonisation jusqu'à aujourd'hui, où la population de la langue française est l'un des groupes les plus dynamiques en Alberta.

Cette célébration a débuté le 6 mars avec des cérémonies du lever du drapeau dans toute la province et culminera le 20 mars lors de la

Journée internationale de la Francophonie, célébrée dans plus de 70 pays à travers le monde. M. le Président, les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie est une occasion de rassembler les gens pour célébrer la francophonie albertaine par la musique, les festivals et d'autres événements culturels. Les francophones et nonfrancophones albertaines peuvent participer à un grand nombre d'événements à travers la province. De Bonnyville à Grande Prairie, de Lac La Biche à Lethbridge, et partout ailleurs dans la province il y a une communauté francophone fière qui célébrera la joie de vivre.

Compte tenu les plus de 238,000 Albertains qui parlent le français et les plus de 390,000 Albertains d'origine française, il ne fait aucun doute que la culture francophone est une partie vivante et intégrale de notre province. Au fur et à mesure que l'Alberta continue de croître, il est important de se rappeler que notre province est un merveilleux endroit pour vivre, travailler et élever une famille. C'est un endroit qui accueille et célèbre la diversité culturelle et linguistique qui enrichit notre qualité de vie et contribue à développer des collectivités dynamiques et inclusives.

M. le Président, mes remerciements à vous et aux membres de cette Assemblée pour leur soutien continu de cette célébration annuelle de nos communautés francophones.

Merci.

[Translation] Mr. Speaker, every year in March we take the opportunity to highlight one of the founding peoples and one of the important linguistic groups in our province, the francophone community. The Rendez-vous de la Francophonie is a two-week long celebration that honours our francophone heritage, which has been a part of our province since the earliest days of settlement to today, where the French-speaking population is one of the fastest growing groups in Alberta.

This celebration kicked off on March 6 with flag-raising ceremonies taking place throughout the province and will culminate on March 20, which is la Journée internationale de la Francophonie, International Francophonie Day, celebrated in more than 70 countries around the world. The Rendez-vous is an opportunity to bring people together to celebrate Alberta's Francophonie through music, festivals, and other cultural events. Francophone and non-Francophone Albertans can participate in a number of events across the province. From Bonnyville to Grande Prairie, Lac La Biche to Lethbridge, and every town and city in between there is a proud francophone community that will be celebrating the joie de vivre, the act of joyful living that enhances our lives.

With more than 238,000 Albertans who speak French and over 390,000 Albertans of French descent, there is no doubt that francophone culture is a vibrant and integral part of our province. As Alberta continues to grow, it is important for us to remember that our province is a wonderful place to work, live, and to raise a family. It is a place that embraces and celebrates the cultural and linguistic diversity that enriches our quality of life and contributes to vibrant and inclusive communities.

Mr. Speaker, my thanks to you and all the members of this Assembly for their continued support for this annual celebration of our francophone communities. [As submitted]

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader of the Liberal Party.

Martha and Henry's Children and Grandchildren

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Decades ago Premier Ralph Klein introduced us to Martha and Henry. This session the Alberta Liberals will focus on Martha and Henry's kids

and grandkids. Their priorities are our priorities. As we enter into what will be one of the most important legislative sessions in decades, Alberta Liberals will be talking about Martha and Henry's kids and their grandkids, the generation that has grown up since. They are the people who are now suffering due to the recurring financial crisis in Alberta. This, of course, has been brought on by a failed financial policy that has spent all of Alberta's wealth in one generation. These are my kids and yours. They are parents working hard to look after their families. In this legislative session Alberta Liberals will still provide trusted leadership, standing up for these families.

As I go out and around the province, this generation, Martha and Henry's kids and their grandkids, are struggling, and they're worried. They've worked hard in good times and bad and in some cases have succeeded despite the PCs' poor policies. But many others are suffering, with limited resources and deficient social supports. They're disappointed with a government that does not reflect their progressive values, that ignores the communities by not building the schools and repairing the hospitals, that is failing them, their parents, and their children. Alberta Liberals will stand up for progressive values of equality and human rights, that have defined this generation. Women should not be paid only 63 per cent of what men make for work of the same value. Young parents and mothers, in particular, deserve choice and access to child care and early childhood development opportunities. We will talk about the need for an aggressive urban agenda. A big-city charter is needed now.

Martha and Henry's kids have watched their children's class sizes grow larger, school fees skyrocket, access to postsecondary education go down, and hospitals in our communities crumble. Alberta Liberals . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Let us move on to Lesser Slave Lake. I think we can squeeze in one more before the time.

Adolph and Mary Huculak 65th Anniversary

Ms Calahasen: Thank you. How many of us in this House can say that we've seen 65 years of age? Maybe a few. But to be married 65 years is a long time, in my view, but truly inspiring. I'm so lucky to have the pleasure of knowing two wonderful people who have been married that long and are still together, Adolph and Mary Huculak.

Their exciting story goes back to February 11, 1950, when they got married and professed their undying love for one another at St. Alphonsus church here in Edmonton. By June 5, 1951, they had moved to Kinuso, where Mary, a registered nurse, dedicated her life to working with First Nations peoples and to the children of the Jossard mission. Adolph spent many years working for the Chapel of Memories funeral home in High Prairie. They had seven children. On top of this immense shared labour of love, they managed to thrive as a farming family, in fact cultivating land up to 2013, when they moved to High Prairie.

1:50

They have shared plenty of exciting moments together, a few they wanted me to share with Albertans, like in 1984, when Mary received the Serving Sisters of St. John award from the Governor General, Mme Jeanne Sauvé. That same year Adolph shook hands with Pope John Paul II in Fort Simpson in the Northwest Territories.

These once-in-a-lifetime experiences and accomplishments are just indicative of the remarkable life Mary and Adolph are continuing to share together. They're a unit that Albertans everywhere can take inspiration from because Alberta's strength

grows out of the fortitude of the families that call this province home. The Huculaks enshrine this perfectly as it is encapsulated in their 65 years together.

Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I extend my most heartfelt congratulations to Mary and Adolph Huculak, and I would encourage all hon. members to do the same.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Timers in Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll start the question period in 30 seconds. However, I want to just tell you that the clock and the computer at the Clerk's table were malfunctioning on Tuesday and partly on Wednesday, and that led to some serious time violations of our 35-second rule. It also prevented us from getting the Blues when we wanted them, just so you're aware. Yesterday we did much better. There were just about 10 or so that went a couple of seconds over, but on Tuesday some had gone 10, 15 seconds longer. So we all bear some responsibility for the clock and the computer. However, they have been fixed, so let's see if we can do better today.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Let us start, then, with the recognition of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition leader. First main set of questions.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'll try, Mr. Speaker.

Health Facility Infrastructure

Mrs. Forsyth: Every year Alberta Health Services puts together an objective list of infrastructure priorities that it submits to the government, and every year ministers of Health have ignored most of these high-priority requests. Now, it seems that this Minister of Health, under a Premier who promised to do things differently, is making health care decisions in the exact same way. Cardston, Strathmore, Wainwright, Red Deer, Fort McMurray: those are all the places that AHS says are a priority. Minister, why are they being ignored by your government if not for purely political reasons?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, this government is investing throughout the province. We're investing money in the South Health Campus, in the Kaye Edmonton clinic, in Fort McMurray, in Lethbridge, in Medicine Hat, everywhere. We're investing money to improve health care for our residents throughout Alberta. That's a passion for this Premier and for this minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Now, Mr. Speaker, we're obviously getting close to campaign time, and I say this because a sure sign of an election is the precampaign promises to the people of Whitecourt again for a new hospital. It happens every four years, going back as far as 1993. That promise was repeated again by the Minister of Health just a few weeks ago. Now, what I find curious, Minister, is why you would make that commitment when, according to AHS, Whitecourt is not a priority. Can you please explain to me the disconnect?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, priorities are set by Alberta Health Services, by Alberta Health, but also by the residents of this province and the needs that they have. Whitecourt has been in need of a hospital for a long time, and we'll work with that community to build one.

Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: No, Minister. No, Minister, and I'll share the FOIP with you that clearly lists the priorities.

Yesterday the Minister of Education claimed that he never played politics with schools, and today the Minister of Health says that he's never played politics with health. The Ethics Commissioner says that the Education minister did play politics with schools. Now we see the government making health care promises to areas where it needs to curry favours. Meanwhile mould at the Foothills is ignored, the Misericordia is falling apart, and sewage issues in Wainwright threaten the entire facility. Minister, are you really going to stand here and tell . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, this government is investing about \$200 million over a three-year period to invest in the rehabilitation of hospitals. Yes, I say that there are issues we need to fix, but we are fixing them. We're working hard across the province to invest in the future of Albertans and our health care system.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions. The hon. opposition leader.

School Construction

Mrs. Forsyth: The Education minister said in an interview yesterday that construction is a big word. You see, construction, to the minister, can include just about anything outside of actually putting shovels in the ground, having concrete poured, or walls being framed. You have to excuse Albertans for not connecting empty fields and \$10,000 signs with construction. Minister, you've seen the photos of the 38 schools you said are being built. The vast majority are empty fields. Can the minister explain to Albertans how you define construction?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have chosen to use a very transparent process to allow the public to see where our various school projects are at. Once a contract is awarded, for the purposes of our recordkeeping that is in construction phase. I can assure the member opposite and all Albertans that once a contract is signed, it's the responsibility of the construction companies to move forward and to start digging in a very short period of time. The vast majority of these schools will be worked on . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's move on to the supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Minister, Albertans know what construction is. It's not planning studies, it's not engineering reports, and it's not asking for permits. That's the planning and tendering phase. When the minister was asked if the schools will be ready in 2016, he said that he's committed to timelines while school boards are saying: we'll be lucky to have students move in by 2017. Minister, will you be honest with Albertans and tell them that you will not be able to make those timelines?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that the phase 1 school projects were announced in 2011, and they opened in 2014, when they were supposed to. The phase 2 projects were announced in 2013, and they will open, the vast majority of them, as described from day one, in 2016 as planned. It's that simple. The members opposite can go and ensure that these projects are moving. I have construction start dates. For example, Archbishop O'Leary school . . .

The Speaker: We'll hear more examples later if you like. Meanwhile I have to recognize the hon. member for her second supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. This minister has been at the centre of playing politics with our schools since he got the job. He's the man who was scolded by the Ethics Commissioner for his blatant political opportunism, buying a seat before putting the needs of families first. I've been around a long time, and I've seen this play before: promise everything to everyone before an election, only to not keep your promises. There is no doubt you're behind schedule on almost all of these schools. Why won't you do the honest thing, come out and admit it?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, I really don't know where the member opposite gets those facts from. I just am glad that they don't have the ability to construct a budget because with those types of loose figures, I don't think they would really serve the people of Alberta very well.

The fact remains that 108 schools will be open in 2016 as committed to. The members opposite can see the progress. We have had an unprecedented level of transparency in allowing the public to see when something is contracted and moving forward.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's move on to the third main set of questions. Livingstone-Macleod.

Flood Mitigation

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like many others, I was shocked to read the Auditor General's report yesterday. More than two years after the floods of 2013 this report says that this tired PC government has no real plan in place for effective flood mitigation. Among other things, the AG chastised this government for not having up-to-date flood maps, not having adequate risk assessment processes, and not having systems to assess the cumulative effects of mitigation projects. In short, an overall lack of due diligence is taking place. To the minister: why aren't you taking the proper steps...

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's hear from the minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, this government has acted quite swiftly in the aftermath of the floods to undertake important risk-mitigation strategies such as building flood mitigation. This government has invested well over a hundred million dollars in the flood erosion control program. We've announced a program, and you will see money in the budget for the Alberta community resiliency program, and we've continued to work with affected stakeholders along the Elbow rivershed and the Highwood rivershed on large flood mitigation projects.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

2:00

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, last year in High River this government paid for two costly engineering reports on diversion plans, spent \$30 million on flood mitigation projects, and now realizes that these original reports are in fact not acceptable. This stems, actually, from a third report from a company called Deltares, which has now been accepted as a preferred solution. Now, we all know we need to get to the right result here, but thorough, proven planning is part of that process. To the minister:

has all this wasted time and money in High River due to apparent poor planning put this community at any added risk for this upcoming flood season?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, there have been hundreds of millions of dollars invested by this government working with the town of High River on the berms and dikes in High River to protect that community. That is action. The majority of that money was in place for last year's flood season, and we are continuing to enhance this. These are very complex issues that include impacts on upstream and downstream landowners and communities, of which there are also serious environmental impacts. We need to make sure we get this right. But we have moved, and we have seen action on this item.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Stier: Yeah, well, the same government recently proposed another theoretical diversion project in Springbank. When this plan goes forward, it will render acres and acres of rich farmland, prime development property, to a point of sterilization and leave Bragg Creek actually unprotected. We all want to protect our communities, but the Auditor General's report is clear. Not only does this government not have a plan; it doesn't even have the tools and capacity to make a plan. To the minister: what different steps are you taking to ensure that this Springbank project won't end up like the costly projects in High River that are now being replaced?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, first this member is arguing that we aren't taking action, and then he's arguing that we shouldn't be taking on action for a project that makes the most sense based on all the studies and materials that we've been able to gather up to this point. This Premier has been very clear. It's time for action. All of the studies and feasibility studies and environmental assessments that have been done suggest the best plan to protect the communities in Calgary from flooding is the development of the Springbank reservoir, and we're moving forward with that project.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta's new LIFE Framework document references section 11.1 of the Alberta Human Rights Act. Now, this section was repealed by Bill 10, but the same wording is essentially found and repeated in both the School Act and the Education Act. Can the Minister of Education confirm that the notice and opt-out only apply to instructional materials, programs, and courses of study, not to student groups, including GSAs, held outside of class?

Mr. Dirks: The member opposite is correct.

Ms Blakeman: You know how much I love that.

All right. Back to the same minister. The concern is that the parental opt-out clause is written into this LIFE Framework, so if a GSA student group was requested or a student wanted to join, the parent would be notified. For some kids home is not a safe place, and now they would have been outed by the school to their parents. What is the Minister of Education's strategy to make sure that we don't end up with more homeless LGBT kids that have been kicked out or left their homes?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member opposite for the question. Bill 10 is a bill that we all supported because we very much want to see children provided with a safe, caring, respectful, inclusive environment. Under Bill 10 there is no requirement for parental notification or consent for a student to participate in a GSA. These are voluntary student organizations.

Ms Blakeman: Good.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I believe that most people will obey the new law, but a few will try to get around it. What strategy does the Minister of Education have in place if school administrations lean on or, let's say, use very strong persuasion to students so that they won't start a GSA or call it a GSA? What's in place?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. Of course, we expect that our professional staff in schools will act professionally, in the best interest of children. They have the duty of care for those children, and I would anticipate that they would follow that duty-of-care expectation.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it has been reported that in two separate statutory declarations allegations have been made about the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, which include involvement in a \$10,000 bribe. Now, while none of these allegations have been proven, this behavior could amount to a breach of the Criminal Code. My question is to the Premier. Given the serious nature of these allegations, will he ask the associate minister of his cabinet to step aside until . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I don't know where you're going with this, but if this is something to do with internal party matters, then it ought not be raised here. I don't know what it is.

Is there anyone on the front bench that wishes to comment? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The leader of the fourth party has talked about some very serious allegations, but they are just that, allegations that have not been proven. It's not appropriate to be commenting based on speculation.

The Speaker: First supplemental, I guess.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, as the Solicitor General rightly notes, these allegations have not been proven, but they are very serious, and they're not at all dissimilar from allegations which are under investigation by the police in Ontario. As a result, good leadership would suggest that one not duck and dodge but, rather, that one take a cautious, judicious approach which recognizes the potential conflict of interest between a member of the cabinet and the best interests of the Alberta public. As such, will the Premier ask that member to step aside from cabinet?

The Speaker: I'm not sure where you're going with this, hon. member, but if it turns out that this is an internal party matter, then we'll have to have a discussion.

In the meantime is there someone who wishes to try and answer to whatever this allegation is? Try and connect it to government policy or government programs or government services if you would.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, there is no connection apparent here, and I would say the same answer from the first exchange.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I ask. Statutory declarations have been made that allege criminal behavior. Will the Solicitor General appoint a special prosecutor to be seized of this matter as it progresses and as resolution of these allegations progress?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, once again, I'm not aware of any investigation by any law enforcement agency, but even if there was, it would be improper for me to comment on a live investigation.

The Speaker: Neither am I.

Let us move on. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Sherwood Park.

Childhood Immunization

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday both the Education and Health ministers agreed that vaccines save lives. They're in good company because the World Health Organization, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and the chief medical officer of Alberta all agree. Clearly, there's no problem with the science, but when pressed to show real, progressive leadership, all this government said was that more consultation is needed. If the science is so clear, who exactly does the Minister of Education need to consult?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I would simply say that there are no regulations or other requirements that Education imposes on school boards relating to compulsory vaccinations. The administration of vaccinations in schools is between Alberta Health in co-ordination with school boards.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Health minister. It sounds to me like the PCs just want to kick the can down the road, perhaps until after an election, but we have an opportunity to require this now. The only thing lacking is real, progressive leadership for Martha and Henry's grandchildren. Will the minister assure us that our kids and grandkids will be protected by implementing a mandatory vaccination before school resumes in the fall?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. We urge parents to immunize their children. We think it's very important. Immunizations save lives. Again, it's very important. It protects our children, our communities, reduces the burden on our health system. But, again, we're not going to mandate it.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that children with compromised immune systems and others may be risking their lives by attending school, by visiting the park, or going elsewhere because the cadre of children is not vaccinated, how long will you allow unimmunized children to attend school before there's a public health crisis?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I just recently said how important we believe vaccinations are, how we encourage parents to do it, how the school board encourages parents to do it, but again it is a parental decision.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

2:10

Education Funding

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents in Sherwood Park, especially parents with school-aged children, are concerned about the impact of the current fiscal situation on students. After all, despite the current fiscal challenge, a well-funded K to 12 education system is vital to ensuring the long-term success of our province and young Albertans. To the Minister of Education: what assurances can this government give to my constituents to show the commitment to ensuring our education system remains well funded in light of the current fiscal situation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Dirks: I thank the member for the question and thank you, Mr. Speaker. We take our responsibility for supporting our students very seriously, and we're committed to funding education services in a fiscally prudent manner. In the 2014-15 school year we have invested nearly \$38 million every day for students who are in our schools. In light of the current economic situation, obviously, difficult choices will have to be made by school boards and by government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will this government address the need for our school boards to receive stable and predictable funding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of this government's top priorities is education, of course, and preparing our children for the future. We will continue to invest in schools and in school facilities in a fiscally prudent manner. I have been tasked with implementing a plan for long-term, stable, predictable funding. School authorities have asked for stable funding, and we will do our best to deliver, of course, within available resources.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what steps is government taking to ensure that funding for education reaches those that matter the most, our students?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We believe that school authorities, our school boards, are in the best position to allocate resources based on the student needs and local priorities. In fact, I don't know if members are aware of this, but almost 98 per cent of the current Education budget goes directly to school authorities, to school boards, to ensure that local priorities and student needs are being met.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I understand you are going next in place of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Lethbridge-East.

Tailings Pond Dam Safety

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Auditor General issued a scathing report on dam safety in our province, telling us that the majority of coal mine tailings ponds have not been inspected by ESRD since the '90s and others not since the '80s. We also found out recently that the Obed mine dam

that failed, spilling billions of litres of coal slurry from a pond of toxic sludge containing arsenic, mercury, and lead into the Athabasca River, wasn't even monitored or included on the registry of dams. If it looks like a dam, holds water like a dam, and has the risks of a dam . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Now let's hear the answer from the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, Albertans can be confident that their dams in this province are built, maintained, and operated in a safe manner that is aligned with international and national standards. I can tell you that Albertans can have confidence in the public safety of Alberta's dams; however, we know, in accordance with the Auditor General's report, that we must improve the transparency through more effective record keeping and reporting.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, thank heavens for the Auditor General. That's all I can say.

When we raised this matter in the House at the time to the minister, now the Minister of Municipal Affairs, she failed to disclose that this tailings pond's dam was not even on the department's registry and that there is no evidence of an inspection whatsoever. Given that this is either deception by omission or gross incompetence, will the minister tell us which it is?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member doesn't want to take my word for just how safe our dams are, I'd like to read a quote from an internationally recognized professor at the University of Alberta, Norbert Morgenstern, who is a geotechnical engineer. He has said in documents that he's produced that it's the view of the writer that "dam safety systems applied to the Alberta oil sands industry are the best in the world." And I'll table . . .

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, if the dams in Alberta are as safe as the minister is claiming, why did the Obed mine break, spilling billions of tonnes of toxic sludge into the Athabasca River and killing millions of fish? If they're so safe, Minister, why did that disaster occur?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, again, I will say that all of the dams in our province are kept to the highest national and international standards. The Auditor General certainly identified some areas where we can improve in reporting and monitoring these dams. But what I want to say with respect to this particular incident is that this is still under investigation by the Alberta Energy Regulator, and when the Alberta Energy Regulator is ready to put out the findings from its investigation, that will be made public.

The Speaker: Thank you.

AltaLink Transmission Line Consultation

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, Albertans live in or visit our pristine landscapes, some of the finest on this planet. These landscapes are invaluable for tourism dollars, particularly the eastern Livingstone Range, which is actually featured in Alberta's Remember to Breathe ads. The people at AltaLink, owned by Warren Buffett, have proposed 500 kV power lines from Pincher Creek to Crowsnest Pass. AltaLink has conducted consultations with some

residents. Citizens north and south of highway 3 in that area are very upset . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

We'll have to hear from the appropriate minister to conclude this. I don't know whom that might be. Is it the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development?

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. You know, certainly, Mr. Speaker, AltaLink has requested information regarding the importance of our natural landscapes in this area, and we expect them to use this information in consideration of their selection. I want to remind all members of this Assembly that the actual siting of this facility is done by the Alberta Utilities Commission, and they will be the one that finalizes this decision.

The Speaker: The hon. member. First supplemental.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There might be something wrong with your thing again. I timed myself.

Anyway, to the Minister of ESRD: is your ministry aware of these consultations and the resulting issues?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, we're certainly aware of it, and all of the advice that our department has provided AltaLink is to make sure that what they're doing is consistent with the south Saskatchewan regional plan. This is why we have this plan in place. We've informed them of all of the key environmental goals such as protecting wildlife corridors and conservation areas such as the Livingstone Range wildland provincial park and maintaining extensive native grasslands and habitats. Again, Mr. Speaker, the AUC has jurisdiction, and they will be the ones that will make the final decision with AltaLink.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Culture and Tourism: if this abomination goes through, how will this development impact our ability to market our province's natural, untouched beauty as an attraction for millions of visitors?

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

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Southwestern Alberta's breathtaking landscape draws many visitors, and it's important not only for our visitors but for our tourism industry and culture as well, as there's much filming going on there. AltaLink has contacted my ministry as a part of their consultation activities, and we will be providing feedback on this project. Stakeholders, including commercial trail rides and horse outfitting operations, are important to tourism. In this area we're encouraging them to work with AltaLink with regard to this project. The uncluttered . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We will check the clock and make sure it's working.

Let's move on to Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Full-day Kindergarten

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The final report of the early childhood mapping project concluded that more than half of Martha and Henry's grandchildren are lagging behind on at least one developmental milestone. There have been six recommendations, and this PC government has committed to following none of them. As I educated the minister on Tuesday, full-day kindergarten is a

proven way to spur development. To the Minister of Education: why are you passing the buck on to school boards for the lack of full-day kindergarten when you know it was your government that promised the funding and has never delivered?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, we take very seriously this matter of early childhood developmental needs. That's why the early childhood mapping program is something that we supported, and I'm working with my minister colleague directly beside me on this particular matter to ensure that we're going to be able to continue that important early childhood mapping program. It provides us with a very important wealth of detail that helps us understand what the developmental needs of children in Alberta are.

2:20

Dr. Swann: Well, of course. We're understanding the developmental needs. We're just not acting on them, Mr. Minister.

Given that the mapping spent five years and \$16 million gathering and analyzing data from 87,000 kindergarten-aged children, why is the minister shutting down the program at the end of the year and not acting on these issues? These are our grandkids.

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not shutting down anything. In fact, as I indicated earlier, almost 98 per cent of our around \$7 billion budget goes out directly to local school authorities. Those are school boards. They make the determinations about what the priority needs are in their particular areas. That amount of money I believe amounts to something like \$38 million each day for local school boards to allocate in the way that is going to be in the best interests of those children.

Dr. Swann: Let me put it another way, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Education minister isn't funding full-day kindergarten or implementing the report's recommendation, why is this government giving back \$11.6 billion more in tax breaks than any other province in the country instead of helping Martha and Henry's grandkids? What's the answer?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the greatest advantages of Alberta is our low tax regime. Albertans are hard-working individuals, and we don't think we should tax them to death like other provinces do. We are very proud of the tax system we have. We're about investment. We're about keeping Albertans working. In today's economic times the last thing we want to do is raise taxes on hard-working Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Landowner Property Rights

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we are all aware, property rights are a very important issue to rural Albertans. It is one of the most important issues in my own constituency. This government has made progress with the Respecting Property Rights Act. However, many Albertans are still troubled by the Land Stewardship Act. This question is to the Minister of ESRD. Will this bill be repealed?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, property rights is an important issue to all Albertans, and Albertans also understand that our population is on the rise and our land is not getting any bigger to accommodate this. The Alberta Land Stewardship Act is an important piece of legislation that allows us to manage our precious resources to the benefit of all users, so we do not have any plans to repeal this legislation, but I'm always happy to hear from any of the colleagues

in this Legislature or all Albertans or landowners on ways that we can improve our legislation.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the government plan to amend the act to address the concerns that landowners have raised over various parts of it?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act allows for the government to plan wisely for the future needs of Albertans to help manage growth while balancing the rights of property owners. My ministry has no immediate plans to amend this legislation. I'd be happy to hear any concerns from Albertans regarding this legislation with respect to balancing these issues.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is the government planning on having additional legislation to follow up on the Respecting Property Rights Act?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, this government does respect private property rights, and our Premier has been one of the strongest advocates in this area over his career. The all-party committee, the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, has made recent recommendations on property rights, and I've asked my ministry to review these recommendations as they relate to my department.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Along the same vein – the minister is warmed up – when the Premier was running for leadership of his party, he said that property rights would be at the top of his priority list. Since then all landowners have seen is a trumped-up Bill 1 and not a whole lot else. Bill 36 continues to be a gross infringement on property rights, giving the government the hammer over lease agreements and landowner rights. The Premier personally signed a promise to review Bill 36 months ago, but there's still no progress. When can we expect this review to be completed?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, again, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act is an important tool as part of our integrated resource management system, in which we need to make sure that we're utilizing the landscapes, the airsheds, the watersheds and maintaining the biodiversity in this province so that we can get the social licence to develop our natural resources. This is an important tool that we continue to implement through the regional planning process, and this government is committed to that.

The Speaker: Supplemental, please.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Centralized planning hasn't worked in eastern Europe, and it won't work here. If the Premier doesn't fulfill his promise to review Bill 36, which concentrates power in the hands of the PC cabinet, limits rights to compensation for landowners, and blocks access to the courts for citizens, does he expect landowners to be okay with no review, no action, and no repeal of Bill 36?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, again, I need to reiterate the message, I guess. The hon. member isn't quite understanding this. The Alberta Land Stewardship Act is an incredibly important piece of legislation for developing the province's resources. It's the foundation

on which our integrated resource management system is based, with which we can go out confidently to the world and say that we're responsible developers of our resources. That's vitally important to the economy, it's vitally important to our communities, and it's vitally important to Albertans, who care about protecting and enhancing our environment.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With draconian legislation like Bill 2 and Bill 24 still taking away the rights of landowners, can anyone expect this government to actually do meaningful work to protect property rights like repealing these bills, or will they just give more lip service and broken promises on the eve of an election?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, there is no one that has a better track record on protecting private property rights than our Premier. He has a track record and a reputation in this particular area, and there's no one that has a better record of understanding how to balance the development of our natural resources with the environmental consequences of that. This is what this piece of legislation tries to balance in the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, and it's a very important piece to be able to get access to markets for our resources.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

School Construction in Edmonton-South West

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ran in the 2012 election to bring forward an agenda as a dad of two young daughters to get our area of Edmonton-South West caught up and proactive in building the schools we need today, not 10 years from now. I'm getting a bit nervous, though, as I see the oil prices dropping and the budget ahead, and I'm hoping that there's still money for our schools that we need. Even though we've accomplished securing a commitment for eight new schools in our area, we need to keep building more schools to continue to rapidly expand. My question to the Minister of Infrastructure: given where our province is headed financially, are we still expecting these new schools in Edmonton-South West to be finished on time?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are. The member has three schools in phase 2: Southbrook, Windermere Catholic, and Ambleside. All three of these are schools that have contracts awarded, and the contractors are mobilizing by March 30 of this month. In addition, this member has five schools in phase 3. Four of these were starter schools that are now going to be fully built schools by the end of 2016.

Mr. Jeneroux: I like that answer, Mr. Speaker.

Given that we're planning to open these schools on time, can the Minister of Education tell me if we're going to be able to afford to staff these schools with the resources we need to continue to offer the high quality of education our teachers in Alberta provide?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Infrastructure minister for the confirmation that these schools are going ahead. That's very good news. Our government is committed to investing in education so our children have every opportunity to reach their potential. That means investing in schools, providing the teachers that are needed, ensuring we have an outstanding curriculum and that we can do the

very best for our students all while we are living within our means. We take very seriously our responsibility for students to provide the teachers that are necessary.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, given that we're seeing an average of 28 to 31 babies born a day – a day – at one of the nearest hospitals, which is a kindergarten class, can the Minister of Infrastructure continue to keep up with the rapid rate of growth happening in Edmonton-South West, particularly in our young kids?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have one of the largest school-build projects in Canadian history ongoing right now in Alberta. I think I previously said 108. It's actually 102 schools that will be opening in 2016; 102 schools will be opening in 2016. Those are schools that were announced in 2013. They'll be ready for 2016. The schools that were announced in 2011 were ready in 2014. We're going to keep pressing ahead to make sure that we have the infrastructure and the schools for our children.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Lethbridge-West.

2:30

Rural Health Review

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On September 23 of last year the Premier called for a rural health review to be done in 90 days. Back then the Premier said that we need practical solutions that can be implemented without delay. Well, it's been 170 days. Still no report and no solutions to the problems of longer wait times, doctor shortages, and a crumbling infrastructure. It's just another example of PC electioneering: promising big and underdelivering once the votes are counted. To the Health minister. It's been 170 days. Where's the report?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, what we indicated was that the report would be done in three phases of 90 days each. The first phase was done about December 15. The second and third phases are now complete. The report is just being finalized. It will be released early next week by statements, we think, by the Premier.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, the Premier promised this report, and, as the member opposite says, it's in 90-day increments. This government has not delivered on its word. Folks in my riding are calling this a broken trust. In a recent interview the chair of the health review said that he expected the full report to be released now. Minister, why?

Mr. Mandel: To the hon. member: I think I've answered that question. I think that the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster did an incredible job of putting this report together, and I think that it's a remarkable discussion with Albertans, information, heart-to-heart talks with people about what we need in rural Alberta. I think the results of the report and the information are quite fantastic. We look forward to implementing many of those decisions, and we're quite excited about it.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, this is absolutely frustrating. The priorities are simple. This does not require splitting the atom here. Maintaining and adding rural health physicians, sustaining and improving primary care, ending divorce by nursing home, fixing

ambulance service, improving wait times. Why are you going to continue to delay this report?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we haven't delayed this report. It's going to be ready before we had estimated due to the great work of the committee, who worked tirelessly for the first 90 days and the next 60 days in order to get this done. They should be really recognized for the tremendous work that they've done to support Albertans.

The Speaker: Lethbridge-West, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last December the provincial government approved tuition increases for 25 programs at postsecondary institutions in Alberta. Student groups say that these increases broke a promise to students. My questions are all to the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. Given that Alberta already has the lowest participation rate in postsecondary education, doesn't the minister think that this is going to hurt accessibility in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our goal is not to have the cheapest education system in Alberta; our goal is to have the best education system in Alberta. Our aim is excellence. I approved 25 market modifiers in 2014. This decision allows the affected programs to deliver vital, competitive, and responsive programs that meet the needs of students. The market modifier program is going to generate approximately \$21 million in additional revenue for the institutions. I am committed to working with all Campus Alberta partners to build a strong system.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 25 programs which were approved for hikes include engineering, commerce, economics, pharmacy, and many nursing programs, some seeing increases of 71 per cent. How are students supposed to afford an education and gain the skills they need to have a successful career when they face overnight hikes like these?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, graduates from Campus Alberta have just made the best investment of their lives. Recent market modifiers do not apply to students who are already enrolled in those programs.

I'm happy to tell the hon. members that our graduates are extremely successful at paying back any loans and finding jobs. Aside from the \$408 million available for student loans, we invest \$234 million in student aid supports. These supports include scholarships, bursaries, grants, and debt management programs.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, to the same minister. We know that student aid is usually student loans, and therefore students will be paying back this money that they have to borrow in order to attend these programs. How long will Alberta students be paying for these hikes?

The Speaker: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Our system has served Alberta learners extremely well, and 90 per cent of Albertans with government student loans pay them back on schedule. Our most

recent graduate survey data shows a 94 per cent employment rate for graduates, and those grads who received government student loans had an average of \$20,000 owed. Graduates in the survey reported a mean annual income of \$60,300. We still have work to do, but we are well on our way. I invite the hon. member to help us build a Campus Alberta that is sustainable, accessible, and achieves excellence.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in place of Edmonton-Calder, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

School Construction Reporting

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the Infrastructure minister presented an update on school construction around the province, school boards have come forward claiming the information on nearly a dozen schools is inaccurate. After defending this report for three days, the government is now saying that this misinformation is the fault of a couple of typos. To the Minister of Infrastructure: how can you claim that almost a dozen inaccurate dates are simply misprints?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, I know of one specific case in Red Deer where in one instance a school board has asked that a school project be delayed so that they can have consultation with local communities to make sure that the school is a facility that the entire community can use. We'll listen to the local authority, and instead of that school being ready by 2016, it will be ready in 2017.

In another case, Mr. Speaker, we made a mistake and said that construction would start in December 2015 when, in fact, construction has actually already started.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Bilous: Empty fields.

Given that based on what school boards are reporting, there are at least 11 mistakes that this PC government is attributing to typos and given that these 11 delayed schools mean families once again have to bear the burden of your incompetence, will the government admit that it has failed Alberta families, students, and teachers by once again overpromising and underdelivering?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member just went from 12 to 11, and if he has 11 examples, I would be more than happy to look into every single one of them because the fact remains that we want to be very open and transparent about this process. So if there's a mistake, we will look at it. We'll update it so that every single Alberta parent out there can take a look at their project, know when it's going to be ready so that they can plan their lives accordingly. This is critically important for us. We take it very seriously. And 102 schools will be opening in 2016, as committed to.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Final supplemental.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll hold you to that, Minister.

Given that yesterday the Education minister said that construction is a big word by implying a lot of different things are part of construction, what else do you mean by construction: stapling news releases together, constructing sentences inflating your own record on school construction, constructing a narrative to get yourself re-elected, or is it anything besides building a school?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What construction does mean is that when you award a contract, the specific general contractor has to do a few things, first of which is to make sure that their subcontractors are all lined up. That's a very important piece. The second thing, which is critically important, is to make sure the ground is actually thawed so they can start construction, a pretty important point. That's something that is critical so that there are not additional costs to make sure that you have heating and so on when you're pouring a foundation. These are all very important parts, very important pieces . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

I must recognize the next member, and it will be Calgary-Glenmore.

PDD Safety Standards

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The PDD safety standards have been designed to ensure safe-living homes for community members. Unfortunately, with the enforcement of standard 8, inspectors from fire, safety, and health are creating distress. To the Minister of Human Services: how will the government ensure that service providers and their clients are not unfairly suffering because of this standard?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has a responsibility for the safety of our most vulnerable, and we will not compromise on that. These laws apply universally to all landlord and tenant settings, and these standards are not new. We've been working with the service providers for the past two years, so now they are aware that standard 8 will require inspections.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister. I appreciate the process you're going through. At the same time I'm hearing reports that inspectors are telling family members they have to move where the cat dish is placed in the home. Again to the minister: why is the implementation of this policy forcing people to live in homes that look and feel like institutional settings?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we cannot compromise on the safety of our most vulnerable. We know that these compliances must take place. Often some of the required changes are as simple as putting in a fire extinguisher. Again, we want to work with the agencies to resolve issues. If agencies are not able to meet the deadline, we're happy to talk with them, and they can apply for an extension.

Ms L. Johnson: I appreciate that information, Madam Minister.

Again, with respect, the standard is causing some landlords to consider evicting these vulnerable individuals and forcing them out of their homes. To the hon. minister: will your department put an end to this standard before more damage is done?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we do not take chances with the safety of our vulnerable. As a matter of fact, at this point today 82 per cent of the homes have already been

inspected at the various levels across Alberta. Again, we want to work with the agencies. If they need an extension, need to speak with us, we're happy to work with them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Disaster Recovery Program Claims

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been more than 18 months since flood waters devastated communities across southern regions of our province. Many Albertans faced the worst as they lost everything and struggled for months as they tried to rebuild their lives. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: can you tell me why nearly two years since this disaster 2,000 Albertans are still waiting for financial assessment from the DRP program and why they are still out of their homes?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank this member for his excellent question. I want to say how committed we are as a government to help these people get back into their homes. The largest natural disaster that we've had in Canadian history, and we're working hard to complete these files. We have completed more than 80 per cent of the files. There were 10,500 files that were there. We've completed more than 80 per cent of them. Our goal will be that until we're completely finished, we will be there to help all of those files be completed. We've provided over \$100 million to Albertans to help rebuild and remediate their homes.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. member. First supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the process for applying for financial assistance to the DRP is wrought with confusing paperwork, why are you making it so difficult on those Albertans who have already been through so much?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, again a great question by the hon. member. Since our Premier has come here and I've come to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, we've done a couple of things. One, with the open files we completed all of the outstanding appeals by December 2014, as we said we would, by tripling the staff. Since then, with the Premier and the hon. Member for Highwood, we also added 15 more caseworkers to close the files that are open. We've committed to closing those by June of this year.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Final supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what are you doing to ensure those Albertans with open files are given the funding they are eligible for so that they can rebuild and move on once and for all?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, when we announced in High River, with the Premier and the hon. Member for Highwood, the addition of 15 more caseworkers, we also announced that we are advancing 90 per cent of the eligible expenses to help fast-track payments for the complex cases. This is making sure that we clear up these cases and we help these poor people that were devastated by this flood.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. That concludes Oral Question Period.

Just in response to the question posed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, your microphone was cut off when I stood up at the 35-second mark. The clock is working just fine. We know that you continued to speak, and I don't know if *Hansard* picked that up or not. But just to answer that.

Number two, as a result of the reasonably short questions and answers from some of you, we were able to get 108 questions and answers on the record today. So well done to all of you.

Now, in 30 seconds we will proceed with the continuation of Members' Statements, and we'll hear from Calgary-Fort, Banff-Cochrane, and Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: I show the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort going next and then Banff-Cochrane.

Retrospective by the Member for Calgary-Fort

Mr. Cao: Merci, M. le Président. It's known that I will not be returning to the Legislature following the next election. It has been an exciting 18 years. I feel honoured to have had the opportunity to serve the people across Alberta and the wonderful people of the Calgary-Fort constituency and to have been at many places in our great province. I'm grateful to have met and worked with many community organizations and the great people in my political association.

The work of 18 years cannot be said in a few sentences – it's in volumes of the *Hansard* report – but I can briefly say that I have worked with five Premiers. Memorable moments are many. Just to name a few: celebrating Alberta's centennial with Alberta's official song, cutting Alberta's credit card to symbolize Alberta being debt free, initiating the naming of Alberta's veterans highway, parental maternity leave increase, employment standards applied for domestic workers, removing the wage differential of youth, and, particularly, medical benefits for severely handicapped people. Another memorable time was being elected by my peers, by you, to serve you as Deputy Speaker in 2008 to 2012.

My thanks go to all my office assistants, all LAO staff.

I would like to thank my family for motivation: my wife, Kim; sons William, Winston, Ulysses; daughters-in-law Sarah, Mimi; and grandchildren Dylan, Maxwell, and one on the way.

I thank all members of this Assembly, past and present, for sharing time and space with me.

To the media: thank you for leaving me alone, with a low profile, to serve constituents for 18 years.

This Cao-boy will be riding to a new horizon. I wish everyone all the best in yours.

From the bottom of my improved heart, thank you. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Well said.

Let us move on to the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Action for Agriculture

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Action for Agriculture was established in 1990 by concerned ranchers and farmers in southern Alberta. At the time they felt there was a need for a voice for agricultural working landscapes as urban demands for land use and

recreation expanded. As it turns out, 25 years later the need for that voice to be heard is greater than ever.

Over the years Action for Agriculture has educated and lobbied for the responsible management of our watersheds, and they have promoted the understanding that land is a resource and not a commodity to be simply bargained away. The continued loss of productive agricultural land to other uses is a threat to all Albertans as the ecological goods and services of which we are all the benefactors are at risk of being severely impacted by current land-use decisions and practices.

Currently Action for Agriculture is focusing its efforts on methods to allow landowners to preserve their lands as agricultural in perpetuity and, in doing so, to slow down the fragmentation and conversion of agricultural lands so that future generations can benefit from these working landscapes.

2:50

One tool available to landowners to achieve this is conservation easements. Conservation easements are voluntary restrictions placed on land that allow for the protection, conservation, and enhancement of agricultural land. However, current legislation in Alberta, specifically the land trust grant program, does not recognize cultivated lands appropriately, and the use of easements as a preservation tool is very limited because of this.

Mr. Harvey Buckley, who is the current chair of Action for Agriculture, and myself recently met with the Minister of ESRD and in July with representatives from Alberta Agriculture to outline the issues surrounding the use of easements on cultivated lands, Mr. Speaker, and we'd like to thank them very much for their consideration.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Members' Statements

The Speaker: Before I recognize the next speaker, hon. members, let me say this. With respect to today's rotation regarding members' statements, today is day 18, I believe, but the sixth spot, which we're about to have filled, was ceded by one member to another. The Speaker has no objection to that happening, provided that there is that kind of reciprocity of mutual understanding. So that is why you will now hear from the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills instead of someone else.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. member, the floor is yours.

Retrospective by the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills

Mr. Saskiw: I'd like to thank the Member for Medicine Hat for that.

For the last three years I've had the great privilege of representing the constituents of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. They entrusted me to work hard on their behalf, and I've tried every day to live up to their expectations and to advocate for their priorities. I hope I served them with the tenacity, integrity, and respect for my constituents that all Albertans rightfully demand from their MLAs. I defended the values of my constituents even when it wasn't the popular thing to do, when it wasn't the easy thing to do. I did it because it was the right thing to do. That's why our constituents send us here: to make the right decisions, not to take the easy way

out. I know you all came here for the right reasons. I hope you stay focused on why you are here and that you aren't afraid to make the tough decisions that need to be made.

It has become clear that this Premier is going to call an election a year early. For the sake of future generations I hope this Premier and those who follow will keep taxes low and will keep the flat-tax rate, Alberta's primary competitive advantage, and will streamline government to get spending under control, now and always. I hope you will let yourselves be guided by the common sense of the common people and that the Premier will lead a renewal of faith in everyday Albertans in their abilities to make the best decisions for themselves, their families, and communities.

When the Legislature resumes later this year, my constituents will have elected a new MLA. I will not seek re-election. This has been the honour of a lifetime. I've enjoyed the experience immensely, and I will forever value new, forged friendships. I have not made this decision lightly, and it is with mixed emotions that I stand here today. I look forward to returning to the private sector, to spending time with my family, and to the opportunities that lie ahead.

Thank you to my constituents for their trust and confidence, thank you to my colleagues for their passionate and sometimes even entertaining debate in the House, and thank you, most of all, to my family and friends for your dedication, love, and support. Thank you, all. God bless, and good luck. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Good words.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: I think we have one petition I may have overlooked here. Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, were you trying to catch my eye with a petition?

Ms Fenske: Yes.

The Speaker: Let us go to that quickly, then.

Ms Fenske: Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition that was put together by Ruby Kassian. It asks that the government repeal the Daylight Saving Time Act. These signatures were collected throughout the region of northeast Alberta.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of a dam integrity briefing note prepared by the Alberta Chamber of Resources. In this document there is a quotation from Dr. Norbert Morgenstern, whom I referred to in a question from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. He is an internationally recognized authority in the field of geotechnical engineering and a professor at the University of Alberta and a member of the Alberta Order of Excellence. Dr. Morgenstern states that it is his view that dam safety applied in the Alberta oil sands industry is the best in the world.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, or someone, Edmonton-Centre perhaps, on behalf of?

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have tablings on behalf of the leader of the Liberal opposition. The first one is from the University of Calgary's Faculty of Law on developments in Alberta law on farmworkers. They make the claims of farmworkers

for legislative protections even stronger, refuting the argument of the Premier that we need more research and debate before taking action on unconstitutional exclusions. This is specific to constitutional decisions and rights of farmworkers.

The next are all on vaccines. Comparison of Effects of Diseases and Vaccines, prepared by and available online from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

An opinion from the *Calgary Herald* titled Vaccine Opponents Risk Return to a Dark Age, published February 12, 2015, encourages parents to protect their kids with vaccinations.

An article from the *Globe and Mail* published November 5, 2013, titled Officials Urge Immunization After Measles Outbreak in Alberta.

The second last, Mr. Speaker, an article from the *Metro* news published February 16, 2015, titled Alberta's Unlikely to Hit Long-term Targets for Child Vaccination Rates. So the status quo is clearly not working.

Finally – and a little bit of a surprise – from the C.D. Howe Institute, commentary 421, A Shot in the Arm: How to Improve Vaccination Policy in Canada. It calls on Alberta to mandate vaccinations for school entry.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a budget backgrounder produced by the Alberta Federation of Labour that shows government provided, in their view, inflated figures of Alberta's per capita spending. The report finds that the figures are inflated as a result of the government including flood repair money in its calculations in addition to comparing Alberta's spending to the Canadian average rather than specific provincial averages.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other tablings? Edmonton-Centre, you have one more tabling?

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry. I have my own tablings. It looks like I've got three. The first is a tabling from Judy Semeniuk, living in Alberta, directed towards the Premier. She is a regular voter and concerned taxpayer and is expressing her concerns with the cuts in the Klein era, which were never reinstated, and how the government is proceeding without consulting taxpayers.

Secondly, from Niko Palmer an e-mail – he also lives in Edmonton – writing about the current crisis in maternity care. I believe he's talking about pregnant women finding it very difficult to find primary caregivers, particularly if they're in remote or rural areas.

Finally, Elena Renderos, also from Edmonton, is writing also on maternity care in Edmonton with concerns about difficulties having consistency in finding care for pregnant women and a critical shortage of obstetricians, fewer family doctors providing maternity care, and the demand on midwives far exceeding the number of registered midwives.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there were no points of order today and no points of privilege, so I believe that right at the stroke of nearly 3 o'clock we can move on to Orders of the Day.

3:00

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 17

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015

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

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 17, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015.

The supplementary amounts provided by this bill reflect the fiscal picture outlined in the third-quarter fiscal update released on February 24. These amounts are necessary for the government to conduct business and fulfill its commitments for the current fiscal year. The additional amounts mainly relate to support for the municipal sustainability initiative and the Alberta community partnership; support for drugs and supplementary health benefits, collective bargaining costs in Alberta Health Services, and payment to physicians; support for capital maintenance and renewal to accelerate school construction and modernization projects; provide emergency funding for firefighting in forest protection areas, mountain pine beetle mitigation; support for municipal disaster and flood controls, mitigation, and ongoing recovery efforts.

I respectfully urge my colleagues in this House to support the bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Do I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre going next? Okay. Thank you. Followed by, I think, Edmonton-Calder, and then we'll proceed after that. Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Looks like a plan, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for allowing me to stand and speak in second reading on Bill 17, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015. Of course, this is the bill stage of the estimates that we debated yesterday afternoon and yesterday evening. Unfortunately, I was not able to return in the evening, so there are a few comments that I would like to offer. It's my fault that I wasn't able to come back, and therefore I can't question and receive answers for the questions that I have.

One of the concerns is around the funding for legal aid, which did appear in the supplementary supply and appears here on page 3 of Bill 17 in the amount of \$16,739,000. Now, I believe there is almost \$11.36 million for the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees and management compensation agreements. I'm going to assume that that is staff in the department that was entitled, and I think that also included the one-time lump sum that was paid out to employees as part of the agreement but kind of in lieu of an actual percentage raise. I mean, clearly, that shows up in a number of the departments that had applied for supplementary supply estimates, and that's – I was going to say "as it should be." Ideally, we would know that in advance and it would already be part of the budget, but when those settlements come a little after the fact, indeed, I'm glad the government found the money because otherwise our people would not be paid.

Sorry; just while I'm at that, Mr. Speaker. I can't remember who said it over there, but the government has slipped into a habit of giving one side only of the story. And, tsk tsk, I'm going to give you the example so you don't need to crinkle your eyebrows at me. For example, there was much ballyhoo about how our public-sector employees are paid the most or the highest amount in Canada. Oh,

my goodness. Huff puff. Well, that only makes sense, and the information that wasn't given was that our private sector also is up in that league. They are on the same level, as a matter of fact, and that tells us that the issue is not an overpayment to public-sector employees. What it is is a roaring, great economy for Alberta, in that everybody is doing really well.

So to just give half of that and to make it sound like the public-sector people were being grossly overpaid is a little sneaky. No; it's really sneaky. And that has become more regular than I would like to see it coming out of Public Affairs around government. So stop doing that because I'm on to you. Now, I know that will change your behaviour. Oh, for sure. But I just thought I'd tell you that I noticed.

Okay. Under supplementary supply is the \$5.5 million for Legal Aid Alberta, which was a bit of an arm wrestle, as I saw it, with the Minister of Justice, who was trying to cut costs, but in doing so – the minister has a contract with Legal Aid Alberta, and they have to perform certain tasks, certain duties as a result of that contract. The minister puts in money toward Legal Aid Alberta as does the federal government. But we have an increasing number of people who are in conflict with the law and are also fairly low income, so they're looking for assistance from Legal Aid.

I just want to underline how important that is for women. You know, I talk a lot about equality and seeking and achieving legal equality, social justice equality, and economic equality, and legal aid is very important for women. I wish it had a larger family law section because that's usually where women are most in need of their services, but I won't belabour that at this time.

Now, what was happening was that there's such a thing as a Rowbotham application – I hope I said that properly, Mr. Speaker; I think I did – in which an application can be made to the courts using that argument that says, in essence, that this person really needs to have legal representation and shouldn't be here self-represented. And the judge can say: "Righty-ho. I agree. Go get them a lawyer." In this case the money for the lawyer that's been ordered by the judge is then paid by the Minister of Justice out of his department's budget.

There was such limitation upon the money that was being granted from both the provincial and federal governments to Legal Aid Alberta that they'd had to revise their application criteria downward. They'd actually reached the point, much to their distress, where an individual who was getting AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped, was considered too high income to be eligible for legal aid, which is pretty bizarre and looked terrible when it hit the news. In fact, 5 and a half million dollars was granted to Legal Aid. The minister did come up with the money within about a month, I think, which I'm sure they would have liked sooner, but I was glad to see that it happened in a month.

But what we don't know is where we are going forward. We continue to have I think I was told the other day five to six more of these Rowbotham applications every week, which is a much more expensive way to fund lawyers than the reduced rate that they are eligible to receive under legal aid. So you have an arrangement under legal aid where all lawyers are expected to spend a certain amount of time performing legal aid cases. They get paid at a much lower rate – if you want to look at it, a deal for Alberta taxpayers – but are being paid at the higher rate that is resulting from a judge's order in council, much more expensive.

I don't want to see this again in supplementary supply, so I'm hoping that there is adequate funding and that the minister is quick like a bunny to let Legal Aid know and to sign their operating budget. Last year I think there was a delay where that wasn't signed until June, which is, you know, kind of unfair, Mr. Speaker. They're trying to run a budget, and they haven't managed to get the minister

to actually sign off on it, so that places them in a very difficult situation. I hope that the minister is able this year to both supply adequate funding so that we're not getting all of these challenges and to approve their budget in enough time that they can make good use of it throughout the entire year. Those are my comments on the Justice section.

The other area that generated a lot of discussion – I was trying to zoom through the Blues from last night so that I didn't ask questions again, and I do apologize if I didn't read this properly and I repeat a question. I apologize for that. But one of the areas that was generating a lot of discussion was under Environment and around, if I'm remembering correctly, buying out the land leases. The situation there is that when the – I'm not going to remember the full name of it: something, something Athabasca, lower Athabasca ...

3:10

An Hon. Member: Regional plan.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

... regional plan was finalized, there was certain land that was expected to be brought back into the fold, so to speak, into public land, so there was a certain amount of that that was spent – oh, no. Sorry. I might totally be in the wrong place here. Yeah. Wrong place.

This was the one that had the Kananaskis golf course. Oh, yes. I mean, that looks bad, and it's also kind of curious as to why money would be spent to restore the Kananaskis golf course, which has always had a bit of – what's the word? – scandal attached to it. At one point they imported special silica sand from somewhere – I don't know where – exotic in the world in order to use that sand in their sand traps, and it garnered the then government a good deal of unwanted attention for spending this extra money on this super sand to put in a golf course. Yet here we are: \$8 million to maintain the operational infrastructure and grounds at the Kananaskis golf course during the rehab – in other words, they're paying everybody to keep going even though they don't have a golf course to keep going on – plus \$1,170,000 for capital for the Kananaskis golf course. That's a lot of money.

I read in one part that it was because it was flood recovery, and that's why they were doing it now. But I do question that allocation of resources when we don't have enough money to do some of the things we'd like to do with children or in Education or in Municipal Affairs, yet we're laying out some serious cash here on a golf course. I hope that doesn't happen again. I am very curious about the government's defence that they did it because the golf course was included under flood infrastructure because it's not here. The line above it actually is talking about implementation of flood infrastructure recovery measures, so I'm kind of curious about the government using that as their reason that the golf course got that amount of money.

There is quite a bit of money in Environment and Sustainable Resource Development around the flood hazard identification program, flood infrastructure recovery measures, and then the usual wildfires. Then there's mitigation programs to build berms, recovery erosion controls, the Springbank off-stream reservoir, and watershed resiliency and restoration, which is around drought and water and the province's watersheds.

My concern around this is that you can't fool with Mother Nature, and I think that the choice has been made to protect some peopled land, particularly in the Okotoks and High River area, by diverting rivers and trying to build reservoirs to divert water into. Boy, you've got to be careful with that. This just happened in a tremendous hurry. So I'm looking for some reassurance from the government that there were, you know, appropriate consultations with some pretty slam-dunk, impressive scientists because I am

quite concerned that we will end up implementing a number of things here that will cost us very dearly in the future in that we have tried to fool Mother Nature and she will get us for it, as often happens. We need to be doing this right the first time rather than scrambling after the fact. So I'm looking for a bit of reassurance around that, please.

I think it was fairly clear what the money in Health was being spent for. Human Services was clear enough for me. Thank you. Transportation was fine, but I did wonder in Transportation why there are 119 vacancies, which was part of the money that was talked about by the Minister of Transportation.

Oh, my goodness, it's a bit thin over there.

He said that some of the money that was saved was saved from not filling 119 vacancies.

Some Hon. Members: Look behind you, Laurie.

Mr. Campbell: It's pretty thin over there, too.

Ms Blakeman: Fair enough. All right, then. Yeah. Everybody is out in the fabulous constituency.

I'm wondering why you would not be filling those vacancies. I know it's one way of saving money, but, you know, we are supposed to be budgeting to provide the programs and services, and we need people to do those. If we don't fill the vacancies, that work is not being done, and eventually that costs us quite a lot, as we learned from the deferred maintenance during the Klein years.

Those were some of the issues that I wanted to raise in second reading of Bill 17, which is the supplementary supply act, that the government is looking to pass through over the next couple of days. Hopefully, I can get some answers once we get into Committee of Supply, but I appreciate the opportunity to put my comments on the record.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, after whom 29(2)(a) will be available.

Mr. Eggen: On 29(2)(a)?

The Speaker: After you, 29(2)(a).

Mr. Eggen: Right. Okay. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak on second reading of Bill 17. I'm just reminded that this is the extension of the estimates from yesterday, so I just had a number of significant and some smaller issues to highlight around the supplementary supply.

Now, it's not unfair to say that sometimes supplementary supply can be quite a significant amount of money, involving many different ministries, depending upon when it occurs. Because we are moving into an electoral period, I think that perhaps the requirement of supplementary supply is somehow made larger. It can be unfortunate in some circumstances because, of course, we're talking about ongoing funding and choices that we make for each ministry. If somehow things do get cut short, I just want to make sure that they stay on the table after the election period does see itself through.

Regardless of who forms the next government in regard to the postelection period, I think it's very important for us to remind ourselves that we need to provide ongoing, stable, long-term funding for essential core services such as health care, education, and infrastructure and that the funding can be counted on, not just over a period of weeks or months but over a period of years, so that we can make the necessary decisions to not just deliver health care

and education, for example, but to actually build capacity in both of those areas as well.

Now, what we've seen sort of thematically are some problems in regard to the Health budget specifically and then some problems that we've identified in regard to the infrastructure spending for both health care and for education as well.

First, health care. Although it seems as though – I mean, everything in health care globally is quite large numbers because, of course, it is a very important part of our overall budget. But what we are identifying here is that we didn't spend some of the money that we did budget for last year. You know, in some ways you end up seeing a cut by omission somehow when we actually did provide for budget allocations around pharmacy and for other collective agreements around Alberta Health Services. So there's no service being provided necessarily, but then the money is not being spent as well. It's important for us to identify that there are effective cuts taking place in health care already, even before this budget that we are anticipating here on the 26th of March, and they're having real effects on the capacity for health care professionals and staff, and so on, to deliver the health care that we require.

3:20

Also, you know, it can't be understated, the irony that does exist in decisions that the government has made around this supplementary supply in light of cuts and delays that we've already seen for projects that were very essential and important for all Albertans. One that comes to mind straightaway for me is the Tom Baker cancer centre. It's a facility that is not in keeping with the population of not just Calgary but the whole surrounding hinterland that the Tom Baker supplies and services. We know that the expansion and the modernization of that facility has been anticipated for many years. I just find it ironic that we would still have that on the table when we are making other supplementary supply decisions here in this bill that direct money to what I would suggest is maybe not quite as essential and pressing as, let's say, developing the Tom Baker cancer centre.

Usually I don't look at some specific things, but, I mean, it just can't be avoided, seeing how certain infrastructure choices are being made here in this supplementary supply. Maybe, you know, it's symbolic, but at the same time I really question the choice to put supplementary supply money into the Kananaskis golf course, in fact, not just for flood mitigation or for flood reconstruction, but I see – maybe I'm not reading it right – money for operation of the Kananaskis resort as well. I mean, maybe one does not equal the other, but choices do reflect on the intention and the priorities of individuals sometimes. When I look at the Tom Baker cancer centre and the absolute necessity of moving forward on that, I just am feeling a bit conflicted on that particular issue.

Back to health care. There are a number of spending areas within the existing budget that I think we could have sharpened up considerably. You know, the whole emergency wait time initiative issue, I think, is something that is lingering and not being addressed in the most direct way possible. We haven't seen the numbers actually being reduced in a significant way for emergency wait times around the province. I get updates very regularly from different emergencies around the province saying just how overcapacity they are at any given time. For us to look at supplementary supply and not perhaps target funding more specifically, that could help to mitigate the overuse of emergency rooms across the province, from the Misericordia to the Foothills, I think, is something that we could have done better on as well.

The whole issue around, of course, the Child and Youth Advocate. Certainly, it's important to have that extra funding, but we were just, I think, all very conflicted in the Legislative Offices

Committee meeting in regard to the cuts that seemed to be imposed by this government on the Child and Youth Advocate. We knew that the relatively modest funding increases that the Child and Youth Advocate required were a reflection of legislation that was directing that office to expand its services. Especially, you know, considered in light of more disclosures of child deaths in care, that we saw here in these last couple of days, it certainly underscores the importance of investing in the Child and Youth Advocate to have the independent investigative capacity of that office expanded, not for the sake of just building a bigger bureaucracy but for trying to solve a systemic problem we have with children in care and the level of protection that we can afford children in care. Again, you can see in supplementary supply the reflective lower number that the advocate was asking for during their budget considerations in Legislative Offices. Again, it just reminds me of a real sore spot that will continue to linger until we start to make more reasonable, logical decisions around funding independent offices of the Legislature.

Again by omission, the choice of cutting the Auditor General's funding: we should remind ourselves of that during the supplementary supply discussion because again we see, clear as day, with the Auditor General's report that we saw yesterday, that a dollar invested in the Auditor General is an incredible investment for saving money and resources down the road each and every time they do their job. Certainly, I know just how modest and careful they are with their budgets. Certainly, we should have supplemented their capacity to what they had required in their budget discussions because, of course, we know that money is tight, and when money is tight, it redoubles the responsibility we have to audit and account for those monies in an independent sort of way.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, in regard to the supplementary supply the other issue I wanted to just bring up is around legal aid. I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre did a good job of reviewing the problem that we have in legal aid. Again, I would suggest that it's an investment for saving money in the legal system down the road. We know the backlogs that we experience in our justice system, and I know that the minister responsible has been looking for ways to expedite some cases and has legislation before the House in that regard. But I would venture to say that a prudent investment in legal aid is the best bang for your buck to streamline the legal process and to help expedite the dispensation of justice in this province. For us to somehow compromise that, I think, is us as a legislative body compounding a problem that we should be in fact trying to solve.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker, in regard to supplementary supply, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak. Thanks.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

I don't see anyone rising, so we'll move on to Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 17, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act. I guess, just generally speaking, some of the main points are that when you look at these documents, it appears that overall the government just doesn't have a handle on its spending. I don't think that should come as a surprise to any members of this Assembly. In fact, when the current Premier was travelling across the province, I think he was pretty shocked and astonished at how spending had escalated without any fiscal constraints. You know, it appears as well that they always do, throughout the years, underestimate certain costs such as the cost for wildfires and other types of emergencies. You'd think at this point in time that you'd have a more accurate number,

that it wouldn't be out by such a large percentage year after year.

3:30

A couple of main points to consider when you look at these numbers: the fact that there has been no attempt to cut what most Albertans, I think, would understand as wasteful spending. One of these is, of course, the carbon capture and storage. Two billion dollars has been wasted since this program was announced by the then Premier Stelmach, and, of course, we thought this was going to be changed, but now that program has been extended by five years, to the year 2020. [some applause] Which ones clapped on that one? You know, this has been experimental technology that hasn't proven that it would actually reduce any emissions. It's corporate subsidies. We feel that industry with the proper incentives could go ahead and make sure that their practices are the best practices throughout Canada and North America. But this carbon capture has been a complete, dismal failure.

We're going to see more of this in the years to come because some of the financial statements and the contracts that went into this are going to be uncovered. It takes time to do FOIPs, but some of the companies that were awarded these contracts had deep connections and tentacles throughout the whole current government, or PC Party, apparatus. I look forward to seeing what those documents reveal.

But on the surface of it, it just appears that, you know, when a private entity like Shell states that this technology is simply not feasible economically, you would have thought the government would have got the hint and cancelled it. In fact, this was a complete flip-flop. I know that during the leadership race the current Premier indicated that this technology was, to my understanding, a waste, but instead they decided to extend the program by five years, to 2020. I would be remiss if I didn't say that this was a dismal waste of money.

The second key component that you can find throughout the supplementary estimates is the federal building, and this, of course, is the extravagant building for MLAs and bureaucrats. The price tag is roughly \$400 million, and I don't think that includes the cost of, or the value, I guess, of the transferred land that went into this deal. It includes things like a million dollar sky palace. It includes a garden rooftop – it must be just beautiful – an 80-person movie theatre, I think eight shades or five shades of marble.

An Hon. Member: Fifty shades.

Mr. Saskiw: There could be more. There could be more. That will make for some interesting times in that building with that happening.

You know, this is one of these extravagant things. When you're looking at schools or other dilapidating infrastructure, you'd think that a brand new MLA office building would be the last thing on a priority list. Of course, it went over budget, I think by about \$100 million, give or take a few million. This is one of the things that we in the Wildrose suggested could be one of the first assets that the government divests itself of to help balance the budget. Assuming they put 400 million bucks into this building, they got the land for free, you would assume that you could get that same price or roughly the same price on that building. Why not sell that building and put those funds towards the impending fiscal mess and perhaps get closer to balancing the books?

I don't think anyone in their right mind could think that at a time where oil prices are where they're at there is a need for a brand new, fancy federal building. I know the minister at the time called it the crown jewel of the government. I think those words have come back

to haunt him. I think that Albertans are going to look at that during the election period and say: well, that's one example of a waste of money that has been perpetrated on taxpayers.

The other aspect, when you look at the supply estimates, is the costs that are being paid out to the cancellation of certain oil sands leases in the north. Of course, this is under the lower Athabasca regional plan, whereby the government unilaterally cancelled leases, property rights, of oil sands companies. I guess the question is: if the government can come and unilaterally cancel oil sands leases, those property rights, what chance does a farmer, a landowner have? Of course, the lower Athabasca regional plan is the first of a series of regional plans. The subsequent plans are more than likely going to trample on even more rights. A lot of the land up north was Crown land, and of course the issues aren't as severe with those facts in hand.

The question that I have for the government is: how much money has gone for these cancelled leases, and who calculated the compensation for the cancellation of leases, and who receives what funds? The fact is that under the law there was no legal right to provide compensation, so the government must have come up with some scenario or formula to compensate the oil sands companies that lost their leases. I think that Alberta taxpayers have a right to know who is receiving those monies, what it's being received for. Is this setting a precedent? When future regional plans are developed and landowners lose their rights or companies lose their property rights, what will the compensation be to them? Under the law there is no right to compensation, so the government did this, apparently, out of their goodwill or to pacify some of these companies that invested substantial amounts of money in the north, which, of course, generates the vast majority of the revenue in this province. What is going to happen to those smaller landowners when their property rights are trampled? There's no right to compensation, so what formula is going to be used by the government to provide that, or is no formula going to be used at all?

The other aspect that's been touched upon by other members of this Assembly was the refurbishing of a golf course and the operation of it. Of course, governments are never good at operating businesses. I'm sure they wouldn't be good at operating things like golf courses. My question is, you know: during a time of apparent economic downturn why would the government expend tax dollars on a golf course? The dollars that you're looking at, maintaining the infrastructure and grounds of the golf course, are \$8 million. Obviously, if you ask taxpayers what the priority would be – would it be a school, or would it be health care infrastructure or a golf course? – I think maybe with the exception of some avid golfers they would argue that the golf course would not be on the priority list. You know, if you look at other jurisdictions, it's only in Alberta where they would sink this much money into a golf course.

Again, you look throughout the document. Aboriginal Relations: there's a \$5.6 million promise for housing on the Lubicon Lake band. Of course, we'd want more details on this. Why was there this deficiency in the first place, and what exactly are the projects that are going to be funded? The government hasn't really delineated how those funds are going to be allocated and for what projects.

The \$3 million for critical infrastructure on Métis settlements. My riding has two Métis settlements, Kikino and Buffalo. Of course, I'd like to examine what exactly the government is proposing here. Where are the details, and why wasn't this appropriately budgeted for in the previous fiscal year?

Mr. Speaker, we see again and again, when you look at the budgeting of this government, that they never do take into account proper contingency rates for disasters, and what I would suggest is that they seek the advice of the Auditor General to do an analysis

operationally of why they're always underestimating this and for an explicit contingency to be put in the budget so that they don't always have to request more during the supplemental supply. Of course, you know, if there's funding that's needed for emergencies like the Alberta flood recovery, every member in this Assembly is going to support those types of allocations provided the projects make sense. But at the same time, why not budget for a reasonable amount, a reasonable contingency, in advance so we don't have to come back to the Assembly and ask for more money year after year after year?

We see as well in the Justice and Solicitor General department \$5.5 million for legal aid. The government put forward a one-time funding increase in this department. We'd like to ask that the government consider having a funding formula where you have year-over-year consistent funding at the rate of inflation plus population growth to help those most vulnerable in our society get the proper legal representation.

3:40

When you don't have the appropriate legal aid in place, what happens is that it clogs the system in place. You have unrepresented litigants in court who then tie things up. The judge typically has to bend over backwards to make sure that their rights are being upheld, and that inevitably leads to delays in the court system. This slashing of the budget and increasing it one year or the next year creates havoc within the court system, it creates havoc within the legal aid system, and it creates havoc with the lawyers that do this type of work generally on a much lower, reduced basis, sometimes pro bono.

We're also looking at, of course, that it made a splash in the news on Municipal Affairs, where all of a sudden the government came up with \$400 million in the MSI capital grant program. It'd be nice to get an understanding of why the government can't simply go forward with predictable, consistent funding for municipalities. The timing of this, obviously, appears to be pretty fortuitous, you know, one month before election. It's, I guess, pretty good timing if all they're concerned about is campaigning and getting re-elected.

Mr. Speaker, I guess, just in general, when you look at the overall budget and what's been put forward here, you see a government that just has out-of-control spending. This government spends more per capita than any other province on all sorts of things, yet Albertans aren't getting the best results. I think that this is a telltale of a government that has been in power so long that they'll do anything to get elected, and their spending will just get more and more out of control. By the government's own polling, it shows that the number one concern of Albertans and how they would want to fix the fiscal situation is to cut wasteful spending, and I think that's got to be the priority here.

You know, the PC government has been talking tough about this upcoming budget on March 26, but my guess is that when we see the budget document, it's going to be one of those mushy ones, where they've moved far to the centre to appease certain stakeholders throughout this province. I'm very interested in seeing what this budget is actually going to produce, if it's going to be a tough budget or if it's going to be one of these things where, you know: tough talk without the actual tough action.

By this bill itself, the supplementary supply estimates, you can see that, you know, there hasn't been any restraint in spending: \$8 million for a golf course, \$2 billion for carbon capture, a federal building. There's no restraint here, so I'd be very surprised if I saw on March 26 a budget that actually showed some fiscal restraint. It'd be a great thing to see. I just don't expect that to be the case given the document that we're debating here today.

With that, again, I look forward to seeing if the government has any actions that would fix this process and would help to ensure that Alberta's finances are in good hands. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

I don't see anyone wishing to pursue it, so let's move on to the next speaker. It will be Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, please.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank my colleague from Lac La Biche that spoke before me and congratulate him. Apparently, being a young newlywed is much more fun than being in here on a daily basis, so congratulations to him.

There are a number of things in the supplemental bill that I hope the government takes under consideration. You know, we have to do the business of government. I applaud the government for looking at things like flood mitigation and some of the attempts at flood mitigation, but I will say this. If you look at the structure of how we're dealing with it, it's piecemeal, and in my view that's inefficient. So here we are with a supplemental bill that even based on my questioning yesterday is trying to get three different and separate ministries dealing with this issue, and that's a systemic problem.

Evidence of the problem just came out in the Auditor General's report, where the Auditor General talked about Infrastructure purchasing homes in a floodway and then ESRD investing money to build a dike to protect that floodway, which changes the floodway to normal land. Now you've got the community saying that now that you built the dike and also purchased the land, they want to resell the land for development. That's a waste of money. That's a waste of money. That money is better spent on more productive flood mitigation.

I think that the only way to deal with this going forward, to make more efficient use of the money that we spend is to look at how we're going to deal with flood mitigation overall, provincially, and maybe bring that under one ministry or one authority so that we can basically not spend and overspend and counterspend between ministries. That's not getting us ahead of the game.

The other thing is that when you look at what has been proposed even in this supplementary budget, in dealing with some of the issues, we're not looking at it holistically. What we are doing is dealing with more of the symptoms of the problem. On the issue of the flood mapping and the studies about floods – and the minister spoke about that today – when you look at the broader picture, we're not looking at the entire watershed.

So on the issue affecting Sundre, which is one of those few communities in this province that has a significant flood problem, we're not looking at the actual watershed in the high country and what the logging is doing to the flow of the river. Without taking that under consideration, we don't know if we're spending the money efficiently. We don't know if we're wasting the money.

When you look at the three different ministries – Infrastructure, ESRD, and Municipal Affairs – each has something in this budget, this supplemental budget, for flood mitigation. The question now comes: are we getting our money's worth? Are we doing what's right? Without that knowledge upriver of how it's going to affect the entire river basin, we don't have that answer. This ministry can't tell me, this government can't tell me anymore than I can tell them whether we're getting our dollar's worth on spending this money. All we know is: we're going to pass this so we can do some flood mitigation work.

My colleague from the fourth party had mentioned something about: he was conflicted over this golf course. I can assure you that

I am not conflicted. This thing has to come out of this supplemental budget. It really does. If we are going to go after the Auditor General and tell a committee to reverse a decision, where an independent committee met and decided to give the Auditor General an additional half a million dollars, and we rescind that, but we're going to spend \$1.1 million to construct a golf course and another \$8 million to make sure it stays operational while we're rehabbing that golf course, that to me is just not something we can reconcile.

Is a golf course a good investment? I'd rather leave that to the private sector. I'm not so sure it is in the sense that up in the high country it is. But I will tell you this. The private golf course owners aren't really thrilled that this government is building a golf course again anyway. They have their own issues. But to have that golf course operational while it's under rehabilitation, to me, you wouldn't do that in the private sector. You wouldn't spend that kind of money while you're rehabilitating your golf course. You'd just fix your golf course. So I think that absolutely has to come out in light of the items that we absolutely need, that are essential.

The minister stood up the other day in this House and said that there are no unsafe bridges in the province. Well, that's absolutely untrue, but I will give the minister credit. It depends on what you define as safe and unsafe. You can change the level all you want, but the fact is that I can name you two bridges in my constituency, and I know the Member for Little Bow can name a number of bridges that absolutely are not up to standard. They need to be fixed. I have a bridge called the James River Bridge that needs a quarter million dollars to be repaired and brought back up to standard. It is absolutely essential that this bridge be repaired because this is an evacuation route for sour gas wells in case something goes wrong. Clearly, we have a critical piece of infrastructure, we have a county who says, "The province hasn't funded us, so we can't fix the bridge," it needs a quarter of million dollars, and we're going to spend \$8 million to keep a golf course operational. That doesn't make sense. That you cannot reconcile.

3:50

How do you justify that to the public? Do you want to go out to the public in the next election and try to sell that to the public? Do you want to campaign on that? I know one thing; I do. If you approve it, I will be campaigning on it. I'll have fun anyway. How can you build a golf course when you have these other important needs? You just can't do that. How can you tell the public that, on one hand, everybody's got to give up something. Front line: everybody's got to give up something except those who are going to golf up in Kananaskis. That, to me, cannot be reconciled.

We have hospitals that need to be taken care of, that need to be built. Clearly, those are expensive. One of the things that would help tremendously in dealing with these supplemental budgets as well as with our regular budget is to have a list of priorities just like every municipality does on a yearly basis. You list your capital projects by priority. How would this government want to do that? It's flexible. You should do it by ministry, in my view. If you want to do it as a whole, it doesn't matter. But you list by priority what projects should be built next year. You draw a line of what is funded and what is unfunded.

There are always circumstances that arise during a budget year, where projects that are unfunded need to go to the funded level and something needs to move out. The public understands that. But if you want to sell an austerity budget to the public, if you want to sell a supplemental budget that doesn't address the basic needs of their critical infrastructure, then that public, in order to buy into this, would like to know where their critical infrastructure is on the

priority list in relationship to the budget you're passing. That's all they want to know. They want that information so that they can rely on it. If this government were to adopt that practice, this is something we could easily sell to the public, saying: this is why we need these things.

With that, I just want to talk a little bit about the money that's going to the Springbank off-stream storage, that \$4.5 million. I don't know if it's right or wrong. I watch the newspapers. I know the government is dealing with the experts, and they're deciding whether this is the right deal or not. I will tell you this. There is an argument on whether you should store in-stream or out of stream, which one is better. It is site specific, whether it should be more efficient in-stream or out of stream. That I don't have an issue with. I'm willing to accept the experts' advice on site-specific designs. But I will tell you this. When you look at the money that's being proposed, \$4.5 million, compared to the money that would be lost in a flood, the devastation even in a minor flood, the money comparison is not even worth talking about in the sense of how much better this investment is to protect the property damage that could be a result of a flood.

Backing up, provincially speaking, when you look at the value you get by doing something right and how you're going to protect the community, the property, the businesses downriver, it is, to me, paramount that we look at our flood mitigation holistically and think about it in terms of: if \$4.5 million can do the trick for Calgary, then why can't we get that kind of money for a community like Sundre and some of these other communities that have not seen that flood mitigation money come in for what I would call a long-term solution that could protect billions of dollars in dealing with a community that is prone to floods? This is something that, in my view – if you take a step back, look at the broader picture, and design how you're going to attack the whole flood mitigation problem by your watersheds, I think the investment dollars would be significant in a sense of what every dollar spent would save in flood prevention and flood damage. I think that would be immeasurable.

With that, clearly we need to pass the supplemental bill. It will pass, but I hope – I hope – before we're done here we get rid of the money that is slated for this golf course. It is unnecessary. It is not good for the public, and it's not good to try to sell an austerity budget that you're planning on selling to the public, where everybody's at fault for our fiscal woes. How do you sell that if we're going to be building a golf course? It doesn't make sense.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I understand, hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, that you wish to participate.

Mr. Strankman: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I think it's an interesting comment. The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre makes prominent mention of the Kananaskis golf course. The government has been interestingly quiet in their final deliberations in regard to the sale of aircraft that they were using in competition with private industry, so I was wondering if the member could go into the use of government funds for private industry. There also are private owners of golf courses in the province. I think that's an important competitive thing, the idea of using taxpayers' money.

You also made mention that there are uses of interdepartmental rivalry with funding allotments, and there is the \$4.8 million transfer from Municipal Affairs to the Department of Seniors. I was wondering if you would like to give some comment in that regard.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure about inter-departmental rivalry. I haven't seen any ministers tackling each other in a rivalry. But I will call it interdepartmental inconsistency. It happens. When this government is looking for efficiencies, as in any business enterprise, as in any organizational structure, if you look at the goals of each ministry, one of the things you have to make sure is that they don't conflict with other ministries. That, I think, is paramount, and it's a never-ending task for an executive branch to look at that, to make sure it is efficient.

I do want to talk about that question on the golf course because the investment of public dollars into a golf course is questionable under a number of standards. In this province, where we have a very, very short season, we know that private golf course owners struggle to get that bottom line. In order to get to that bottom line, they look at the competition. When you've got a government in there, that has unlimited pockets, that can invest in something like a Kananaskis, particularly \$8 million to keep it operational while it's under rehabilitation, it really puts at a disadvantage the private golf course owners who are struggling to make sure that they can, you know, make a profit and be successful. It's unfair to them, particularly those within that driving range – driving range: there's a pun for you – within the driving area of that golf course where they compete for the golfers.

You have the two stages of this, where you have government investing in what probably should be private – and I'm not saying that Kananaskis isn't a great place to go. It is, and it always has been, and it probably always will be. The fact is that if we're going to invest in rehabilitating the golf course, which I think is wrong, and then invest another \$8 million just to keep it operational while it's under reconstruction, that does not seem logical to me. It is something that I have a difficult time reconciling on spending money.

I see one of the ministers shaking his head. If he can provide a different answer than we got last night, then I'm really interested in hearing it and comparing it to the record we got last night on the \$8 million. We were told last night that that \$8 million was about keeping this place operational while the construction was under way. I just feel that that is not something that you would ever do in the private sector. Yes, they suffered damage, but if they're going to invest to build their golf course, they would just build their golf course.

In the end, where is the revenue stream that we can see over the last, say, decade, the last five years of this golf course? How much have they spent operationally, and how much revenue have they seen returned as a result of how much money has been spent? We don't know if that golf course has ever been profitable. There's no proof that it's ever been profitable. Then the question is begged. Why are we investing in the first place if it's never been profitable? We need answers to those questions. If it's profitable, then there's no reason for government money to be in there in the first place. It is certainly something that this government should think about turning over to the private sector.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you. We have eight seconds left under 29(2)(a).

If not, are there any other speakers, or are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: The question has been called.

Hon. President of Treasury Board, did you wish to close debate?

Mr. Campbell: Question.

The Speaker: No? Question. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a second time]

The Speaker: We shall move on.

4:00

Bill 12 Common Business Number Act

The Speaker: You're moving it, hon. member? Thank you.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 12, the Common Business Number Act.

The purpose of this legislation is to enable Alberta to enter into a partnership with the Canada Revenue Agency to adopt a common business number. The common business number is based on a one business, one number vision, where a business is provided with a single unique identifier to be used when dealing with government. Simplifying how businesses interact with government when allowing them to identify themselves with a common business number will particularly support our small-business community. Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, representing 95 per cent of the businesses and creating 35 per cent of the private-sector employment in Alberta.

In 2013 we engaged the small-business community to help determine how we can create the right conditions for small business to continue to thrive in our province. As part of this I led eight in-person engagement sessions across the province attended by 170 small-business owners, and 335 small-business owners also completed an online survey. What we heard was a consistent message, that it can be difficult for small businesses to determine where to find the right information about where to obtain business services, support, or regulatory information from government. Having been a business owner myself, I know first-hand that businesses spend a considerable amount of time looking for information and determining whom to contact in the government for help, particularly in the start-up stages. I also know that our small-business community wants to know what rules apply to them, what government expects when it comes to compliance.

Mr. Speaker, our government listened to what we heard from small-business owners, and we're now delivering that through the Alberta small-business strategy. The strategy is intended to maintain Alberta's favourable investment climate and make it simple to do business in Alberta. One of the commitments made in the strategy is to provide better client service for small business, and adopting the common business number is one of the ways we're achieving this, by allowing businesses to conveniently identify themselves using a single identification number. This will reduce the number of times small businesses provide the same information to various government programs, saving them time and money.

In recent years some provinces have begun to adopt the common business number for their programs as well, and they include our B.C. and Saskatchewan new west trade agreement partners. Jurisdictions that have adopted the common business number have realized benefits for businesses and government, including red tape reduction by eliminating duplicate registration requirements, improving service delivery and program compliance, and expanded opportunities for online service integration and collaboration.

This bill is the first step to achieving these benefits for Alberta by establishing the necessary legislative framework for our province to adopt the common business number. Here are just a couple of examples of the way this bill will do this. First, it establishes the legislative authority to adopt the common business

number as our province's business numbering system. This satisfies the requirement under the federal Income Tax Act that only permits the Canada Revenue Agency to share business information with the provincial partners for the purpose of administering a federal, provincial, or municipal law.

Second, the bill allows Alberta to enter into a formal agreement with the Canada Revenue Agency to obtain basic information about a business's identity like its name, date of incorporation, and contact information.

Third, it allows Service Alberta to establish agreements with other public bodies, gradually expanding the use of the common business number across provincial programs.

Finally, the bill contemplates the establishment of an information system hub to facilitate the exchange of certain business information between the Canada Revenue Agency and participating provincial programs to facilitate the use of the common business number and to protect data integrity.

In addition to these measures, the bill contains regulation-making powers that will allow our province to streamline government regulatory requirements and eliminate duplication in procedures.

As you can see, this bill creates a legislative framework that will enable Alberta to simplify how businesses interact with government and by allowing businesses to identify themselves using a common business number. I think this bill is a significant step forward for our province towards its goal of providing a business-friendly environment, and it's been endorsed by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business as a way to reduce red tape for small-business owners.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 13 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and move second reading of Bill 13, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015, on behalf of the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

When the current act was created, aquatic invasive species were not considered to be a large risk in Alberta, and for this reason, the current act does not sufficiently address the issue. The proposed amendments would establish measures to protect our lakes, rivers, and water infrastructure from the devastating consequences of aquatic invasive species. The measures suggested include mandatory watercraft inspections at our borders, new authority for enforcement officers, and a controlled invasive species list.

Mr. Speaker, all Albertans have an interest in protecting our water for recreation, irrigation, and use in our homes and businesses. That's what makes these amendments so critical.

I now move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 14 Agricultural Societies Amendment Act, 2015

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise to move second reading of Bill 14, the Agricultural Societies Amendment Act, 2015, on behalf of the Minister of Agricultural and Rural Development.

Alberta's agricultural societies are valuable organizations that work to enhance the quality of life in our communities. They have a long and important history, predating the creation of our province. In fact, the original statute that established agricultural societies was a Northwest Territories ordinance from 1886.

Over the years agricultural societies have continued to evolve. They not only fulfill their traditional role of encouraging awareness and improvements in agriculture but also provide services that improve the quality of life for the residents of their communities. There are currently 293 agricultural societies that administer over 3,000 activities annually. These include rodeos, fairs, farmers' markets, 4-H activities, agricultural education, farm safety education, and scholarships. These societies operate more than 700 facilities such as hockey and curling rinks, community halls, and exhibition facilities.

Mr. Speaker, despite changes to how societies operate, some of the wording of the original 1886 ordinance remains in our Agricultural Societies Act today. It is important that our legislation remains current and relevant to ensure that it is meeting the needs of our agricultural societies and the communities that they serve. In a nutshell, the Agricultural Societies Amendment Act will modernize the existing legislation, make sure that it is well aligned with the Societies Act, ensure that all agricultural societies have effective bylaws in place, and recognize that large and small agricultural societies need to have flexibility in how they are structured to meet their unique needs.

The current act is overly prescriptive, going as far as outlining the order of business for annual general meetings, membership fees and membership eligibility, and entitlements within the legislation itself. Under the new provisions these types of requirements would be contained in each society's individual bylaws. This would allow societies both large and small to tailor these requirements to their individual needs and allow the procedures to be updated from time to time without having to reopen legislation.

To ensure good governance and oversight practices are maintained, minimum requirements for bylaws will be outlined in the regulation. For example, bylaws would have to include provisions for membership requirements, rights and obligations, as well as requirements for directors in terms of office. New or amended bylaws that are introduced by societies will be vetted by the department.

4:10

To reflect the evolving role of agricultural societies, we are also updating some of the language in the act to recognize that these societies are not solely agriculture based and are involved in a variety of community activities. For example, the object statement will be broadened to reference communities in general rather than just agricultural communities.

The number of people involved in agricultural production who are required to be part of an application to form an agricultural society has been updated from at least 25 per cent of a minimum of 15 applicants to 25 per cent of at least 50 applicants.

We've also added a provision that further clarifies authorities and responsibilities of societies incorporated under the act. For example, the revised statute states what are referred to as natural person powers to agricultural societies such as the ability to enter into contracts; to purchase, own, use, and dispose of property and assets; and to enter into indemnity.

Mr. Speaker, while we recognize the unique role of agricultural societies in this province, we also want to ensure that the legislation

is aligned with the best practices outlined within the Societies Act. This includes provisions that apply to maintaining a members' register, having a registered office, liability protection for society directors, and the process for major decisions such as amalgamations and dissolutions.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments have been carefully considered. My department has been working closely with the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies and held consultation meetings across the province. All agricultural societies were invited to attend and to provide input. Approximately 200 people representing 97 agricultural societies took part in the consultations.

As a result of these changes, the majority of provincial agricultural societies will have to update their bylaws. However, the societies will have three years to comply. The department will work closely with the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies to provide ongoing support to agricultural societies to facilitate the changes.

I am confident that these changes will effectively meet the needs of our agricultural societies and support their outstanding efforts and service to their communities. I urge members of the Assembly to support this legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 15 Securities Amendment Act, 2015

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

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 15, the Securities Amendment Act, 2015.

In 2004 Alberta made a commitment to ongoing reform under the provincial-territorial memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulation. Ongoing review of regular amendments to the Alberta Securities Act is required to keep pace with industry developments and to support the ongoing reform of the Canadian regulatory system. The Securities Act was last amended during the 2014 fall session and, for the most part, is amended at least once a year.

As I mentioned at first reading, the proposed amendments relate to four topic areas: enforcement-related amendments, point of sale related amendments, amendments that support the continued harmonization of derivatives regulation, and housekeeping amendments of a technical nature.

I'd like to take a few minutes to provide some detail of the amendments. I'll start with the enforcement related amendments. Mr. Speaker, effective enforcement and compliance are essential to advance investor protection and foster a fair and efficient capital market. Our proposed enforcement related amendment is designed to improve the Alberta Securities Commission's enforcement capacity by clarifying its investigators' statutory authority to electronically record statements or evidence during an investigation.

Other proposed amendments will permit the extension of an ex parte court order appointing a receiver, a receiver and manager, trustee, or liquidator; prohibit the directors of an insurer under an investigation from exercising any of their powers that have been granted by the court to the receiver, receiver and manager, trustee, or liquidator to avoid conflicting exercises of authority; permit the court to revoke or vary an order upon application; and allow for ex

parte applications to be made in the absence of the public. Ex parte is, of course, the legal proceeding brought by one party whereby the other party might not be present or represented. Similar provisions exist in other jurisdictions like B.C. and Ontario, permitting ex parte orders to be issued.

Moving on, the point of sale related amendments relate to the third and final phase of the point of sale project to facilitate the development of a summary disclosure document specifically for exchange-traded funds, also known as ETFs. An ETF is a security that tracks a commodity, index, or basket of assets. It trades like a security on an exchange, and like a security, its price can change throughout the day as it's traded. The summary disclosure document will be similar to the fund facts. Summary documents are currently in place for mutual funds and segregated funds which provide investors with the key information about a fund in a concise and easy to understand format.

Mr. Speaker, work continues on the continued harmonization of securities regulations across the country. The proposed amendments relating to the harmonization, including the prohibition on the front-running in section 93.3, will be expanded to apply to derivatives. An example of front-running is when a broker buys up a stock based on information that has not yet been shared with his or her clients.

The Securities Amendment Act, 2015, also proposes an amendment to expand the definition of associate to include persons cohabitating in a conjugal relationship who share material for the purpose of insider trading or tipping and are not otherwise captured under the Alberta definition of the adult interdependent partner. This amendment would capture persons in a conjugal relationship of less than three years or those who have not had a child together.

Other technical and housekeeping amendments to the Alberta Securities Act are intended to clarify or update existing provisions. They are changing "and" to "or" at the end of subclause (ii) and the definition of officer in section 1(II), harmonizing the wording of beneficial ownership in section 5, and striking the phrase "pursuant to subsection (2)" in section 33(3).

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments will ensure that Alberta honours its commitment under the 2004 memorandum of understanding to ongoing reform in international commitments as well as the ongoing harmonization of security laws and regulations across Canada. As you know, the co-operative capital markets regulator proposed by Ottawa is not yet operational, and there's been some slippage in implementation timelines. Meanwhile there are several jurisdictions that have not joined the regulator, so it is important that all provinces and territories continue to work to harmonize legislation to strengthen the existing Canadian securities regulatory system.

I ask for your support for these amendments. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I adjourn debate on Bill 15.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 16 Statutes Amendment Act, 2015

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today and speak on behalf of Bill 16, Statutes Amendment Act, 2015, on second reading.

This bill amends the following pieces of legislation: the Provincial Court Act, the Court of Queen's Bench Act, the Police Act, the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation Act, the Land Titles Act, and the Post-secondary Learning Act.

An Hon. Member: That's a lot. Wow.

Mr. Donovan: There is a lot there. These are the updates that will ensure provincial legislation is clear, concise, and effective.

Now, to provide some details on proposed changes, the most significant ones are to the Provincial Court Act and the Court of Queen's Bench Act. Starting with the Provincial Court Act, there are three amendments that will provide civil procedures and other processes for the Provincial Court to clarify the jurisdiction. The goal of the changes is to make Alberta's civil justice system more effective, efficient, and accessible for all Albertans. So we might not need all the lawyers that are in this room.

The first amendment will increase the maximum monetary judicial award from the prescribed cabinet for civil matters from the Provincial Court from \$50,000 to \$100,000. It must be noted, however, that the current maximum limit in the court's civil matters will remain at \$50,000, which was set in 2014. The proposed amendments give the government the option to raise the limit to \$100,000 at a later date, if required, without having to amend the legislation.

The second amendment will update the civil matters section in the Provincial Court Act by repealing provisions governing civil procedures. These provisions will instead consolidate into a single regulation under the act to govern the procedure for civil matters in Provincial Court.

The third amendment provides a procedural foundation for the court to stream down dispute claims into what's going to be referred to as resolution tracks. The aim to make the civil claims process more effective and efficient is to anticipate that the resolution tracks will be part of the pilot project in both Calgary and Edmonton later this year. In this project court officials will direct civil disputes to the appropriate resolution track so that court services are available to matters that are needed by them, while more straightforward civil matters can be resolved quickly and effectively. This will simplify the process, providing alternatives for dispute resolutions and resolving less complex civil claims. Finally, the alternative track in the courtroom not only will ease pressures on the courts; it will also mean more accessibility to the justice system for self-represented litigants.

4:20

I'll now move on to the amendments to the Court of Queen's Bench Act. These changes will create a second Associate Chief Justice position and give the Chief Justice the power to issue directives limiting the jurisdiction of masters. Over the past two decades the Court of Queen's Bench has not increased in size to match Alberta's rapidly growing population. The complement of the Court of Queen's Bench in Alberta currently has one Chief Justice and one Associate Chief Justice with 65 Crowns, referred to as regular justice positions, for a total of 67 justice positions.

Calgary and Edmonton are the fourth- and fifth-largest centres in terms of population in Canada, respectively. This presents a unique governance challenge for the court to determine the dedicated Associate Chief Justice needed for each major city to oversee the operational needs such as judicial scheduling. With the proposed increase, the court would have one Associate Chief Justice in Edmonton and one in Calgary, giving the Chief Justice the capacity to provide more strategic direction to the court as a whole. Adding the new Associate Chief Justice would help the Court of Queen's Bench deal with increasing case volumes and give the strategic leadership the needed effectiveness to serve Albertans.

It must be noted that an increase to the court complement requires the provincial government to create a new judicial position and the federal government to make the appointment. It is the province's

responsibility to create the new Associate Chief Justice position now so the government of Alberta and the Court of Queen's Bench can work with the government of Canada to see that it is filled.

The second amendment to the Court of Queen's Bench Act gives the Chief Justice the powers to issue directives on the jurisdiction of masters. Masters and judicial officers appointed in the province sit on the Court of Queen's Bench. Currently they primarily hear interim applications in civil matters and applications involving bankruptcies. They also hear certain applications under the Maintenance Enforcement Act. There are some exceptions. Masters have the same jurisdiction as a judge sitting in the chambers. This means that they can expand the types of applications they hear during the interim applications in family matters. In future, in order to increase accessibility to justice, it is anticipated that the masters will be asked to hear interim applications on family matters. As the master's role is expanded, it will be useful to have clear but flexible mechanisms to control the types of applications the litigants can bring forward before a master. This amendment requires the Chief Justice to provide such a mechanism.

Next, under the Statutes Amendment Act changes will be made to the Police Act. This is necessary because a potential inconsistency between the Police Act and the police service regulations has been identified. In 2011 a change was made to the definition of one who can be designated as a presiding officer governing the discipline or performance of a police officer under the regulation. The change was inadvertently missed in the Police Act. Section 13(1) of the regulation identifies that

any of the following persons may serve as the presiding officer at a hearing:

- (a) ... [a] former police officer;
- (b) a former member of the judiciary, including judges of the Court of Queen's Bench and the Provincial Court.

Chief of police or current chief of police. In contrast, section 45(3) of the act specifies that "the chief [of police], or a police officer designated by the chief [of police] shall conduct a hearing." All chiefs of police have been advised to immediately cease using the presiding officers who do not currently serve as police members until the change can be made under the expanded definition of presiding officers under the act. The proposed amendment will be addressing the potential inconsistencies.

In addition, there's another small amendment to section 52 to align the legislation with current practices. It is suggested that section 52 be amended to require that the police service and police commission notify the director of law enforcement about the police complaints and how the complaint was disposed of. This change will ensure that legislation is consistent with the current practices of provincial regulations and that the act is consistent.

Next, the amendment to the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation Act. The foundation was established in 1994 to develop an active partnership between sports, recreation, active living, parks, and wildlife programs. However, in 2013, with a directive of the then minister of tourism, parks, and recreation, the focus was mandated on delivering sports programs and services. Since that time the foundation has been operating as the Alberta sport connection. The amendment to the act officially changes the name to the Alberta sport connection. This also includes provisions for the transfer of land previously owned by the foundation. It has not been actively engaged in managing the lands donated and purchased by them since 2013. This change will ensure the Alberta sport connection can officially continue to focus on making Alberta the best place in Canada for sports and sports development.

The transfer of lands is expected to be done over the next 10 years and will only be done under the provision that the new owners honour the original conditions that were set out on the lands.

Culture and Tourism is working with the Treasury Board and the Justice and Solicitor General's office to develop a transfer plan for the lands, and it will involve input from the original donors as well as stakeholders in the near future. In the meantime the lands will continue to be managed by Culture and Tourism.

Next are the Land Titles Act amendments. The Alberta land titles system and its supporting software have served Albertans well for the past 30 years. However, a significant upgrade is currently under way. Once completed, this upgraded operating system will position our land titles office to deliver efficient and effective services for years to come. The key upgrade to this system will be the ability for the subscribers to submit documents to the land titles registry electronically with a unique digital signature. The amendments to this act are required to enable the use of these digital signatures. Specifically, amendments will allow the most frequent land title users, such as lawyers and land surveyors, to become subscribers.

Subscribers will have the ability to affix their digital signatures onto documents they submit to the registries for the land titles office. These types of forms will be accepted, and procedural guidelines for digital signatures will be developed by the registrar of land titles. Paper registrations will still continue to ensure access for those that are nonsubscribers. The registrar will be authorized to recognize a certified authorization for those who will be working in partnership with the land titles office, to maintain the master list of eligible subscribers, and to monitor the compliance with guidelines to ensure that proper practices on the part of subscribers is taking place.

This structure will ensure that unique digital signatures are more secure than traditional pen and paper signatures. The appropriate offence provisions are included to deter the misuse of digital signatures. Where individuals affix an electronic signature in contravention of the act or they incorporate the digital signature of another person, they may be fined up to \$10,000 or imprisoned for six months.

In addition to the authorization of digital signatures, the amendments will provide title insurance for companies from making claims against the land titles assurance fund. The assurance fund is intended to compensate the individuals so that true loss will not be done. Land titles insurance companies collect premiums from policyholders, recover the potential claim loss, and they should not compensate the Alberta assurance fund.

Mr. Speaker, Service Alberta has worked extensively with the Law Society of Alberta, the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association, and the Real Estate Council of Alberta to ensure a system that is needed for their professionals and their real estate transactions.

Lastly, a necessary amendment to the Post-secondary Learning Act is being made. It concerns the legal status of the boards of governors for both Medicine Hat College and SAIT. The college was established by an order in council in 1970, and the SAIT board was established by the same in 1982.

On that, I will adjourn debate on second reading of Bill 16. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I realize that I've got that parade on today at 4:30. I would move that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 on Monday.

The Speaker: Thank you. I was hesitant to recognize you because we've hit 4:30, and pursuant to section 4(2) of the standing orders we have to adjourn until Monday, but thank you for making the motion right at the appropriate hour.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 28th Legislature - 3rd Session (2014-2015)

Activity to March 12, 2015

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 199 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1 Respecting Property Rights Act (Prentice)

First Reading -- 6 (Nov. 17, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 30-31 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft.), 142-46 (Nov. 24, 2014 eve, passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 169-73 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 206-11 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft.), 277-79 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014; SA 2014 c15]

2* Alberta Accountability Act (Denis)

First Reading -- 404-05 (Dec. 8, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 456-67 (Dec. 9, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 500-14 (Dec. 10, 2014 aft.), 515-16 (Dec. 10, 2014 eve., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 516-20 (Dec. 10, 2014 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014, with exceptions; SA 2014 c9]

3 Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014 (Quadri)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 89 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 165 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 173 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 259-75 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014; SA 2014 c14]

4 Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 89 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 165-67 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 174-75 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft.), 177-79 (Nov. 25, 2014 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 279-81 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2014 c12]

5 Securities Amendment Act, 2014 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 89-90 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 167-68 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 173 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 281-83 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014, with exceptions; SA 2014 c17]

6 Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2) (Olson)

First Reading -- 22-23 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 90-92 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 175 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 193-206 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft.), 283 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 321 (Dec. 2, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014, with exceptions; SA 2014 c18]

- 7 Chartered Professional Accountants Act (McIver)**
First Reading -- 159 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 275-76 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve.), 319 (Dec. 2, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 425 (Dec. 8, 2014 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 480 (Dec. 9, 2014 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2014 cC-10.2]
- 8* Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (Kennedy-Glans)**
First Reading -- 159 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 276-77 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve.), 319-21 (Dec. 2, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 425-28 (Dec. 8, 2014 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 480 (Dec. 9, 2014 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014; SA 2014 c13]
- 9* Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014 (Olesen)**
First Reading -- 237 (Dec. 1, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 336-38 (Dec. 3, 2014 aft.), 428-33 (Dec. 8, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 470-75 (Dec. 9, 2014 aft.), 477-80 (Dec. 9, 2014 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 495-500 (Dec. 10, 2014 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2014 c10]
- 10* An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children (Jansen)**
First Reading -- 238 (Dec. 1, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 300-18 (Dec. 2, 2014 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 338-55 (Dec. 3, 2014 aft.), 357-66 (Dec. 3, 2014 eve.), 367-74 (Dec. 3, 2014 eve., passed with amendments), 538-548 (Mar. 10, 2015 aft., recommitted, passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 536-38 (Mar. 10, 2015 aft, recommitted to Committee), 548 (Mar. 10, 2015 aft., passed)
- 11 Savings Management Repeal Act (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 334 (Dec. 3, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 433-41 (Dec. 8, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 468-70 (Dec. 9, 2014 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 494-95 (Dec. 10, 2014 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014; SA 2014 c16]
- 12 Common Business Number Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 562-3 (Mar. 11, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 619 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft., adjourned)
- 13 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015 (Leskiw)**
First Reading -- 563 (Mar. 11, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 619 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft., adjourned)
- 14 Agricultural Societies Amendment Act, 2015 (Olson)**
First Reading -- 563 (Mar. 11, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 619-20 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft., adjourned)
- 15 Securities Amendment Act, 2015 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 563 (Mar. 11, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 620-21 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft., adjourned)
- 16 Statutes Amendment Act, 2015 (Donovan)**
First Reading -- 563-4 (Mar. 11, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 621-22 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft., adjourned)
- 17 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015 (\$) (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 597 (Mar. 11, 2015 eve., passed)
Second Reading -- 612-19 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft., passed)

201* Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014 (Anglin)

First Reading -- 86 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 125-28 (Nov. 24, 2014 aft.), 238-52 (Dec. 1, 2014 aft., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 406-08 (Dec. 8, 2014 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 408 (Dec. 8, 2014 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014; SA 2014 c11]

202 Safe and Inclusive Schools Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (Blakeman)

First Reading -- 86 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., passed), (Dec. 3, 2014 aft., withdrawn)

203 Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014 (VanderBurg)

First Reading -- 192 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 409-18 (Dec. 8, 2014 aft., passed)

204 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014 (Amery)

First Reading -- 388 (Dec. 4, 2014 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 16, 2015

Issue 20

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 16, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Dear Lord and Great Creator, we ask for Your guidance as we begin this week of work on behalf of those whom we are privileged to serve in our Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Amen.

Please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem, led by Robert Clark.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you very much. Let us be seated, please.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a number of guests in the galleries, including the Speaker's gallery, today. In a moment we'll begin with the Premier's introduction, but could I ask all of you with guests to be as brief as possible so that we can get all 22 introductions in.

The hon. Premier.

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly His Excellency Selçuk Ünal, who is the ambassador of the Republic of Turkey. His Excellency is accompanied by Mr. Hakan Cengiz, counsellor from the embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Ottawa, and also by Kenan Tan, who is the honorary consul general of the Republic of Turkey here in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and the Republic of Turkey have benefited from a long-standing trade and investment relationship. Ambassador Ünal's visit is a great opportunity for us to celebrate those ties and to build, in fact, on current ties while exploring new areas of co-operation, in particular in a variety of sectors such as energy development and agriculture. We're confident that the future will bring diverse opportunities for even more collaboration between our province and Turkey, not only in terms of trade and investment but also in terms of cultural and educational exchanges, which we value immensely.

Our esteemed guests are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I now ask that they please rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you, and welcome to our guests.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us move on to school groups, starting with Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you students from the Fort Saskatchewan Christian school. They are accompanied today by Mrs. Elaine Baillie, Mr. Uve Knaak, and Mrs. Deborah Pinchuk. They are here to learn about things that happen in the Legislature, but one of the other things that they find very important is to pray for the Members of this Legislative Assembly. I would ask them all to rise right now and to receive the warm welcome of the Legislature, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a good friend of mine, Mavis Giant from the Saddle Lake Christian school. Along with her she's brought two students, Abby, who wants to be a registered nurse, as well as Madison, who wants to get into politics and become the chief of the reserve there. I'd ask that they both rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly eight grades 4 to 9 students from Slave Lake Koinonia Christian school and their chaperones Ms Jasmine Light, Mr. Marc Boissonneault, Mr. Dan Brown, and Mrs. Beatrice Brown. Since choices of where students get an education were made here in this province, this school has been so successful in graduating students, usually with high marks. I know that they are here with other Christian schools, and one of the things that they do value in common is to pray for all leaders. I ask that the students and the chaperones, who are seated in the public gallery, rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Medicine Hat.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very clever group of students from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. Mr. Speaker, I just want to ask you to keep a secret, that this is my favourite school in the fabulous constituency. I would ask the grade 6 class from John A. McDougall to stand and receive the warm welcome. Their teacher is Ms Veronica Chong, and with them is Mrs. Lily Welsh as their parent helper. They are standing. Please welcome them to the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three fantastic grades 8 and 9 students from Cornerstone Christian School in my constituency of Medicine Hat. They are Rhea Nayak, Cambria Malcolm, and Korina Donnelly. These students are joined by their awesome principal, Sandy Sergeant. I know they pray for each of us. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise now and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My guests are not here – they are from Concordia University College in my constituency – neither are my speaking notes here, but I invite all members to give them a warm welcome. They will be arriving later during question period. We'll be unable to revert at that time, so if we could just give them a little round right now.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions if that's all right. First, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a group of students, parents, teachers from Aurora elementary school in Drayton Valley. They are participating at this moment in a tour of the Legislature but will join us here at 2 o'clock. Touring with the students is their teacher, Amanda Gathercole, and parent helpers Glen Saunders, Becky Poulsen, Jaime Pipke, Nadine Benoit, Angela Erickson, Bradly Balfour, Sarah Payne, Kerri Colwell, and Jocelyn Callihoo. When they come at 2, we'll wave at them and give them the warm welcome of the Assembly then.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I would also be pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly President Helen Rice from the AUMA; Mayor Steve Christie; John McGowan, chief executive officer of the AUMA; and President Al Kemmere from the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. I'm thrilled they are here for the introduction today of Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015. I am proud of the long-standing partnership between our government, our Ministry of Municipal Affairs, and our municipal partners and associations. Please, if they would rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by Strathcona-Sherwood Park and Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you students from St. Dominic school, located in my riding, Edmonton-Manning. They are accompanied by their teacher, Luisa Molenaar, and parent helper Angela Wright. I'm pleased to see these wonderful and dynamic students be part of the School at the Legislature program this week. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask all my guests to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, followed by Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group with the Association of Christian Schools, eight of Strathcona's brightest and best with the Strathcona Christian Academy here today visiting the Legislature. They're here with their teacher, Mr. Symonds Botchey, who tells me he just joined Strathcona Christian Academy this year and is very pleased to be there and very proud of this group of eight students he's with today. We'd also like to extend the warm welcome of this Assembly and have them rise. They're in the public gallery.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the invaluable gems in Calgary-Lougheed is Glenmore Christian Academy. I truly enjoy visiting with their students, staff, and parents, and I'm absolutely

honoured that they're joining us here today. GCA has built a dynamic Christian environment dedicated to excellence in learning and life development. Their focus is to raise leaders who will become responsible citizens and world-view thinkers who are committed to Christian service. It's a pleasure to introduce eight of their fine students, who have made a special trip to Edmonton to pray for us as provincial leaders here in this building. The students are joined by parent volunteer Debbie Mohamed and Tasha Schindel, chair of the parent council. I'll ask our guests to stand now to receive the traditional warm welcome of this fine Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other school or education groups?

Okay. Let's move on to other important guests, starting with the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education, followed by Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I have the pleasure to introduce to you and through you the finest and most dedicated student leaders in all of Canada, representing more than 265,000 postsecondary students. I will ask them to stand as they are introduced: from the Council of Alberta University Students Navneet Khinda, Cam McCoy, William Lau, Ray Khan, Erik Queenan, Seija Roggeveen, Levi Nilson, Chris Hollingsworth, and executive director Beverly Eastham; from the Alberta Students' Executive Council, ASEC, Tyler Ludwig, Alex Willkie, Bailey Daines, Justin Nand, Shannon Peacocke, Hasib Baig, Joshua Bettie, Kristen George, Cody Weger, Thomas Ridgeway, acting executive director Teresa Currie, and Alberta campus mental health innovation project manager Jessica Turowski. Please give these student leaders a very warm welcome.

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a wonderful father who has made the effort and spent the money to bring his children – his daughters Breanna, 14, and Brooklyn, 10, and his son Jordan – here from Lethbridge. It is a hike, and few young people are lucky enough to make it from Lethbridge. Dwayne Lesko's dental lab business and my constituency office were side by side, and I have watched he and his wife, Heidi, raise this amazing young family. They have wanted to visit the Legislature and watch us in action, especially while I was still here. Please rise and receive the warm welcome from this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by the Minister of Seniors.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you two visitors who reside in my constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. Seated in the public gallery are Laurier and Doris Ouellette from Girouxville. Mr. and Mrs. Ouellette have lived in my constituency for over 70 years. Laurier grew up working on his father's farm and owned bees for over 20 years before buying his farm 30 years ago. Doris has worked within the local school system as well as a number of local businesses over the years. Together they're very active members of the community. This is their first time visiting the Legislature Building. More importantly, though, Mr. and Mrs. Ouellette are the proud grandparents of Danielle Seymour, one of our pages, who is in the Chamber today. As many of you know, Danielle is a first-year political science student at the University of Alberta, and this is her third year working as a page for us. I would ask all three of them to now rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you some very special constituents of mine that are seated in the public gallery. They're all members of the Athabasca United church. We have Mavis Jacobs, Wally Cummings, and Dan Dennis, who are all members of the Athabasca Rotary Club as am I. We also have Monica Rosborough, who is the minister of the Athabasca United church; Marion Kadikoff, who has been nominated for one of the 2015 minister's seniors service awards; and Cam Dierker. They're here today to meet with me and to provide an overview of the Athabasca area seniors memory projects. I'd like to ask the group to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with the greatest of honour that I rise before you today, sir, to introduce the farm manager for Strankman Farms. This young gentleman at 24 years old knows the value of a verbal contract. He is my son Jay Strankman. I believe he's behind me in the gallery here, and I hope he will now rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Reid and Joyce Hamula, constituents of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Reid wrote to me in January, a letter that I'll table later today, about the difficulty of living as an AISH recipient who has his CPP disability deducted from his monthly benefits. Reid has been living with one arm since the 1970s and endured a workplace injury in late 2012. Contrary to the advice of his GP the WCB has cut off his entitlement. As a recipient of AISH and CPPD he lives on \$1,300 a month. If he were able to work, he could make up to \$1,950 as an AISH recipient. I invited him here today to help raise awareness about the unfair PC policy in AISH and WCB programs. I'll now ask Reid and Joyce to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly five wonderful, outstanding Albertans from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. With us today are J.S. Ryu, director of public affairs; Marc Workman, manager of advocacy; and three CNIB champions: Dudley Hanks, Rob Inskip, and Crystal Boyde. Mr. Hanks is also my boss because he lives in Edmonton-Mill Woods. I would request they please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, I see you're signalling me that your guests have already been introduced, so let us move on to Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very good friend. When I first met him, it was on Twitter, and he called himself the Kaylinator. Then a short time

later I met him as Captain Bradley. He's been a reservist and a cadet instructor for multiple years, and he was an award winner of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal. Now he's just a great volunteer and a great friend. If Kaylin Bradley could please rise and if members could give him the normal warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Canadian National Institute for the Blind

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to mention the great work being done by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, some members of which I introduced earlier. Today there are close to 53,000 Albertans living with blindness or partial sight along with over 630,000 Albertans who live with a major eye disease. Unfortunately, due to aging those numbers are expected to increase by 30 per cent in the next 10 years. To help those individuals, the CNIB provides a broad range of rehab programming, community-based supports in six offices across Alberta.

1:50

On February 23 I met a group of CNIB champions, clients of CNIB and their family members, who have been personally impacted by vision loss. Hearing their stories of overcoming those obvious challenges associated with being visually impaired was truly inspirational. The champions also expressed their gratitude for the ongoing support CNIB receives from this government, in particular the ministries of Human Services and Health. As a member of government caucus I'm looking forward to working with CNIB to ensure that every visually impaired Albertan is provided with the tools and the skills they need to succeed and to overcome their challenges.

I would like to again commend them on the great work they are doing along with many other organizations in this province who continue to confirm that the strength of Alberta is in its people, including those who live with disabilities yet showcase their tremendous ability.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, 35 seconds for the question, 35 seconds for the answer. Let's go on with Calgary-Fish Creek, who is also the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, for your first main set of questions.

Long-term Care Beds for Seniors

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Make an announcement, put up a sign, and walk away. They do it with schools, and now they're doing it with seniors' beds. Last week hundreds of new seniors' beds were announced, but nobody can say where the beds will go, when they'll be built, or where the money is to staff them. In fact, an AHS vice-president said: cost isn't actually what we're focused on yet, and answers won't be available until April or May. To the Minister of Health. You're giving seniors and their families false hope. This is clearly just campaigning with Alberta's money. When will you stop?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, either the Minister of Health or the Minister of Seniors can speak to this, but in terms of Alberta under new management the Minister of Seniors and the Minister of Health set about with a pre-existing budget envelope of \$180 million to build 1,500 senior citizen care spaces. They have, through an RFP process administered by these two ministers, resulted in 2,600 units being delivered to seniors in this province.

Mrs. Forsyth: All right, Premier. Here's a question to under new management. Minister, AHS says that the locations of these beds haven't even been finalized yet. In fact, nobody can say where these beds are, if they're new, or whether these beds were previously closed, and now on the eve of an election they're being promised to be reopened. Hospitals are packed with seniors who need long-term care nursing beds, surgeries are being cancelled, and ER wait times are skyrocketing. Just some straight answers, please. Since you took office in October, how many net – net, Premier – new long-term care nursing beds have been built and put into operation, and where are they . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We committed in September, October to 750 new beds, of which 466 would be done by September. We've moved 303 people into those beds across the province of Alberta. We'll continue to do that. With the able leadership of the Minister of Seniors we're continuing. We will build more.

Mrs. Forsyth: Are those long-term care nursing beds, Minister?
There have been dozens of announcements within the last month alone promising new seniors' beds. An election is on the horizon, and quite literally every second day this government makes a new promise with new numbers, new timelines, and no plan to deliver on them. So let's make it easy. Minister, on March 31, 2014, there were 14,370 long-term care nursing beds in operation. Exactly how many long-term care nursing beds are in operation today?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, once again, we committed to adding 750 new beds. The Minister of Seniors is allowing us to even add more. We think we'll be over 1,000. We committed to adding 466 before the end of the year, which will be done by September, and we've added 303 of those numbers by now.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions. The hon. opposition leader.

Mrs. Forsyth: Still no answer under new management, Mr. Speaker.

Deaths of Children in Care

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. An internal report commissioned by the Minister of Human Services says that the decisions to investigate the deaths of children in care are often arbitrary and without proper guidance in place. Minister, every death of a child in care is tragic and deserves to be investigated and reported. Why is this not happening?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, the death of any single child is one too many. The death of any child in care in this province is investigated by the Chief Medical Examiner, and the death of any child in care is investigated within the minister's department. Of course, if the Chief Medical Examiner so recommends, there is also a fatality inquiry that is convened. We are all concerned about this. These deaths are investigated, and the public needs to be aware of that.

Mrs. Forsyth: The report recommends that all child deaths should be reviewed like the Premier said. Last year the Child and Youth Advocate was given the mandate to review child deaths when in the public interest but not the resources. I think Albertans would argue that reviewing all deaths of children in government care would be in the best public interest as the Premier said. To the Premier: this report says that all child deaths should be investigated, so why did you order members of your caucus to withhold the resources the Child and Youth Advocate needs to investigate all children's deaths?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, as I've said, I'm sure every single member in this House is concerned about this. The death of any child who is in care in this province is a concern to all of us. They are investigated in those circumstances by the Chief Medical Examiner, and there is, in addition, an internal investigation in the case of the department. In addition, in any circumstance where the recommendation of the chief medical officer is that there should be a fatality inquiry convened, that is exactly what takes place.

Mrs. Forsyth: Premier, it's your internal committee that's recommending these, not mine.

Last year the former Minister of Human Services said that governments are really good at commissioning reports. This is your new management, Premier. Isn't that true? Good at commissioning, bad at implementing. A new report – now, this is under your management – says that all child deaths should be investigated. The child advocate is the best person to review these deaths and make recommendations that could prevent further tragedy. Minister, almost a thousand kids in care have died over the last 15 years. Twenty-six have died this year alone. These deaths are still not being reported . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the death of a child in care is one too many. Every critical incident or death is examined internally and externally, depending on the situation: internally through notification with the statutory director and externally with the good work of the Child and Youth Advocate, the council of quality assurance, the Family Violence Death Review Committee, the fatality inquiry group, and the chief medical officer. I can assure you we will continue to investigate all those deaths.

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

Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Premier, the reporting of the unproven allegations against one of your ministers led to his resignation. I will not be asking about the allegations or alleging anything, but sworn affidavits were provided. Premier, on what date did you first learn of the sworn affidavits in question?

The Speaker: Hon. members, I think we're sharply aware that this is largely an internal party matter, but if you wish, hon. Government House Leader, there's nothing illegal in the question. It's probably not government policy, as far as I know, but I'll look forward to your clarification.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I believe you ruled on Thursday that this questioning really skirts the line. I'm not aware of any investigation by any law enforcement agency here. It appears

to me that this is entirely a party matter, which in the past you have ruled should not be discussed in this Chamber.

The Speaker: That is correct. The clarification stands. Let's see where you go with your supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am simply asking when the Premier – the Premier – received specific information, so it's a very simple question. On what date did you or anyone from the Premier's office or anyone under your employ first learn of the unproven allegations against the minister who resigned?

The Speaker: Hon. Premier, if you wish to clarify this from a government perspective.

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member, the former associate minister, has stepped aside as he proceeds to clear his name in a matter that is a party matter.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Final supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Premier, these allegations of course are absolutely not proven, and they have been denied. So in order to clear the air, have you referred the information to the Ethics Commissioner?

The Speaker: Does somebody wish to comment? The hon. Premier.

Mr. Prentice: I've spoken to the allegations, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I would agree.

Let us move on there to Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Childhood Immunization

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week I asked questions about the life-saving benefits of mandatory vaccinations for Alberta schoolchildren. The Minister of Education said he takes very seriously the proposal and he'd like to have consultations with people across the province. The next day the Health minister said: we are not going to mandate it. With the ministers contradicting each other, Albertans still don't know where this government stands on this important public health issue. To the Premier: will the Premier break the tie and tell us if this government is in favour or not of mandatory school vaccinations?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we were very clear. We believe deeply in vaccinations. They are very important. Immunization is an important part of the protection we can give our young people. At the same time we believe we should consult with different groups, and our public health people should be the first we should consult with. We will take the next step, to discuss that with them.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a bit encouraging. One thing that we can all agree on is that vaccines save lives. What this government can't agree on is the process. The Education minister said that he's going to consult, but he was also ultimately passing to the Health minister the responsibility to work with the

schools. This is certainly blurred communication. Again to the Premier: how can you come up with a credible plan to ensure children are immunized when your ministers can't agree?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, that's far from the truth. The fact of the matter is that we do agree. Immunization is very important. We do believe, though, that discussing with the public is an important step, not just mandating things without any public consultation.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's assume for a minute they do consult with Albertans about mandatory immunizations. We're still unsure which of the ministers is going to take the lead, what the consultation process will look like, and when a decision will be made. Albertans want to know when this government will put the health and safety of our children ahead of politics.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we always put the health of our children ahead of everything, politics and everything else. The minister and I have talked, and we will work together to put together a program for consultation to discuss with our public health people to see what is the best way to do this. We think it's an important step, and we'll move forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. As the PCs frantically rush to nominate their slate of candidates, serious allegations have emerged about the conduct of certain candidates, including the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, who has been forced to resign from the cabinet. Far from being an internal party matter, this is an allegation of criminal activity. So far the only investigation into these allegations of criminal activity will be conducted by the PC Party. Will the Premier admit that the allegations of criminal activity should be referred to the police and not investigated by the same political party that is involved...

Speaker's Ruling Referring to Party Matters

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I think this matter has been clarified and has been nicely summed up as being contrary to parliamentary tradition here. It states here – I hope we've stopped the clock, Clerk, but I want to deal with this because I can see where this is going. It's been clarified by both the Premier, just now, and by the Minister of Justice that it is in fact an internal party matter, and there is a statement here that I'll refer you to in case this comes up some more so that we can stop the discussion on that, in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, and it clearly states here what questions should be all about or should not be all about. I'll refresh your memories quickly once right now. Further, "a question should not ... concern internal party matters, or party or election expenses."

I have let a few questions go already. Last week we heard three questions from your leader. Today we heard three questions from the Opposition House Leader, and now we're hearing another one, but at the time I conclude that this is a party matter as clarified.

I'll pass to the Minister of Justice if he wishes to reclarify, and if not, let's hear what your second supplemental might sound like. The hon. Minister of Justice. No? Okay. Thank you.

Let us move on, then. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Ms Notley: Point of order.

Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie
(continued)

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, let me ask this question. If someone inside a political party murdered somebody else in that political party, would it be ruled that it is an internal party matter and no questions are allowed?

The Speaker: Hon. member, you see, you've just illustrated the point why we don't perhaps allow internal party matters to come forward like this, and in this case I did allow some. So don't let's have any griping about this. I did allow some last week. I just allowed some now. I think the matter has been dealt with. You know where it's going. You know what's been undertaken. So I would ask you now to look at your third and final supplemental, please, and be cautious in the wording you use.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think it's settled.

This is a general question to the Premier. Does he not think that as Premier of the province he has a responsibility to ensure that allegations of a potentially criminal nature are investigated by the appropriate authorities and not brushed aside to be dealt with by a political party, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice, do you wish to clarify, please?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I wish I could rise on something new, but this again is an internal party matter, and that's where it should stay, outside of this Chamber.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's move on now to Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Calgary-Lougheed.

Long-term Care Beds for Seniors
(continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two hundred and eighty-seven thousand: that's the total number of alternate level of care bed days just this year. Every day 822 mostly seniors are not getting the right care in the right place by the right team, the main cause of long wait times, delayed and cancelled surgeries. A study released today by Dr. Donna Wilson at the University of Alberta shows that we actually need up to 20,000 more additional nursing care beds, not the 300 restorative spaces the PCs are promising. Why isn't the Health minister building the beds we need instead of making more promises just before an election?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have not seen the study. I have heard the numbers, and they're pretty wild. We will continue to do what we believe is best for the seniors in this province and those who need long-term care. We'll continue to develop the programs and the support systems that are necessary. We've had great leadership from the Minister of Seniors. This year alone, as the Premier noted, well over 2,500 beds we're going to be improving and building. So we'll continue to do what we need to do to meet the needs of Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Health minister must be aware by now that Alberta Health Services' own figures put the average cost of a hospital bed at \$777 a day compared to a long-term care bed, which is \$170 a day, and, of course, much cheaper for home-care services. This PC government has no claim to fiscal or social responsibility, wasting \$182 million last year by clogging up beds, 10 per cent of many of our hospitals.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I can only say that this government is committed, and we're showing that by building more and more facilities. We care passionately about our seniors. We'll continue to build these facilities. The reality is that those people in need of this support will get it somewhere within our province, and we hope that we'll continue to build the long-term care beds. But if we do need to keep people in acute-care beds to ensure their safety and security and health, we will do that.

Dr. Swann: Well, that's precisely the problem. They're not safe and secure in the wrong place by the wrong team, Mr. Speaker.

Given that ambulances cannot transfer patients through to emergency because it's full and the ER is full because upstairs is full and the beds upstairs are full because this government has not built the long-term care beds needed, does the Health minister still not realize the severe lack of nursing home beds is harming every aspect of our health care system?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, we've committed to building a substantive number of beds, delivering beds today, building beds for tomorrow, and we'll continue to do that. We understand the challenges. That's why we put a program in place to add \$50 million to improve our emergency departments. We understand some of the challenges. They're being dealt with, we think, efficiently, effectively, and we will continue to be committed to improving the care of Albertans in this province.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. leader of the ND opposition, did you have a point of order around 2:04, when the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was speaking? Did you have a point of order or somebody there?

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

The Speaker: Yes, there is a point of order? Well, you'll let me know. Let me know if there is or if there isn't.

Let's move on to Calgary-Lougheed, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Seniors' Housing for Couples

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I often hear from my constituents in Calgary-Lougheed about the urgent need for more seniors' housing and care facilities. They're concerned that the human side of this issue may sometimes be overlooked in favour of numbers and statistics. I've heard stories of husbands and wives who've been together for decades but due to overcrowding or differing needs are placed into separate facilities in their golden years. My first question is to the Minister of Seniors. How do you respond to the criticism that we need to make better use of our existing infrastructure to ensure situations like these do not occur on a go-forward basis?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for his question. He's absolutely right. We need to make better use of all of our resources, and we are. The Premier's vision to put all of the housing elements into one ministry has created a much more efficient and effective way to deliver projects. This one-window approach has improved collaboration between departments, proponents, and community operators, which has led to lower cost projects that produce more spaces and innovative solutions to meet the needs of Alberta's seniors, including keeping couples together.

2:10

Mr. Rodney: My first supplementary question is to the same minister. Can he assure my constituents that seniors' housing is constructed and operated in a manner that puts families first so that divorce by nursing home becomes a thing of the past?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it's a very good point. Many of the spaces coming on stream are actually designed to keep couples together even if their individual care needs escalate or are different. Just last week I was at the Bethany care centre in Calgary to announce the new beds. Within a campus of care, a variety of care options on the same footprint within the same facility, we're seeing supportive and assisted living, independent living, dementia units, and long-term care or nursing home beds. This campus of care is exactly what the Premier has mandated us to do to ensure Alberta's parents and grandparents can age in place with their spouses and their loved ones in the communities that they helped build.

Mr. Rodney: My final question is to the same minister. Can he assure our most experienced Albertans that their needs will be high on the list of provincial priorities and that all of these recently announced seniors' facilities are actually going to get built despite current economic realities and challenges?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we're keeping our commitments. The money is in the budget. We announced last fall that we were building new spaces, and we moved quickly with facilities to get the work done. We'll see more than 2,600 new spaces come on stream, a thousand more than we anticipated with the same dollars. This success is because of the collaboration and the redesign under the new management that we spoke of earlier. We're moving today to get these spaces built, and I think that the member would agree that the assisted living and continuing care spaces for our seniors qualify as a critical need.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently an internal letter from the Minister of Service Alberta to the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council, better known as AMVIC, became public. Among other things the letter talked about misuse of enforcement tools and an inappropriate enforcement hearing that could be construed as illegal. A report into this situation is finished, but so far only the minister knows what took place. To the minister: what is going on within this government agency?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question, and I want to thank him for bringing some awareness to Service Alberta and the important work we do in protecting consumers. I'd like to address the question by saying that my

position is that we support AMVIC. AMVIC is doing good work. We're currently undertaking a review, and the review is to help AMVIC do their jobs better.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, it's not so.

Again to the minister: given that AMVIC should fill an important role for Albertans by promoting trust and integrity in the province's motor vehicle industry and since you won't show Albertans what they deserve by releasing the report, will you do the right thing today and tell this House whether any government officials have broken the law or acted inappropriately?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, again I'd like to thank the hon. member for his question. Specifically to the report, we're currently working with the board chair and the board on the report. The report is a draft report. Once we have an indication of the board and where they're going with the report – we had a meeting with the board. It was a very collaborative meeting. We're quite happy with the results of our meeting. When we've given the board the appropriate time to get back to us, we'll look at making that report public.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Final supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. It's not a draft report, Minister.

Any actions that would violate the trust of Albertans and the morale of front-line workers should be brought to the light of day. Will you do the right thing, Minister, and reassure Albertans and immediately release the full report or a timeline for that?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I do want to correct the hon. member. The report is indeed a draft report. We're currently working with the board and the board chair. We're supporting them in their efforts to help and assist the operational side of AMVIC, and once we've gotten some feedback from the board, we'll take a look at making that report public.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Elk Population

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been receiving many calls on the extremely high elk population in my constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky. The increased number of elk has caused a tremendous burden to the farmers on the land and fences that it has destroyed, and the crops that were once viable feeding sources are no longer. My question is to the Minister of ESRD. When is your department going to properly manage the harvesting of elk?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, we definitely recognize that this is a significant issue, and we're working towards balancing the needs of all users on the land, which includes sustaining healthy elk populations while limiting the impacts that they have on the livelihoods of ranchers and farmers. We are working through our draw system to encourage high levels of hunting for this particular species, and we'll continue to conduct aerial surveys to inform harvest goals and the effectiveness of our program and make adjustments as they're needed.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you. To the same minister: given that not only are the elk destroying the hay and the feeding sources, but

they're now contaminating feeding areas, does your department have a compensation plan for the feeding areas and feeding tents?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Financial compensation is provided to producers through the wildlife damage compensation program delivered through Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. ESRD does consult with producers that are seeking financial compensation, as does fish and wildlife enforcement, and we'll continue to provide information, advice, and fencing materials to agricultural producers who need the help to protect their farm assets.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you very much. Finally, to the same minister: is your department considering property-owner harvesting in timely areas of the harvesting season?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Landowners are eligible for special hunting tags to help reduce the elk populations that are affecting their property. They can apply for a landowners' special licence that enables them, if they were unsuccessful through the draw process, to harvest antlerless elk on their land. Applicants must own a minimum of a quarter section in a single parcel of a 160 acres, more or less, or be involved in the direct farming operations on that land.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

School Fees

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta every family – single parent, two parents, rich, or poor – pays a school fee for every child. Now, contrary to what the government would like Albertans to think, these school fees aren't for luxuries. They are for things like supervision of students at lunchtime and participation in fitness activities. When the government is boasting about low personal taxes, I bet they aren't mentioning this regressive tax on parents. To the Minister of Education: is the minister planning on dumping this regressive school tax, a tax specifically on parents of students?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, we take very seriously the role that local school boards play in providing quality education services to our students. It is up to local school boards to decide what fees they may or may not decide to apply to support their particular education programs. These are of course not to fund basic education services.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister. Well, given that the average school fee across Canada is \$50 to \$75 per student but Albertans pay an average of \$286 per student, how does the minister justify his government's policy that allows local boards to not only tax parents but tax them at four to five times the rate of other Canadian provinces?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I believe we lead the country or are almost at the top in the country in terms of the amount of money that this government provides to local school authorities to provide quality

education to children. Now, we leave it up to the local boards to decide if they want to augment that funding for nonbasic educational activities for children, and that is important, that we provide that kind of local autonomy for boards. We respect them, and we're not going to engage in directing them in that regard.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Well, you've got to kind of square that circle there, Minister, because you're saying that you're providing them with money but clearly not enough money because they are having to tax parents. Let's say parents of two kids: that would be \$572 cash on the barrelhead every September. Or three kids: \$858 cash up front every September. Clearly, the ministry is not providing school boards, schools, or parents enough money.

Mr. Dirks: Well, for the benefit of all members of the House the Education budget this year is about \$7.6 billion. I said billion, Mr. Speaker. That's an increase of \$413 million over the previous year, \$38 million every day being spent to educate the children in Alberta. As I said earlier, we are at the high end in this country on how much we spend per student. We have a great education system that we can be proud of.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:20

Energy Policies

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that the energy sector is hurting right now. Commodity prices remain low, market access remains a challenge, and the export of LNG from the west coast remains uncertain. We can act decisively and collaboratively with the governments of B.C. and Saskatchewan to enhance competitive advantage for all western Canadian energy stakeholders. My question is to the Minister of Energy. What is our government doing to advance these regional collaborations and their practical impacts on Alberta's competitiveness?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed true that it is critical, maybe even more so, in these times of low prices that we're able to access world markets and get world prices for our products. I can tell you that the department, indeed the entire government, is working very aggressively. That's right from the Premier, who's done work to renew the New West Partnership with British Columbia and Saskatchewan and has done work with Ontario and Quebec and the federal government, and through the work of our trade representatives, Jay Hill in the west and Rob Merrifield working in Washington and Ottawa. We have been very aggressive on this file.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: To the same minister: where is our government in the design and the implementation of a strategy to further stimulate the added value here in Alberta for natural gas liquids?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, value-added diversification is another item in my mandate letter. I think that the hon. member would be aware of the incremental ethane extraction program, which allowed for 91,000 barrels of incremental ethane to go as feedstock into the petrochemical industry right here in Alberta.

Wherever there are opportunities, we'll chase those. I'm looking at an opportunity in the propane value-added chain right at the moment.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: That makes me happy.

To the same minister: with the recent approval of the site C hydroelectricity dam in B.C., has there been any regional dialogue about upgrading Alberta's interties with B.C. to enhance our ability to import hydroelectricity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the member would be aware that the Alberta Electric System Operator, or AESO – it's their job to ensure that Alberta has a robust, resilient, and effective electricity system. We do have a productive relationship with B.C., and we will ensure that steps are taken to expand interties where necessary. I can tell you that AESO is planning to work right now with B.C. Hydro on a discussion to identify mutual opportunities, including the possibility of new transmission. I'll also assure this House that we'll do so on a level playing field to ensure that our investor-driven market is . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Surgery Wait Times

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning the NDP released documents yet again showing a crisis in Alberta's hospitals. The overall number of cancelled surgeries in Alberta due to a shortage of hospital beds is up 30 per cent compared to the same time last year. That means more hips that don't get replaced, longer periods of time that Albertans suffer painful conditions, and more children on a roller coaster of anxiety over hospital visits. To the Minister of Health: will you admit that Albertans are being forced to pay a very painful price for your government's chronic neglect of our health care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Any time in our province an individual's surgery is delayed or adjusted, we are very concerned because it does have a tremendous impact on their lives. But the statistics show that less than 1 per cent of our total of 158,000 people have had surgery cancelled this year. So we would like to have zero and will work towards that, but at this point in time .87 per cent is not different than other years.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that at the Stollery hospital the number of surgeries for children that are cancelled is on track to more than double this year and given that these delays are not due to the long-term care crisis that your government is responsible for but, rather, simply due to a shortage of acute-care beds for kids, to the Minister of Health: will you explain to those Alberta families why at the Stollery in 2014 142 more kids than the year before had to struggle with the pain and suffering that comes from having a surgery cancelled?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, our hearts and thoughts go out to those individuals, those families that went through that situation. It's not something we are comfortable with. We'll continue to work hard. But we had a 17 per cent increase in emergency surgeries last year, which helps drive up the numbers. We have a lot of people coming from outside the province. This main centre, the Stollery, is a

wonderful facility. We're investing money in it, so we'll hope to reduce that next year, but a lot of times it depends on the year, the circumstances, and what drives the results.

Ms Notley: Well, it sounds like mismanagement to me.

Given that when parents take their child to the hospital for surgery, it's extremely stressful because they have to prepare their child for all the new, anxiety-provoking situations that entails and that to go back repeatedly for a surgery that gets postponed multiplies the stress and anxiety experienced by parents and their children and given that under your government's neglectful eye the number of cancelled children's surgeries at the Stollery has grown 100 per cent in the last year, why should Albertans trust you to protect any part of our health care system?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we feel the same way as the hon. member, that for any person that has to come to the hospital and that has surgery cancelled, it's a very traumatic experience. For a child it's even worse. We will as circumstances allow continue to expand operations at the various facilities. But the reality is that we've had a lot of pressure this year, with a 70 per cent increase in emergency surgeries, which does create some problems within the system. We'll continue to work with the families. We apologize for what has been done, but we will continue to work hard.

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

Open Data Portal Information Disclosure Policy

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Concerns have been raised about government plans to dump the freedom of information requests to the government open data portal once a week. Along with the concern of hiding information, the public has raised concerns about their private information being shared online. My question to the Minister of Service Alberta: what is being done to assure that the information of Albertans is not dumped online for all to see?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government stands by the fact that public information belongs to the public. Service Alberta is currently working on a public disclosure policy, and my ministry will be working in consultation with the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner to make sure that the rights of all Albertans are protected. Our draft policy is centred on sharing responses to general FOIP questions so that private information of Albertans is protected by the protocols of FOIP.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why is this government seemingly rushing to start off the process of simultaneous disclosure for FOIP responses? Is there something this government is trying to hide?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer is: absolutely not. A strong public disclosure policy will offer transparency to all Albertans, and that's the absolute opposite of hiding. A FOIP is considered public information, and we are providing that information to the public. When our policy is finalized, we'll ensure that there is sufficient time for applicants

such as media to receive their responses before the responses go public.

Mr. Quadri: To the same minister: the FOIP Act review has been discussed for nearly two years now. When will we see some actual results?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the question. It's a good question. The FOIP Act, as we all know, was implemented in 2002, and since that time technology and public data have changed considerably. Substantial work is already completed on analyzing the impact of proposed changes in the review. We'll continue our work with Justice and Solicitor General as well as consultation with the office of the Privacy Commissioner. Service Alberta will continue to work hard on the review, and we trust that in the upcoming months we'll have a lot of good work to show Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Deaths of Children in Care (continued)

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this morning we learned that the Ministry of Human Services decides whether or not to investigate the deaths of children in care without proper guidelines or oversight. Isn't it time that we stopped playing bureaucratic games with both reporting and investigating the deaths of children in care? To the Minister of Human Services: why have you failed to properly investigate the deaths of all children in care and to protect vulnerable children from suffering the same fate in the future?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:30

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the death of a child in care is one too many. I can assure you that every critical incident or death is examined internally and externally depending on the situation, internally with respect to the statutory director and, of course, externally with the good work of the Child and Youth Advocate, the council of quality assurance, the Family Violence Death Review Committee, the chief medical officer, and the Fatality Review Board, if necessary.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that with all of these layers of potential investigation I wonder how come the job is still not being done properly and given that delays in reporting children's deaths in government care only serve to make a bad situation even worse, to the minister again: how can you claim to be properly investigating the deaths of children in care when it isn't even clear that deaths were properly reported months after they happened?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, every critical incident or death is examined internally and externally. I have to say that the implementation oversight committee, headed by Tim Richter, has done a lot of great work – a lot of great work – that we have started and will continue. We are the leader. Alberta is a leader in public transparency and disclosure, and we will continue to do that.

Mr. Eggen: Really, Mr. Speaker, given that you, Madam Minister, preside over such a confused and murky internal system of dealing

with the deaths of children in care and given that you have an independent officer of the Legislature, the Child and Youth Advocate, staring us all in the face, who could do the job properly, to the Minister of Human Services again: why don't you reverse the cuts that you made to the Child and Youth Advocate, empower them to investigate the deaths of children in care, and put this matter to rest?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Working with the Child and Youth Advocate on a regular basis is very important to me. The work he does is absolutely critical, as I have mentioned previously. If there's a need to enhance and refresh what we're doing already with respect to oversight and quality assurance, we will continue to do that. I will continue to support the Child and Youth Advocate, with the good work that he does, through my ministry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Wildlife-human Coexistence in Southwestern Alberta

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner contains some of the richest farming and ranching areas in our province. The beautiful Waterton biosphere reserve is on the west end of my riding, and it is home to farming, ranching, and many species of wildlife, including large carnivores. To the Minister of ESRD: what programs are in place to protect both the wildlife as well as the people who make their living raising grain and livestock in this area?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, Alberta has the wildlife predator compensation program in place, that provides financial compensation to livestock producers who suffer wildlife-caused predation and injury to livestock as well as shot-dead livestock. Alberta also operates the problem wildlife program, which provides intercept feeding, fencing, bale wrapping, and hazing for wildlife that causes depredation problems on agricultural land, infrastructure, and feed.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that wildlife is a natural resource and an asset to all Albertans and visitors, it seems unfair that the farmers and ranchers in this part of my riding should have to bear – pun intended – as much of the cost of predator kills as they currently do. What is the minister going to do to provide adequate, reliable, timely, and predictable compensation to these hard-working people and their families?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, I would agree. This program should be easy and straightforward for ranchers and farmers. We do work with the predator compensation committee to identify ways to proactively manage predator-related livestock mortality. We're developing program efficiencies between agencies to ensure that the livestock owners are fairly compensated using current market averages. Once these processes and working relationships are streamlined, you will see more efficient investigations, and payment processing will occur faster.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the predator-kill compensation system works well some of the time but too often leaves producers holding the bag, the Waterton Biosphere Reserve Association has provided you with useful and fair recommendations. Will the minister please tell us when all of these recommendations will be implemented?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah, Mr. Speaker. In fact, these recommendations were discussed at the last predator compensation committee meeting, that happened this past February. Some of these recommendations will be implemented once a draft policy and program are defined later on in this year, so we are trying to make progress on these recommendations.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Municipal Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2007 the government promised municipalities that they would receive a pot of money worth over \$11 billion over 10 years. Now, just a few years later Premier Stelmach changed it to a promise of \$1.4 billion every year to ensure stable, consistent funding for municipalities, and then Premier Redford one-upped him and promised to make it \$1.6 billion every year. Well, it's all a fantasy 'cause we've never come anywhere close to those figures. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why does the government continue to shortchange their promise to municipalities?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question, especially as we have our friends here today from AUMA and AAMD and C in the gallery. It's nice to have them here with us.

Mr. Speaker, this government takes the MSI funding very seriously: for municipalities, an \$11.3 billion commitment. We have delivered over \$6 billion with that. We continue to work with our municipalities on important infrastructure for them, on the MSI.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. I'm really interested that the minister quoted the \$1.3 billion figure, yet all the press releases that came out recently were talking about \$1.6 billion. So she's no longer including the basic municipal grant as part of that money?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that the member asked the question. What I quoted was the \$11.3 billion, the whole MSI funding, and of that \$11.3 billion \$6 billion has been delivered in both infrastructure and operating dollars.

Ms Blakeman: All right. As part of the last election campaign the then Premier, a lot of them, promised that the MSI grant would be extended and would be around until 2023. Is the government standing behind that promise?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government, today's government, under new management has made the commitment as well to make sure that the \$11.3 billion for MSI funding is there for the municipalities. These are our partners; we value their partnership. The Premier has signed an MOU with AUMA, AAMD and C, and the two large-city mayors with charters. This is a government and a Premier that are honouring these commitments and are working with our valued municipal partners.

School Construction

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, as we all know, oil prices have dropped dramatically over the past six months. As a province we're looking at somewhere near a \$7 billion shortfall in the budget. Clearly, spending will be reduced. It should be reduced. However, there were some promises made that we absolutely must honour. No matter where we sit in here, we know there is a great need for new schools in this province. To the Minister of Infrastructure, the man on the hot seat for this: will you commit to Albertans that these schools are a priority and will be built as promised?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. Yes, in short, the schools will be built. We have a number of organizations that are coming out and saying that capital spending in private industry is going to go down as a result of oil prices, but what the public can know is that this is a great opportunity for us to invest in our public infrastructure, to build the schools we need, and, potentially at this point in time, save some dollars while we're doing it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Committing to building these schools is absolutely a priority. However, many people are skeptical that the timeline is going to be pushed back, that the construction period will be delayed because of the shortfall in funding. To the same minister: can you assure Albertans that this is not the case? Will you build these schools on the timeline that you promised?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said in this House before, phase 1 schools were announced in 2011, opened in 2014, three years later. Last week we had 39 schools on which tenders had closed and contracts have been awarded. This week, as of right now we have 45 schools from phase 2 where contracts have been awarded.

2:40

Mr. McAllister: My final question, Mr. Speaker, is for the Minister of Education. Minister, I'll be the last person to criticize the government for cutting spending and being fiscally responsible. I think we all know that that is a priority given the provincial financial reality. However, we do not want this to affect our kids in the classroom, and that is the bottom line regardless of where we sit. Can the Minister of Education assure us that whatever is done in the Education portfolio will not trickle down and affect our kids in the class?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier to members in the Assembly today, I believe that our annual budget this year for Education is about \$7.6 billion. So we are committed; this is

indicative of our commitment to investment in education so our children have every opportunity. We take seriously our responsibility to support students and do so in a fiscally prudent manner. Alberta's education system is, in fact, one of the best in the world, and we all ought to be proud of our education system. Once our new budget is released, members will see that we continue to work with our stakeholders.

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

In Vitro Fertilization

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Becoming a parent is one of the greatest joys in life, but out of necessity some of our families have to turn to in vitro fertilization to conceive. Unfortunately, oversight of fertility clinics in Alberta is lacking. Oversight is lacking, and there's no standardized fee structure. In fact, some clinics may be denying treatment because of skin colour, according to recent reports, while some families just don't have the financial means. To the minister: will you commit to ensuring that families who require in vitro fertilization will have reasonable access to treatment?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, those kinds of issues we'll leave between their doctor and the individual. We do offer programs and support for people. We encourage them to speak with their doctor about how they can access the things that we allow in the province of Alberta.

Dr. Swann: I'm talking about supplemental public funding, Mr. Minister.

Given that the public health funds for these services actually reduce costs to the health system because they reduce the number of premature infants and multiple births, is the minister considering providing public funding for IVF? If not, why not?

Mr. Mandel: In this period of time, Mr. Speaker, we have tremendous demands on our system, and we'll continue to deliver the services that we have committed to, but looking at expanding those services at this point in time is very difficult given the current restraints.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, given the media reports that some physicians may be refusing treatment based on skin colour, will the government tell us that they are investigating the matter and tell us how it plans to ensure that there's no discrimination in these services?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I will keep that under advisement. If that is the case, this is not something this government or any government should tolerate.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. The time for Oral Question Period has expired. In 30 seconds from now we will continue with the second members' statement, and we'll hear from Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: Let us begin, then, with Cypress-Medicine Hat – you have two minutes – followed by Little Bow.

Government Accountability

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like most Albertans, I was shocked when this Premier told me and everyone else to go look in a mirror over our fiscal challenges. After all, Albertans didn't plunge Alberta back into debt or waste taxpayers' hard-earned money. Albertans didn't run up massive deficits or loot our savings accounts for future generations. Albertans didn't run the most expensive government in Canada. Albertans didn't usher in an era of unprecedented waste and entitlement. The members opposite did.

Albertans worked hard to do their best for our province. I don't know what kind of Albertans the Premier knows, but the Albertans I know have worked their fingers to the bone holding our province together when this PC government's waste and entitlement was threatening to tear it apart. Here in the Official Opposition we thank Albertans for their hard work, Mr. Speaker. We thank them for their honesty, their determination, and their will to succeed despite this PC government. We don't blame them for political inconvenience.

I won't rush to judgment, though; maybe the Premier's mirror is broken. But his comments beg the questions: what does he see when he looks in the mirror? Does he see the members of his caucus who are caught misusing taxpayer resources? Does he see the masterminds behind sky palace, Tobaccogate, the Olympic trip, or government planes? Does he see the members currently facing serious accusations of bullying and bribing grassroots supporters? He must not since he gave these very same members glowing endorsements. Or maybe he knows he's wrong, but he's just looking to place the blame somewhere it doesn't belong.

Either way, this Premier is showing he doesn't have the right stuff to lead. After all, real leaders don't blame their mistakes on others; they take the blame.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Agricultural Safety Week

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm honoured to rise in recognition of Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. Each year the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association along with the government and other partners dedicate a week in March to enhance awareness of safe farm practices. This year's theme is Be the Difference. It encourages individuals, organizations, and communities to make a difference in ensuring Canadian farms are a safe place to work and live.

The government of Alberta is currently piloting the Alberta farm safe plan, a tool to help farmers implement health and safety systems on their farms. The plan is expected to be available to all farmers later this year.

Education is critical to support farm safety and prevent incidents. Last May we launched an online farm safety directory that includes a comprehensive list of contacts to provide farm safety awareness, education, and training. Through the Growing Forward 2 program we also have funding initiatives to enhance farm safety education awareness, including programs directed to rural children and young farm workers.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development continues to provide funding for the Farm Safety Centre to encourage the safety smarts farm programs to deliver to all rural school-aged children. The ministry is also working with the Farm Safety Centre on pilot projects for the Alberta sustainable farm family program, which provides farm workers and their families additional tools to effectively manage their well-being and their safety.

Mr. Speaker, Agricultural Safety Week is an excellent opportunity to provide awareness, to provide some of the important safety programs that are going on here in Alberta. I encourage all producers and their families to keep safety in their minds every day and have a solid safety farm plan to ensure their family is safe where they work and live and to make sure all their employees are treated the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Lacombe and District

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know the importance of youth in Alberta. They are our next leaders. They will be our teachers, our front-line caregivers, our innovators, and our lawmakers. Our youth excel in a range of areas, whether it be academic excellence, attending one of Alberta's fine educational institutions, or through a sport, trade, activity, or charity.

There is one organization, however, that I would like to highlight and talk about the amazing work that they are doing in my constituency, the constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka, because without this organization many of our youth would not have been able to hone their skills or gain the confidence that they now exude. It is the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Lacombe and District. This wonderful group has been serving youth in central Alberta now for 26 years.

Proudly funded by the community initiatives program grant and generous support from the community, there are currently 83 youth enrolled in this positive mentoring program that Big Brothers Big Sisters offers. Some of the programs that they have include community and in-school mentoring, Kids 'n' Kops police mentoring, as well as subsidies for kids going to camp.

This has meant Big Brothers Big Sisters has been widely recognized, winning multiple local, provincial, and national awards. Among these are the Alberta Solicitor General crime prevention award in 2010, the Chamber of Commerce charity of the year award, and the national Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada team spirit award. This amazing team of 90 volunteers helps kids in the Lacombe area and the wider region reach their fullest potential.

Every child that needs a mentor will have a mentor, Mr. Speaker. Big Brothers Big Sisters will continue to mould the minds of our youth, creating the leaders of tomorrow. This organization really is the little engine that could.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

2:50

Waterton Biodiversity Reserve

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Located in the south-western corner of Alberta in my riding of Cardston-Taber-Warner is the Waterton biosphere reserve, WBR, one of only 16 biosphere reserves in Canada. It encompasses some of the most spectacular, ecologically diverse landscapes in the Canadian Rockies and prairie grasslands. Designated in 1979 by UNESCO, the WBR fosters and encourages a sustainable, community-based regional economy with quality biodiversity, landscape, and social values.

Biosphere reserves are recognized internationally for demonstrating practical approaches to balancing biodiversity conservation and sustainable human use of the land. The Waterton biosphere reserve includes a protected 505 square kilometre core area in Waterton Lakes national park but extends well beyond the national park to include the buffer zone of surrounding private

ranch, farm, and residential land and a broad transition zone that supports many people in a wide range of economic activities.

Currently the transition zone includes the MD of Pincher Creek, Cardston county, and Crowsnest Pass, including the Piikani and Kainai reserves and a portion of the Rocky Mountain forest reserve. Here the goal of sustainable resource use is explored and encouraged through research, education, and community-based planning. Land use in the buffer and transition zones is not regulated or restricted in any way by having the biosphere status.

Over the last 30 years volunteers working on behalf of the WBR have supported our communities in many practical ways by providing funding and support for projects, forums, and research that address local land management concerns.

The Waterton biosphere reserve is a living demonstration of the value we place on our natural and cultural resources, our traditional livelihoods, and our commitment to work together as good stewards of the land we hope to pass on to future generations.

Thank you.

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

Multicultural Seniors' Housing

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak about something that is truly important to my constituents of Edmonton-Manning, our seniors. Our seniors worked hard to make Alberta a great place, the great province that it is today, and we must ensure that they are able to continue living independent and fulfilling lives.

Alberta is a multicultural place that's blessed with a multitude of people from many cultures who bring with them a diverse range of traditions. Several family members in Edmonton-Manning have suggested a great idea. Since many of their elderly parents cannot speak English, they would like to see more workers hired who can speak their mother tongue. Their vision for their parents' care would be one that is culturally familiar to them, where they can find a menu that caters to the tastes of their homelands.

Mr. Speaker, I know that our government is one that is inclusive and respectful to the needs of all its citizens, and I hope that this multicultural initiative is one that can be considered in greater detail as a possible alternative for our seniors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 19

Education Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I ask for leave to introduce a bill, and the bill is Bill 19.

If I could just make some brief comments. Bill 19, Education Amendment Act, 2015, is the title of this legislation that, through a series of amendments, will assist in ensuring that the Education Act is, upon its proclamation, successful in focusing education on the student and supporting educational choice, enabling school boards to be more collaborative and responsive to their students. During the process of finalizing the Education Act regulations, a process that's nearing completion, a series of amendments were identified by legislative drafters' legal services as required for the act. Bill 19 does not change the intention of the Education Act; the amendments are largely administrative in nature, with the purpose of providing increased clarity and accuracy, ensuring alignment with other legislation. This bill is a result of due diligence in ensuring that the

Education Act will be effective in serving the long-term needs of Alberta's students.

With that, I ask for leave to move first reading of this bill.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

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

Bill 20 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today and request leave to introduce Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015.

The Municipal Government Act, or the MGA, creates the framework in which municipalities operate. It impacts every Albertan, the private sector, and every ministry in government in one form or another. Mr. Speaker, the world we live in has changed since the MGA was first proclaimed in 1995. The act is in need of updating to reflect changes in technology, new economic realities, and evolving municipal roles and responsibilities. The proposed amendments are the result of extensive public consultation and collaboration with municipal partners and stakeholders. This is the first set of amendments coming from the MGA review process. These changes have broad support from the municipal associations, the cities of Calgary and Edmonton, and key business and industry associations.

I look forward to speaking more about this legislation. I'm proud to table Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015, and I move that the bill be read for the first time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 206, the Childhood . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interject here. The Minister of Human Services has caught my attention, and I believe there is a supplemental motion here.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move pursuant to Standing Order 75 that Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

The Speaker: Thank you. Apologies for not catching your eye sooner.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: I believe that now we can move on.

Bill 206 Childhood Comprehensive Eye Examination Act

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I request leave to introduce Bill 206, the Childhood Comprehensive Eye Examination Act, or CCEE Act.

Bill 206 would ensure that children of school age are set up for success by requiring a comprehensive eye exam by grade 1. The

CCEE Act could help reduce potential learning and behavioural difficulties that affect children with visual impairments. As we know, more than 25 per cent of school-aged children have vision problems that can limit their potential in all aspects of learning and life. Thanks to the work of initiatives like the Eye See . . . Eye Learn program, more children are getting their eyes examined. Still many children in Alberta begin school without a comprehensive eye exam.

Mr. Speaker, you need to read to succeed, and Bill 206 is an important step to ensuring that children in our families and communities across Alberta have the tools to succeed in the classroom and in life. After all, children are Alberta's most important priority.

I move that the bill be read a first time.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a first time]

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I've had a flurry of notes here, but I have to recognize the Government House Leader given the time on the clock.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ask unanimous consent of the Chamber that we can continue the Routine past 3 p.m. notwithstanding rule 7(7).

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent to proceed, so let's go to the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

3:00

Bill 207 Independent Budget Officer Act

Mrs. Forsyth: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise here today to introduce Bill 207, the Independent Budget Officer Act.

After 22 years in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker, this will be my last private member's bill that I will introduce. I don't know if that's good or bad. If passed, this legislation would establish an independent budget officer reporting to the Legislature. Its mandate is to provide independent analysis to the Leg. Assembly about the state of Alberta finances, including the budget and quarterly updates and the trend in the provincial and national economies. When requested by a committee of the Leg., the independent budget officer would undertake research for the committee into Alberta's finances and economy. He would also be empowered to investigate cost estimates of government proposals at the request of members of this Legislature. At a time when confusion has never been greater over the state of Alberta finances, the independent budget officer would bring clarity and credibility to the numbers.

I sincerely hope to receive the support of all members of this House on this important piece of legislation, and I am honoured to move first reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 207 read a first time]

The Speaker: Just before we proceed with the next item of business, could I have your unanimous consent to revert briefly for one introduction of guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Whitecourt-St. Anne, would you proceed.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you visitors here today to listen to the debate on Bill 203: from the Alberta Forest Products Association CEO and President Paul Whittaker; Brock Mulligan, director of communications from the Alberta Forest Products Association; Rory Koska, technical adviser with Wood Works!; Jim Rivait, the chief executive officer with the Canadian Home Builders' Association of Alberta; and T.J. Keil, the external relations manager with CHBA. I'd ask them to stand and be recognized.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: We'll begin with Edmonton-Centre, followed by Calgary-McCall. We have several today.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three sets for the leader of the third party, the Liberal caucus, and one set for myself. The first is with regard to question 4, that the leader asked regarding immunization.

The second tabling is called What Is the Right Number of Nursing Home Beds for Alberta? – 20,000 More, authored by Donna Wilson, a professor at the University of Alberta; Ryan Brow; Robyn Playfair; and Harpreet Gill.

The third tabling is actually three different articles, all on the 18th question, that was asked by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. They are all articles on in vitro fertilization clinics from the *Globe and Mail*, CBC news, and more CBC news.

The tabling that I have, Mr. Speaker, is from a constituent, Susan Cake, who is writing with her concerns particularly about the promises that were made by the Premier when he was running for election as the leader of the party opposite. She's deeply concerned that the Premier "is backpedaling on his promise to restore funding" and undercutting her belief in politicians. She feels very strongly that "increases in tuition are not the fix for this situation" and that neither are market modifiers.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week it was an auspicious occasion when the Minister of Infrastructure made the announcement on the status of promised new schools. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of an award of excellence on behalf of Albertans to the PC government for schools not built. Since the Minister of Infrastructure is not here to accept his award, I will send his award to the Minister of Education.

The Speaker: I understand that the tabling from Calgary-Mountain View has been dealt with, so let us move on to Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you wish to cover both?

Mr. Bilous: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you'll indulge me, I'll make my tabling, followed by the tabling on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter between myself and Reid Hamula, a constituent of Edmonton-

Beverly-Clareview who wrote to me about his struggles living as an AISH recipient who has had his CPP disability deducted from his monthly benefits. I am tabling this document in hope that it'll raise awareness of the unfair PC policies in the AISH and WCB programs.

Mr. Speaker, my second tabling. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a sworn declaration addressed to the Premier that alleges that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie attempted to bribe a member of his constituency association to withdraw his name as a candidate for the nomination in the member's constituency. While it is acknowledged that these claims haven't been proven in court . . .

Mr. Denis: Point of order.

Mr. Bilous: . . . we call on the government to appoint a special prosecutor or refer this matter to the police.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I heard a point of order during a tabling, which is a bit rare, but let me hear what you're . . .

Mr. Denis: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I believe you ruled earlier on this. I rise in accordance with 23(h), (i), (j), and (l) but also the citation you talked about dealing with party matters. I believe this tabling to be out of order, and I would ask you to rule accordingly.

The Speaker: Okay. I was just looking it up, in fact, and that's what distracted me momentarily. We'll deal with this at the appropriate time. Thank you.

Hon. members, I believe we have two points of order, one that was raised during Oral Question Period at approximately 2:04. I'm not sure that they wish to proceed, because I haven't heard otherwise, but could I recognize the hon. leader of the ND opposition? I'm assuming you wish to proceed with the point of order, so proceed and raise your citation, and we'll move from there.

Point of Clarification

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, on behalf of the ND opposition House leader I rise pursuant to section 13(2) to ask the following question. This is with respect, of course, to the Speaker's ruling around internal party matters, what is and is not.

Given that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was attempting to ask the Solicitor General about the appointment of a special prosecutor, a matter which is solely and squarely within the scope of his ministerial responsibility, and given that the precedent of the Saskatchewan Conservative Party a decade ago demonstrates that party activity can also amount to criminal behaviour by cabinet ministers in certain cases and given that the issue is not what a question touches on but actually, rather, that the issue is about the primary focus of the question and given that the focus in this case is the degree to which the people of Alberta can be assured that any criminal investigation which may arise out of the allegations made against a former member of cabinet will be conducted under the advice of a clearly independent special prosecutor, can the Speaker please explain why he shut down a line of questioning which dealt with prosecutorial independence simply because the alleged criminal behaviour occurred in relation to activity within the PC Party?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, this member I have a great deal of respect for. She's legally trained, and she's got many more years at the bar than I do. That being said, I'm really shocked at her argument here.

There are two clear delineations here. First off, dealing with criminal activity, when I had the difficult task of reporting someone who used to serve in this Chamber to the RCMP, of course, we then appointed a special prosecutor from Ontario for exactly the reason that she enunciates. It's a perceptual issue, but it's also an operational issue. But, again, that only deals, Mr. Speaker, with criminal activity. This is a party matter. There has been no charge laid. There is no investigation, to the best of my knowledge, so the bottom line is: yes, we would appoint a special prosecutor if this were a criminal matter. As this member well knows, this is a party matter. There have been no charges laid, and there is no investigation, to the best of my knowledge, at this point.

Mr. Speaker, you ruled on this on Thursday, but this member continues to persist. I would suggest that this point is out of order.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. Briefly, please.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Government House Leader cannot have it both ways here. There are allegations of a criminal offence. There are allegations. That's important to note, that the evidence is strictly an allegation. This opposition has an unfettered right to ask the government about any type of allegation, particularly when there is no investigation, there is no criminal complaint, but it does affect the operation of the actual government.

Now, you have a privilege, once it's under investigation, to say that it is now within the judicial system – I understand that – but it's not there. So to ask the government whether or not they're going to investigate or whether or not this is going to be put to the proper authority is the right of the opposition. There is no privilege defence against a criminal act. The location of the criminal activity, any alleged criminal activity, is irrelevant, whether it's internal to the party or whether it's out on the street. It's the allegation that affects the government that the opposition has a right to question and ask the government what it intends to do.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, and I believe that will conclude our speakers list on this point.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, I rise today on a very serious matter. Everyone in this House knows that these allegations have not been proven, and the member has denied them, but these are allegations of a criminal offence. I would submit that this principle should govern in a scenario like this. It does not matter if a political party is involved. A potential criminal activity should trump any political party aspect in this regard. In other words, if there's some type of criminality involved, even if it involves a political party, that should be subject to debate here in this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, by shutting down this line of questioning, it is outside of any possible precedent that our staff could find across Canada. You would be ruling in a way that no other jurisdiction – every other jurisdiction would allow this question to be asked. It's only your ruling here today that is inconsistent with that precedent.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, as well, when members here receive information that's very serious, whether it's coming from outside of a political party or from the public, the same principle applies. If it's a very serious matter, we can deal with it here in this Legislature. What your ruling does is that it essentially shields the

government from any questioning, where a government official puts on a party hat and says: no, you can't question me here in this Legislature. This is unprecedented. It would be the only jurisdiction in Canada where we couldn't ask this question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I heard that there was a point of order. I'm not sure exactly if the point of order that was being requested at the time or has since been attempted for clarification is with respect to more of a clarification of the ruling that I made earlier. I'm going to accept it that way because, as you know, you can't really raise a point of order against the Speaker, so you were careful in how you phrased that. Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills went a little bit further, but I'll deal with that in a moment.

Nonetheless, this request for clarification is more just that than it is a point of order, so I'll make a couple of comments in that respect. One is that when today's issue arose, it was brought up by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. It was very clear in what he said, and I have the Blues in front of me, which, assuming their accuracy amongst other things, attribute the following words to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood: "So far the only investigation into these allegations of criminal activity will be conducted by the PC Party."

At that point he immediately had my attention because, as you well know because it's been said so many times in this House, you should not be raising questions that have anything to do with internal party matters. That's the point that I raised, and I cautioned members about that last Thursday. I gave you the citation today, and I, in fact, read it today. They should not go into internal party matters, or we would be here potentially dealing with all four parties and their issues. Can you imagine if other members started raising points to do with your party?

I understand the gravity of the allegations, but they are being dealt with, I'm told by the Premier today in question period and by the Government House Leader today, as an internal party matter. As such, that means that *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* page 504, which I will not take time to read again, applies. I hope that clarifies that and that having alerted you to that last week would have stood today, particularly since it was from the same party that raised it on Thursday for the first time. These are allegations, and we know how serious they are.

Secondly, I would just further my brief clarification by referring all members to page 636, which is also in the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, with respect to ruling on a point of order, and here for your short emolument and edification is the following statement on page 636.

Ruling on a Point of Order

The Speaker has the duty to preserve order and decorum and to decide any matter of procedure that may arise. The Chair is bound to call the attention of the House to an irregularity in debate or procedure immediately, without waiting for the intervention of a Member. In addition, the Speaker decides questions of order once they have arisen and not in anticipation. Though raised on a point of order, hypothetical queries on procedure cannot be addressed to the Speaker nor may constitutional questions or questions of law.

When a point of order is raised, the Speaker attempts to rule on the matter immediately. However, if necessary, the Speaker may take the matter under advisement and come back to the House later with a formal ruling. In doubtful cases, the Speaker may also allow discussion on the point of order before coming to a decision but the comments must be strictly relevant to the point raised.

And then it goes on and talks about other authorities. You can read the rest for yourselves.

Suffice it to say that I have clarified this now, and I hope I don't have to clarify it again for anybody tomorrow. We understand the gravity of the situation. I did allow the questions. I listened very intently last Thursday to every single word that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona phrased and found those to be okay. They didn't break any rules as such. Today it was clear by the member's own admission that he was dealing with an internal party matter.

So that brings that point of clarification to a close, and the matter is now concluded and ended. Thank you.

I believe there was another point of order that the Minister of Justice had. Did you have another?

Point of Order Tabling Documents

Mr. Denis: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I think you've spoken mostly on this. I rise, again, on 23(h), (i), (j), and (l) but also *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* page 504, that you've enunciated. The tabling from the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, again, deals with a party matter, and it is highly irregular to table legal documents in this Chamber. I would suggest that these tablings are, respectfully, out of order.

The Speaker: I'll have a look at that. I don't know that there's anything illegal about what was tabled, but I want to review the wording and the content. So I'll reserve judgment on this until tomorrow, and maybe there'll be some clarification required on that. Otherwise, they will be allowed to stand as they are. However, should it be necessary, I will come back to the House with another comment on this tomorrow.

Mr. Saskiw: Will we have the opportunity to argue on this point? Are you going to make a determination tomorrow? Can we make a submission on this today, or will you allow us the opportunity to make the submission tomorrow?

The Speaker: Please allow me the time to at least look at the Blues. As I indicated, I was looking up the very point on that ruling during the tabling, and I was caught a bit off guard by it. So I do want to review it, and then I'll let you know the procedure tomorrow. Okay? Thank you very much.

Let us move on, then.

3:20

Orders of the Day Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 203 Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014

The Chair: I recognize the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It is indeed my pleasure to speak to Bill 203, Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014. I would like to thank the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne for his leadership in bringing forward this

legislation to allow six-storey wood buildings in Alberta. This bill has helped to drive the adoption of six-storey wood building requirements as part of the Alberta building and fire codes. Alberta is now at the forefront of evidence-based standards for six-storey wood buildings because of the initiative of the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne and his leadership. Six-storey wood buildings combine the very best of safety standards, environmental sustainability, affordability, and innovation.

I am pleased to table today a draft amendment to Bill 203 that helps to clarify the importance of the regulations under the Safety Codes Act. This draft amendment calls for six-storey wood buildings to be constructed in accordance with the regulations under the Safety Codes Act. Mr. Chair, would you like me to wait before I read out the amendment?

The Chair: Just pause, hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Absolutely.

The Chair: We'll have the amendment distributed. Being the first amendment, this will be A1.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you.
Should I proceed, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, please.

Mrs. McQueen: Okay. I move that Bill 203, Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014, be amended in section 2 by striking out the proposed section 65.1 and substituting the following:

Wood construction
65.1 A building that is 6 storeys or less in building height may be of wood construction if the building meets the requirements of this Act.

With this amendment the Ministry of Municipal Affairs strongly supports Bill 203, recognizing the demand for six-storey wood construction across the nation. The technical building requirements are published in the Alberta building code, which comes into force starting May 1, 2015. A wide range of code, building, fire service, engineering, and other experts developed these codes through the National Research Council. The proposed amendment ensures these structures will be constructed based on the work of these experts.

Some of the specific safety measures that will be mandatory with this type of building construction include protection during construction of the building. One of the leading causes of fire at construction sites is arson. The additional items outlined in the national standards for six-storey buildings will further enhance the security of the construction site against unauthorized entry and help reduce the risks of intentional or accidental ignition after hours, when arson is most common.

Mandatory sprinkler systems to protect against high-intensity residential fires, which were adopted in the national building code. The application of the sprinkler system was expanded to areas such as attics and balconies.

Street access to the building. Another safety measure that would be mandatory for this type of building construction is a requirement for at least one street access to the building. This provides emergency responders with increased ability to access the building's exterior and interior, and it could help limit the spread of fire.

Fire rating of roof assembly. Typically in sprinklered buildings the roof assembly is not required to be provided with a fire-resistance rating. However, for six-storey wood buildings the fire-

resistance rating for the roof would be not less than one hour. This means that the materials used in the construction of the roof will provide protection from flame and heat for a period of at least one hour based on tested conditions. This limits the risk that a rapidly developing fire will spread to the roof space, which could lead to the spread of fire to an adjacent space or building.

Structure and earthquake design. These standards would reduce the risk of building sway and shear force such as stress on the building walls caused by seismic activity, that can lead to building collapse.

Ceiling and drainage. The standards would also require designers to consider wood shrinkage in their designs. This will protect against moisture penetration of the wall and roof system or the building envelope, which is the exterior shell of the building. This means that the ceiling and drainage requirements of six-storey buildings will have increased protection.

Emergency power. The duration of emergency power for fire alarm and emergency lighting would also be increased from 30 minutes to one hour for buildings.

As Minister of Municipal Affairs my first priority under the Safety Codes Act and the Alberta building code is the public safety of all Albertans. I wish to emphasize that these changes in no way affect the choice of designers and builders to build with other materials such as concrete or masonry. This is simply another choice that the Alberta building code will provide.

Again I would like to thank the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne for his initiative and leadership on this important legislation.

Mr. Chairman, you have the copies of this draft amendment to be passed out, which you have done. I thank members for the opportunity to speak on this matter.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I'll look to any speakers from the opposition.

Mr. Kang: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have heard discussions on this before, and the concern was the firefighters fighting fires, you know, in case the building is on fire. I think with this amendment we can address that, but still there will be concern about fires. That's my only concern about this bill. Otherwise, I fully support this bill. I said that last time, too. This will bring in affordable housing, a demand for lumber, and will create more jobs.

I support the bill, but my concern is with fire only. I think this will address the fire issue somewhat. It may not address it to my satisfaction, but I can still support this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. I'll recognize next the hon. minister of . . .

Mr. Fawcett: I'll wait till the bill is amended.

The Chair: Okay. So on the amendment. Any other speakers on the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Now back to the main bill.

The hon. Minister of ESRD, followed by the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Unless I have some opposition in between.

Please proceed, hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Oh, yeah. Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this bill, a bill that I think is very

important for the forestry sector, a sector which I as Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development have the pleasure of working with on a day-to-day basis to ensure the vitality, health, and sustainability of the industry as well as making sure that the industry operates in a manner that takes care of our environment and the health of our forests.

What I will say, Mr. Chair, is that as minister for approximately six months now, I've toured many of the mills and facilities that this industry has in this province. At every one that I tour, I am amazed at the level of innovation that goes into this particular industry. I think regular Albertans – probably I would include myself as one of those – kind of have our traditional way that we think of the forestry industry, you know: a bunch of lumberjacks that climb trees, cut them down, and the next thing you know, there are two-by-fours that are being pounded in to build our houses and those types of things. But I can assure you that it's a much more sophisticated industry than that, that it's come a long way both from an environmental standpoint and how we manage our forests but particularly on the innovation side.

3:30

In fact, I believe that just over I would say the last five years a lot of our mills have become 15 per cent more efficient in productivity. That's an indication of how much this industry is investing in being innovative in how they operate. One of those things is certainly in the innovation of the kinds of products that they are producing. I think that what this particular bill does is that it allows them to be more innovative and have more options available when they look to what kinds of products they want to develop and sell to consumers and to customers.

Mr. Chair, you know, it's very important that we ensure that any of our buildings or structures are safe and that public safety comes first. We cannot compromise the public safety of our buildings and our structures for economic purposes. But, as I was mentioning, there have been a number of advances from an engineering standpoint, from a product development standpoint that suggest the time is right to allow for this change to take place. This will provide builders many more opportunities to be flexible around the types of materials that they use from both an architectural standpoint and an economic standpoint, so I really like that positive aspect of it. As the Minister of Municipal Affairs just indicated, we're not forcing any builder, any architect, any engineer to use any one particular type of material, but this does give the opportunity for those producers of wood products to go out and market their products as an economically viable alternative to the ones that are currently used. That is a very positive step in the right direction for our forestry industry.

We all know of the economic challenges that we're facing in this province right now. They've been talked about at length in this Assembly so far this session. But there is one area we can be quite proud of, Mr. Chair, and that is our forestry industry, for the reasons that I just mentioned before. This is just one more, I guess, notch in the belt for the forestry industry to become an even more economically viable player within our economy.

For that, as minister responsible for forestry I can only commend the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne for bringing forward this initiative at this time. I believe the time is right and we shouldn't hesitate as an Assembly in passing this bill so that we can let our businesses, whether they be in the forest sector or the building sector, start to make the decisions that will allow this province to become even more economically viable, to have more choices available. That's really what this bill leads to.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll sit down and cede the floor to someone else. I encourage all members to make sure we support this bill and get it back.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise on Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014. Just a couple of brief comments. I think this is an example of a type of bill that should in fact be on government business. You know, we have the member opposite. He's got a fair amount of pull. I'm sure he could probably put this on government bills. The reason I say that is that I think the proper process here, that could have taken place with Bill 203, is that you go into second reading. Obviously, the vast majority of the members would approve of the overall intent. But then you put it to a committee where you have proper consultations so that a full series of amendments could be proposed and then come back to this Assembly at Committee of the Whole, put forward a series of substantive amendments, and then have them pass.

Of course, we were lucky in this circumstance that there was a break in the sitting, so there was apparently some time for a bit of consultation where one of the hon. ministers put forward an amendment that she probably drafted based on some of the feedback that was provided. If this is such an urgent bill, if this is a bill that the government wants to pass right away, if the industry wants it, and all these other things, as the member opposite stated, that we shouldn't wait to pass this bill, if it's that important, put it as government business. The government then has the ability to make sure that it's shepherded through reasonably and quickly whereas this bill right now, depending on when a potential election is called, may not even pass.

That's my main argument, Mr. Chair, that on bills like this it makes no sense not to put this directly on government business and leave private members' business for other measures that aren't, obviously, on this government's agenda that's being put forward.

Mr. Chair, we look forward to seeing the final reading of Bill 203 before passing final judgment on it. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the last speaker, the hon. member, for sharing that with us. He somewhat missed the point of private members' business, which is that the private member gets to decide what the business is.

Such being the case, I have to inform the House that it's with a slightly heavy heart that I rise today. I do want to congratulate the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, and I know I spoke to the bill in support of the industry in second reading. This makes a lot of sense, that we should build wood structures six stories high. It's done in other jurisdictions. Wood, as I said, is a renewable, remarkable, sustainable building material. It's one of the best insulators out there, a natural insulator, and it really speaks to the energy of a fantastic Alberta business. But we always watch for unintended consequences of the bills that we pass in this Legislature, and I want to point one out, Mr. Chair, and that is that it exposes a fundamental flaw in the children's fairy tale that any of us in this House that had children told to our children. That, of course, is the story of the *Three Little Pigs*. In this story – I'll recount it quickly if you'll allow me.

Of course, with the *Three Little Pigs*, the first pig built a house of straw, and the wolf huffed and puffed and blew his house down.

The second little pig built a house of sticks, and the wolf huffed and puffed and blew his house down. Of course, the third little pig built a house of bricks, and the wolf was unable to huff and puff and blow his house down, and that's the end of the fairy tale that we all grew up with and that we all understood.

Actually, the flaw in that tale – and it's exposed by this bill – is that that didn't end the tale. Of course, when winter came, the poor little pig in the brick house came close to freezing to death and starving to death. As he went out in search of food, fortunately there was a pile of straw nearby from the first little pig's house. He went out in search of heat. Fortunately, there was a pile of sticks nearby from the second little pig's house. But he got caught by the wolf, who was smart enough to know that he wouldn't survive the winter in a stone house.

I can propose a revision to the fairy tale, and that is that there actually was a fourth little pig, Mr. Chair, and that fourth little pig built a house of wood, a sturdy house, that was warm and comfortable and welcoming in the wintertime, and he was smart enough to build the thing six stories high. As time went on, he opened up a home for wayward pigs. It's just a wonderful story from there on.

Mr. Chair, wood is a part of our national identity. It is a beautiful, remarkable, environmentally responsible building material. We are known as hewers of wood and drawers of water. We've built our houses out of wood since the beginning, and our First Nations partners did it before them. We've taught the world a lot about how to manage forests and how to build things out of wood, and I hope we continue to do that in our children's and grandchildren's lives. I wholeheartedly support this bill, and I thank the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne for having the vision to bring it forward.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there other speakers?

If not, I'd invite the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne to close debate.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I was bugged by a number of my colleagues today asking me: "Why are you wearing a green tie today? It's not St. Patrick's Day." I said, "I wear a green tie today to stand for everything that Bill 203 stands for: green, sustainable, and looking into the future, as most of us all know."

It's my pleasure to rise and offer some concluding remarks, but before I do, I want to thank all members of this House for being so supportive. The folks that are here with us today, the organizations like the Alberta Forest Products Association, the Canadian Home Builders' Association, the Canadian Wood Council and Wood Works! have been very strong advocates of Bill 203, and I want to thank them for their attendance here today.

3:40

Mr. Chair, the safety of all Albertans is paramount in all that we do. Bill 203 will ensure that this continues to be a top priority. Fire-resistant ratings for floors and roofs must be met and require a fire-resistant rating that is the same as any other material, whether it be steel or concrete. Sprinkler systems must be designed to meet the National Fire Protection Association 13, or NFPA 13. Exterior wall cladding must be noncombustible on a minimum of 90 per cent of each material face, and 25 per cent of the building parameter must be within 15 metres of a road, allowing firefighting access. This will enable full and proper access to homes of Albertans when they are faced with an emergency situation. The minimum emergency power must be exceeded by 60 minutes so that proper action can be

implemented when emergency situations arise. Finally, buildings must be constructed at a minimum distance from the property line.

I think the comments from my colleagues were evident that there's wide support for this bill. I'd offer these concluding remarks and thank everybody for their input.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. members, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration Bill 203, the bill to amend the Safety Codes Act.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 203 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Chair, I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 9(1) to proceed to third reading.

The Chair: That would be after. We would rise and report, and then ...

Mr. Denis: I'm sorry. So I would ask that we rise and report. My apologies, sir.

The Chair: I'll offer you the opportunity to ask that question again, hon. Government House Leader.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration Bill 203. The committee reports the following bill with amendments. I wish to table copies of all the amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Having heard the report by the hon. Member for Little Bow, does the Assembly concur in the report? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'd ask all members in the House to allow me to go to the third and final reading, so I'd ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 9(1) and proceed to third reading of Bill 203.

Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne has moved to waive the provision to allow the House to go straight to third reading of Bill 203. This requires unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Bill 203

Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all the hon. members who rose to speak today. I think that my concluding remarks will be very short and very brief. The members of this Assembly have been very outspoken in support of this bill, industry has been very outspoken on this bill, and I'd ask for third and final call.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

There is an opportunity to speak. Are there any other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne has moved to close debate on third reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a third time]

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

Bill 204

Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today to begin debate on Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014.

The purpose of Bill 204 is to increase punishment for distracted driving by amending the Traffic Safety Act to include a monetary penalty of \$250 and three demerits for each distracted driving offence. Currently the punishment for distracted driving is \$172. Alberta's distracted driving law came into effect in September 2011. The original intent was to reduce and prevent incidents of distracted driving. Under the legislation drivers could be charged and given a \$172 fine; however, it has become clear that this is not a great enough deterrent.

I had the pleasure to meet with the inspiring Renaye Wade last week. This young woman suffered a crushed pelvis, a broken jaw, and a severe brain injury that left her in a coma for 34 days after her car was struck by another vehicle. The driver who struck Wade later pleaded guilty to careless driving. She is a passionate advocate for stiffer distracted driving penalties, and after meeting with her, I felt stronger than ever that we must act now to prevent distracted driving on Alberta roads.

The current law hasn't noticeably reduced incidents of distracted driving. Mr. Speaker, RCMP Corporal Chris Little has said that distracted driving incidents have actually risen since legislation was first introduced. He has said that incidents of distracted driving are worse than ever. The deterrents currently in place are not working. Distracted driving leads to accidents and even fatalities, yet this is easily preventable. Bill 204 can help to greatly reduce those incidents.

Mr. Speaker, technology has provided us with a lot of great things, but we sometimes find ourselves multitasking with our phones, our GPS, our iPads. These distractions lead to driving errors. Driving errors are a factor in 87 per cent of total collisions in Alberta. When it comes to driving, it requires our full attention. Texting takes your eyes off the road for 4.6 seconds. At 88 kilometres an hour that is like driving an entire football field blindfolded.

Mr. Speaker, no Albertan should be put at risk because of careless, distracted drivers. Distracted drivers are three times more likely to be involved in a crash than attentive drivers. Cellphones are one of the most common distractions. Drivers who are texting are 23 times more likely to be involved in a crash or near crash event compared with nondistracted drivers. International research shows that 20 to 30 per cent of all collisions involve driver distractions.

There needs to be a behavioural change amongst drivers. The deterrents currently in place are not working. That is why I am proposing these changes in Bill 204. Alberta has one of the lowest provincial fines for distracted driving. Distracting driving punishments in Canada range from \$100 to \$280. Some fines rise with the subsequent number of offences. Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 would position Alberta's distracted driving laws as some of the toughest in the country.

The annual social costs of a motor vehicle collision in terms of loss of life, medical treatment, rehabilitation, lost productivity, and property damage are measured in tens of billions of dollars in Canada, Mr. Speaker. Even if that were divided equally among the provinces, that represents over \$1 billion. That number can be significantly reduced by preventing distracted driving.

3:50

The addition of three demerit points may be an even stronger deterrent than the fine itself. While many Albertans can afford to pay the \$172 fine and treat it as a minor inconvenience, a three-demerit fine can lead to a suspended licence and pose a serious punishment for what is a serious infraction. A new, harsher punishment I believe will encourage more people to take steps to ensure they are not breaking the distracted driving law.

Reducing distracted driving involves strong legislation, education, and enforcement. Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 allows us to do our part by ensuring strong legislation. Distracted driving laws do more than just restrict people from texting or calling. There are many other potential distractions that drivers need to be aware of such as using electronic devices like laptop computers, video games, cameras, et cetera. Entering information on a GPS unit, writing, printing, or sketching; personal grooming; and pets sitting in the front seat or in the cab can cause distraction. Although cellphone use makes up most cases of distracted driving, these other factors are risks as well, Mr. Speaker. With close to 90 per cent of all collisions caused by driver error, most of which is caused by distracted driving, it is important that we make real, meaningful change to influence people into changing their behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, adding three demerits for distracted driving gives the punishment some real teeth. Drivers can no longer ignore the perils of distracted driving, and if they do, they will be off the road with a suspended licence. By adding this extra deterrent, I believe Albertans would be motivated to enact widespread behavioural changes. The potential of losing one's driver's licence will give Albertans pause before answering their cellphone, replying to a text, or otherwise engaging in distracting behaviour. The physical and possible financial implication of losing one's licence acts as a strong deterrent. We need drivers to focus on the road and not risk their lives and the lives of others by being distracted. Texting and driving kills 11 teens each day in North America.

Changing driving behaviour isn't easy, and although we saw a decrease in distracted driving initially after previous legislation was introduced, it proved to be short lived. For behaviour to be truly changed long term, Bill 204 is needed. It will not happen overnight, Mr. Speaker, but by increasing the fine and adding demerits, we can make significant strides and really tackle this devastating problem. It is time to stop needlessly endangering Albertans on our roadways, time to stop the avoidable accidents as fatalities attributed to distracted driving, time to give our law enforcement officials legislation that can help them reduce these careless accidents and make Alberta roads safer for all Albertans.

Bill 204 isn't dictating to Albertans, Mr. Speaker; Bill 204 is responding to Albertans. Albertans want harsher penalties for distracted driving because they see it endangering those around them. Ultimately, it will be Albertans who dictate whether or not this bill will be successful in reducing distracted driving. For there to be meaningful change, societal change has to occur. Distracted driving should be treated with the same social stigma as drinking and driving for it can have the same deadly consequences. Bill 204 can spark this conversation amongst Albertans and show that the Alberta government is serious about the dangers of distracted driving. Our leadership can bring about real change in the way Albertans think about distracted driving.

This is more than a problem amongst teenage and early-20s drivers. People of all ages have been guilty of letting themselves become distracted by one thing or another while driving, Mr. Speaker. We need to introduce tough legislation now and spur societal change. Then, hopefully, we will not have to wait a generation for distracted driving to become unacceptable. Anyone not getting that message risks losing their licence as well as hefty financial fines.

Government has often been slow to adapt to changing technology. It would have been difficult for anyone to predict the exact dangers new technology would cause. However, Mr. Speaker, now that we have seen the dangers and reviewed the statistics and evidence, we can no longer turn the other way and let this behaviour continue. These changes proposed in Bill 204 need to be made to protect Albertans and help keep our roads safe.

I look forward to hearing the debate on this subject and encourage all my colleagues in the House to participate and to support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand up and tentatively, if I may, support Bill 204, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014. The idea of second reading, obviously, is to discuss the intent of the bill, and I'm going to be listening to the conversation. I think what's going to be more important is when we get into Committee of the Whole. I like where this member is going because I'm one of those drivers that are on the road continuously, and I can't tell you how frustrated I get when I'm driving, whether it's in the city or whether it's on highway 2. I am wondering what the driver in front of me is doing as they're weaving on the highway or, for that matter, on the street. I can be somewhat nosy at times and catch up to them and find out that they're texting. Most of the time that's what I see, them texting. I have been known to give a honk of my horn and just let people know how I feel about that, as the Member for Calgary-East has explained in his notes and as we saw in the gallery last week when he introduced the young lady who had been so severely injured by a distracted driver.

I think what's important to me is that we brought this legislation through three years ago, the distracted driving legislation. I haven't heard a lot of comments back and forth about: has it increased, has it decreased, how many more tickets have been given? Fortunately – knock on wood – Mr. Speaker, I have not been the recipient of a lot of tickets. I say that and hope that I'm not jinxing myself on that. We originally had legislation on driving without – I think, it's due care and attention legislation. I'm somewhat confused if this has kind of been absorbed into I think it was Bill 16, the distracted driving legislation. I'm not sure if police – maybe the Justice minister and Solicitor General knows if the police can still ticket for undue care and attention or if it's under . . .

Mr. Denis: Yes, they can.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. Yes, they can.

It's interesting to me to find out in the last three years how many tickets have been issued under the distracted driving legislation. I look forward to the Minister of Transportation providing those details, which I know he can, and exactly what those tickets were for. Were they for texting? Were they for cellphones? That kind of thing. Because I think it's something important to consider as we move forward.

I would also like to know from the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Justice how many more police and sheriffs, for that matter, are going to be hired to monitor this particular piece of legislation. I think that is more important than anything if we're going to be passing legislation, that we have what I consider boots on the ground or in the car, if I can use that, to start monitoring this. I do think the increase in fine is well worth the effort.

But, again, I'd like to see from the Minister of Transportation how many tickets have been given since this legislation was enacted three years ago and what those tickets are for. I'd also like to know whereabouts in the province it is. I know he has access to that. If it's in the city, if it's in the rural areas, I think that's important to know because then we'll know where we have to put the boots on the ground, if we have to put more sheriffs in the rural areas. Do we have to put more police in the urban areas? Is that the priority for the police officers?

4:00

The three demerit points. I think sometimes that you're all in or nothing. I, honestly, have seen what, to me, is a travesty when you're driving, and to this day we still see people texting. The information that I've been able to access briefly just after the Member for Calgary-East introduced this bill is that it's young people that are most distracted on this type of stuff. He did mention, you know, eating, putting on lipstick, dogs, kids, and all those things, but I really feel that the biggest distracted driving issue is texting and probably cellphones.

I was trying to do some research just before question period, but of course it's very busy. I came across a research page that talks about the 10 most distracted places. I didn't have enough time to even pull it up. It was one of those where it talks about the 10th and what it was doing, and then you have to go to the next slide, and it's the ninth and the eighth and the seventh, all the way down.

I think it's incumbent upon the minister to provide us that information. I know he's probably wanting to get up and speak to this bill. I'm sure he's getting up to speak in support of this bill. If he could provide to the House, as I said, how many tickets have been issued since this Bill 16, I think it was, the distracted driving legislation, was brought in, what those distracted driving tickets were, and what areas of the province they were in, I think that will

give us a good idea of how many more police or sheriffs we will have to add for this when this bill is passed.

I look forward to Committee of the Whole as we move forward. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I'll recognize the Minister of Transportation next.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I could answer those questions specifically, but I'll wait. I've seen all those numbers, and I know them, but going off the top of my head, I don't want to misquote, so I'll bring them back to Committee of the Whole. I could almost say the number, but I would be afraid I might be wrong. It is lots; I have seen the stats. I'll bring that back to committee.

Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Transportation I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014. Before I begin my comments, I'd like to acknowledge and thank the Member for Calgary-East for bringing this bill forward. His commitment to the safety and well-being of Albertans is evident, and I commend him for his efforts.

Bill 204 aims to assign three demerit points to anyone charged with distracted driving as defined by the Traffic Safety Act. It also proposes to raise the monetary fine for this offence from \$172 to \$250. Mr. Speaker, I've said before in this House – and I'll say it again – distracted driving is simply unacceptable. It puts everyone on our roads at risk. That's why in 2011 this government enacted legislation that made distracted driving illegal in Alberta, and at the time it was one of the most comprehensive anti distracted driving laws in the country.

But legislation is only one piece of the traffic safety puzzle, Mr. Speaker. We need to use a combination of education and enforcement to encourage Alberta drivers to comply with the law. To this end, we launched the innovative Crotches Kill campaign to educate Albertans in an effort to shift behaviours. We know meaningful change in driver behaviour doesn't happen overnight. It can often take years. In fact, it has taken decades for Alberta to see a 95 per cent compliance rate for seat belts.

Mr. Speaker, my department continues to educate motorists in our efforts to keep Albertans safe on our roads. Last month 16-year-old car driver Parker Thompson from Red Deer helped us launch distracted driving awareness month by speaking to about 600 staff and students at a south Edmonton junior high school about the dangers of distracted driving. His goal is to reach out and educate youngsters, before they start driving, in an effort to create a new generation of Albertans who will grow up knowing how unacceptable distracted driving really is. Mr. Thompson's goal is to travel the province and give his presentation to as many students as possible. It's a bold and innovative approach to ending distracted driving, and his efforts should be commended.

In spite of all these efforts, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't appear Albertans are getting the message. We all have a role to play in reducing the number of deaths and injuries on our roads. Government, law enforcement, and our many traffic safety partners are committed to finding solutions through updates to Alberta's traffic safety plan, which, I'm proud to say, was the first of its kind in Canada when introduced in 2007. Since its introduction the traffic fatality rate in Alberta has decreased by some 22 per cent, and that's while the number of drivers and vehicles on the road has been increasing at the same time. This is clear evidence that our innovative approach to traffic safety is working, but we know we can always do more.

Mr. Speaker, it's important that drivers also realize the important role they play in keeping everyone safe on the road. When we get

behind the wheel, our main task is to stay focused on the road ahead and not on other distractions. We know that every text message that's sent takes our eyes off the road for five seconds. It only takes a second for a collision to occur, and lives can be changed forever. Research shows that between 20 and 30 per cent of all collisions are due to distracted driving, and it's very clear some Albertans aren't getting the message. It's also clear that we need to be doing more to address the very serious problem on our roads. The Member for Calgary-East recognizes this and has brought forward this legislation to address it.

Mr. Speaker, while I support the spirit and principle of the bill, the assignment of demerit points and fine amounts is something better done in the Traffic Safety Act regulations. Historically this is where these kinds of changes have always been made, and this is how we adjust sanctions for other traffic violations under the Traffic Safety Act. Making this change in the regulations rather than through legislation also gives government the flexibility to make future adjustments to distracted driving sanctions, should they arise, regardless of whether the Assembly is in session or not. It's quicker and easier to adjust it in regulation.

I want to be clear, Mr. Speaker, that my reluctance to deviate from the regular process through which we make adjustments to Traffic Safety Act violation sanctions should in no way be interpreted as a reluctance to strengthen penalties for distracted driving. I agree that current sanctions have not served to deter Alberta drivers from driving distracted, especially when it comes to using their phones behind the wheel. My job as Minister of Transportation is to ensure Albertans are able to get where they're going safely and efficiently. Any injury or a fatality on our roads is something I take very seriously and very personally.

In conclusion, I'd like to again thank the Member for Calgary-East for his work on this bill and bringing this issue to the forefront. Mr. Speaker, I'll be voting in support of this bill, and I urge all my hon. colleagues to do the same. I look forward to the remainder of this important debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak to Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014. I'm pleased to say that our caucus will be voting in favour of this legislation because it's a fundamental piece to ensuring greater levels of safety on our highways and our roads as they relate to Albertans travelling every day from place to place and ensuring that they do so as safely as possible.

This bill introduces new penalties for distracted drivers by increasing the fine and by giving out demerits. It essentially brings Alberta into line with the rest of the country. Strangely, up until now we were the only province that didn't offer demerits as a penalty for distracted driving. As well, until this bill is passed or adopted by the government and passed, we also have almost the lowest fines for distracted driving in the country.

4:10

My big concern, really, if we pass this bill is that the government actually act on it in a timely way, because we understand that as a private member's bill it's not, of course, binding. Really, relative to the rest of the country on something that is as important as this issue, we really are very far behind, Mr. Speaker. I don't know why that is exactly, but that's just the way it is. In B.C. they were slightly lower than us; \$167 was their highest fine. But they've now

changed their legislation and raised it. That's what the government has done, so it's actually been done as opposed to here, where we're just leaving it to a private member's bill. Of course, they also have demerits. In Saskatchewan the maximum fine is \$280. New legislation in Ontario makes the fine between \$300 and \$1,000, so you see that it's being taken more seriously there. Before that, it was \$280, still above where this bill takes us. Then, for instance, in Newfoundland we see that it goes up to \$400.

If we pass this bill and if the government then chooses to make it its own and make it law, because, of course, it's still very much discretionary, then we will be in the middle of the pack. So as much as everybody is making all these various sentimental comments about their concerns for safety, I think we need to keep in mind that all we're doing here is that we're passing a private member's bill that may or may not be brought into law by the provincial government, that takes us from dead, dead last to almost the middle of the pack. As everyone is getting super pumped to give themselves a party about how much they care about public safety, let's be sure that we keep it in context and remember that we're not really quite as excited about public safety as most of the rest of the country.

That being said, we're certainly pleased to at least support this first step for all the reasons that have already been identified. We understand that traffic fatalities and traffic injuries go up dramatically with distracted driving. We also understand that with the increasing complexity of communication devices there's greater and greater temptation for people to engage in distracted driving.

Distracted driving: it's really jaw-dropping when you consider the amount of time people will spend reading things on devices while driving a moving vehicle at, you know, 120 kilometres an hour.

Mr. Denis: That would be speeding.

Ms Notley: Indeed, it would be speeding, but it's something that has developed as a pattern. It costs not only families, of course, when horrible injuries occur, but it costs taxpayers to pay the cost of ameliorating those horrible injuries. So it makes perfect sense that we would move forward on this. As I say, it's long overdue.

We support both the addition of the demerit process as well as the increase in fines. We think that if we were as concerned about public safety as everybody here is talking about, we might actually be putting just a little bit more teeth in this legislation so that we're not moving ourselves carefully and quietly to almost the middle of the pack. Of course, we would also urge this government to move towards adopting this legislation or a more stringent version of it.

This is certainly a very important public safety issue, and I think that as our young people, who are probably more attached to their devices than we could ever possibly imagine, move towards having licences, then this problem is going to grow more and more significantly, and it's going to jeopardize and threaten the safety of Albertans even more. Then there are even some older people out there who have a growing reliance on their devices, as I'm seeing from across the way. That being said, I think that we all know – anyone with a teenager knows – that it's a new way of being. So this is something we need to act on.

I'm pleased to see it come forward. We're pleased to support it. I hope the government will take a more energetic approach to establishing both the demerits and the fines than we see here and, in any event, that we don't allow this bill to lie dormant once it has received the support of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank all speakers for their comments but particularly the Member for Calgary-East for bringing this to the forefront. This is an opportunity to save many lives. To the member: thank you very much.

The purpose of this bill would be to increase penalties for distracted driving, including a monetary penalty of \$250 and three demerits on each of the offences. Now, presently it's \$172 with no demerits. To give a comparative example, Mr. Speaker, if you exceed the speed limit by 15 to 30 k, which, of course, none of us ever would, it would be three demerits. If you failed to stop at a red light, it's also three demerits. If you failed to stop at a stop sign, it's also three demerits, and if you failed to yield the right-of-way to a pedestrian, it's also three demerits. Now, of course, if within two years you receive 15 demerits on your licence, you are suspended for 30 days. I think this strikes the right balance, adding those three demerits.

The original law came into effect in 2011, and I wanted to thank the former Minister of Transportation, who would often talk about people's texting machines as this law was coming in because there was a lot of controversy at that time. Many have, though, since said, Mr. Speaker, that this law does not do enough to deter people from distracted driving, and many have also said that the current law has not noticeably reduced incidents of distracted driving even anecdotally. I've often said in the past that this is something that we would consider if the evidence was there. Police agencies across the province have presented me with this evidence. But also speaking anecdotally, I drive a lot. I drive a lot between Calgary and Edmonton. I think I drove over 40,000 kilometres last year, and I see it absolutely everywhere. Some of the instances are absolutely shocking.

Last week, though, I had the opportunity to really put a human face to what can happen if an individual drives while they're being distracted. I met Renaye Wade. Now, two years ago she was in a car on the Yellowhead Trail when she was hit by a distracted driver and thrown into the path of a semi. I've seen some of the footage from that even. The startling thing is that she was in a coma for 34 days, Mr. Speaker, with a brain injury that very few survive. In addition to her brain injury she had a broken pelvis, tailbone, and jaw. Now, while I've met this remarkable woman and she's had an incredible recovery, some of her injuries continue to challenge her everyday life. What bothers me about this most, though, is how preventable this accident was. Not all accidents are preventable, but accidents relating to distracted driving are 100 per cent preventable.

Now, we've done major strides in this Assembly to tackle drunk driving. Drunk driving has been a problem since cars became widely used. However, cellphone use causing distracted driving is a relatively recent phenomenon. Cellphones have been rapidly adopted. I'm actually advised that this is the most rapidly adopted technology in human history, and it has become a staple in many vehicles. I, for one, have a cellphone charger in my vehicle out of what used to be a cigarette lighter when more people smoked. I'm sure many people here do as well.

I was just as surprised to learn how many people are addicted to their phones, and, Mr. Speaker, I'm guilty. Talk to anyone that works with me; I'm constantly on my phone, trying to keep up, and BBM is the best way to reach me. But that being said, the actual addiction is so prevalent that there is a name for it. It's nomophobia. Nomophobia: that's the fear of being without one's smart phone. That just shows how prevalent that is in our modern-day society. It's when you notice your cellphone is out of sight or, worse even, out of hearing range, and you stop everything until you find it. I can think of loved ones close to me that are in that category. While this is a recent compulsion occurring on a massive scale, it's no wonder distracted driving has become a serious issue.

I found out when I was doing some research here, Mr. Speaker, that Canadians send approximately 10 million messages per hour. Ten million text messages per hour. Of course, I'm not using my phone right now. All too often, though, these texts are sent while driving. This diversion reduces awareness, decision-making, or performance, leading to a risk of driver error or near crashes or crashes, sometimes even fatalities. A driver's awareness of their environment and level of attention to what is happening around him or her when using these devices while driving is reduced. It's time that we toughen up our legislation. It's time that we put demerits on distracted driving.

If I want to say thanks to anyone, it's the Minister of Transportation for hearing me harp about this every time I saw him for the last few months.

Distracted driving is a very real problem with very real consequences, but there are ways around this, Mr. Speaker. One of the simplest solutions for a driver to do is to purchase a Bluetooth device. I have. In fact, many new cars already have a Bluetooth as a standard feature. However, we're still seeing too many people talking on a handheld device, texting while driving, or engaging in other types of distracted behaviour.

4:20

Now, Mr. Speaker, if this legislation is adopted, we are not outliers in this country. I'll give you a comparative. B.C. has a \$167 fine with three demerits, and just to the east Saskatchewan has a \$280 fine with four demerits. That kind of puts us in the middle of the pack, as the last speaker had mentioned.

Also, many law enforcement officials have told me that there is a disturbingly upward trend in distracted driving. Clearly, the current legislation that we have needs to be beefed up. Increasing fines and introducing demerits is one way that we as legislators can help change attitudes and get the message through that distracted driving is not acceptable.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we all depend on vehicles in this Chamber. I'd say most if not all Albertans do depend on vehicles in one way or another, but the Supreme Court of Canada has repeatedly said that driving is a privilege, not a right. No one has a right to drive. It is a privilege that we enjoy as Canadians. That privilege can be taken away, and there have to be some parameters around that privilege. I would submit to you, sir, that we should never see situations like Renaye Wade's, where her right to live as an ordinary young woman has been severely changed because someone was abusing the privilege of driving.

Mr. Speaker, many people talk about legislation like this. They say that it's the nanny state; we shouldn't be doing this. Well, I again ask: what about Renaye's freedom in that particular case? That's the question that I ask. What about her freedom?

Similarly, Mr. Speaker – I'll close with this – I remember as a child that my father, Brian, and I would drive off into Medicine Hat to see my favourite aunt, Pat. As soon as we crossed the border, my father would say to me that this province doesn't have seat belt legislation, and we would think about how ridiculous that was. We adopted seat belt legislation in this province in 1987. At that particular time there was very low compliance in this province for seat belts. I would ask any one of us: do we even think twice about getting into a car, starting it up, and going without putting our seat belt on? In fact, 95.1 per cent compliance for seat belts in 2011. I think that's great. I'd like to see that same level of compliance when we talk about distracted driving. The first step is passing this legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to speak to Bill 204, brought forward by the Member for Calgary-East. The bill will affect the following legislation, the Traffic Safety Act, by adding a subsection that will increase the distracted driving fines to \$250 from the current \$172 and give three demerits. You know, the polls have been done, and 93 per cent of Canadians believe that distracted driving is a problem in Canada, and 86 per cent of people have supported demerit penalties for the offence. Distracted driving has taken over. I think it's the number one killer now. I think it's even overtaken impaired driving. When the law was brought in in 2011, I think we should have gone much further, even with the penalty. I wouldn't mind if the penalty was raised not to \$250. Let's hurt the people who are not obeying the law heavily in the pocket. Maybe they will – you know, the demerits are kind of hidden. A person gets demerits, and they forget about this. If there's a heavier penalty, maybe they will keep that in mind before they break the law because they know it's going to hurt them in the pocket.

This is very good legislation. You know, when we are driving on the highway, I have followed people. They do their texting. They're talking on the phone. They're in the inside lane, and they're blocking the traffic. Both lanes are blocked. People are getting, like, mad. They're getting road rage on the highway because people get so upset. Then people are racing to pass the guy on the highway, and that has caused accidents or fender-benders, right? With the distracted driving, like Renaye Wade – she was here – it's totally going to cost somebody's life, or some person could get maimed for the rest of their life, or they're in a wheelchair or whatever, which just costs us money in health care costs as well.

You know, I don't know if it's the enforcement. We brought the law in in 2011, and it didn't make any difference. You look around. People are talking on the phone. They are texting. They are doing whatever. People think a car is there like it's their home, it's their private property, and they can do whatever they want in their car, but that should not be the case. We can bring in all kinds of laws. If there's no enforcement – I think that education and enforcement are going to be the key in saving people's lives and saving people from not getting into accidents, saving people from not killing innocent people.

With this law I think we should follow Ontario's lead, not \$250, you know, \$250 to \$1,000 and three demerits. Let's go all the way and make people think that, you know, breaking the law is going to cost them dearly. I think about the Alberta Liberals. Way back I think it was Mr. Hugh MacDonald who brought in some kind of motion or law against distracted driving. The Alberta Liberal caucus has always been supportive of some kind of law because things evolve. We've got cellphones. We've got the technology, and we have been addicted to the phone, even myself. I've got Bluetooth. Most of the time I'm on the phone, too, but I have Bluetooth. We have all done it. It's not like we're immune to this because I think the cellphone has really taken over our lives. We can't even sleep at night without the phone right on the headboard or whatever.

If we have to legislate to change people's habits, you know, so be it. If it's going to save lives, so be it. If the fines are going to be heavy, so be it. If we have to bring in demerits, so be it. I'm glad finally something is getting done to enforce, to bring in some strict legislation, which will make people think twice before they break the law. Like I said, no matter what kind of law we bring in, if there's no enforcement, I don't think the law is as good as the paper it's written on. So we have to think about enforcement. We have to

put more money into enforcement if we want to have laws which are going to be effective.

With that, Mr. Speaker, we have always supported safety laws, and I'm supporting this Bill 204 as well wholeheartedly. Let's put more teeth into this. Let's be more strict than what it is.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Speaker, I am certainly in favour of this legislation, and an essential component of Bill 204 is the addition of penalty demerit points to the monetary fine that is already in place when charging a citizen with distracted driving. As we've heard here today, at present the repercussion for a distracted driving charge is a penalty of \$172. There are no demerit points alongside this monetary penalty. Bill 204 calls for amendments to the Traffic Safety Act to include a steeper monetary fine as well as the introduction of three demerit points for distracted driving offenders. These amendments are proposed to change the penalty for those offences.

Mr. Speaker, the penalties proposed in Bill 204 are the three demerit points and increasing the monetary penalty from \$172 to \$250. It is suggested that an increase in the monetary penalty and the provision of demerit points would lead to the improvement of road conditions by successfully deterring distracted driving. The increase in the monetary fine intends to create a bigger impact on the offender by making them dig deeper into their pockets to pay for their offence. Bill 204 helps to leave a more profound impact on the offender by changing and increasing the consequences provided to them. By increasing the monetary fine, there is a deterrent to the Alberta driver by targeting their pocketbooks. It has been suggested that the driver is more likely to follow the rules of the road when there is a more substantial cost to them for their actions. As it now stands, a \$172 fine is provided to drivers who plead guilty. The increase should make a substantial difference in their driving habits but perhaps only for a short term.

4:30

The hon. member, though, is suggesting long-term consequences in order to have a stronger impact on the driver and their future decision-making. The provision of demerit points is a longer lasting consequence due to the fact that demerits may only be rewarded back to the driver after one year. Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's bill directly takes into account the risks of distracted driving with an emphasis on long-term consequences. These long-term consequences support safe driving practices due to the fact that drivers have to work around lost demerit points. This will leave them with less demerit room on their licence for infractions should they find themselves in that position.

Distracted drivers are three times more likely to be involved in a crash than attentive drivers, making it a serious concern for Albertans. Mr. Speaker, with 90 per cent of collisions in Alberta being attributed to driver error, it is safe to say that distracted driving is a serious issue that we as a government have been focused on targeting. With the exception of Nunavut every province and territory in Canada has implemented laws dealing with distracted driving infractions, with an emphasis on cellphone use by drivers.

The Alberta government is dedicated to achieving lower numbers of distracted driving infractions as well as related fatalities. Efficient ways to effectively prevent infractions are taken very

seriously within our government. Bill 204, as proposed by the hon. member, suggests that the increased monetary fine as well as provision of demerit points as the driver's penalty will be efficient as a preventative means.

Mr. Speaker, penalties specific to distracted driving infractions are set within the Provincial Offences Procedure Act. The demerit point program alongside the service of documents regulation oversees demerits for traffic regulation. Demerits for distracted driving have not been brought up within the demerit point program and service of documents regulation. The hon. member's bill moves for contemplation of amendments to the Traffic Safety Act in order to assist in the enforcement of the Alberta distracted driving law.

Other jurisdictions and their distracted driving legislation have undergone a series of incidents where monetary fines are increasing. Ontario is suggesting that they plan also to increase sanctions by including three demerit points and setting the monetary fine at \$1,000. British Columbia is moving to stiffen their policy on penalizing distracted drivers though they already include three demerit points and a \$167 fine. Repercussions to distracted driving infractions range across this country, with a movement at present to include demerit points and increase the fine.

The Alberta government takes these infractions seriously and has every interest in driver and pedestrian safety. Mr. Speaker, every year the number of people killed on our roads is approximate to the population of the number of students you would find in the average elementary school class within our province. Distracted driving can directly affect the driver in ways similar to impaired driving. With this information we know that distracted driving penalties are a serious consideration. The complex task of properly operating a motor vehicle must be taken seriously. Driving is a privilege and not a right.

Mr. Speaker, those of you present here today and who were here last week would have met a young lady, Renaye Wade, who has undergone, as we have heard, a horrendous incident in her life. Many of us were present yesterday when we met on the steps of the Alberta Legislature to mark the second anniversary of this horrific incident that changed Renaye Wade's life forever. Renaye has become a spokesperson for change. We must do better. The financial and emotional costs to families is so immense. Yesterday Renaye outlined the cost to Albertans in the form of how many doctors and how many surgeries and how many hours of rehabilitation that she has had to undergo because for just one second someone's attention was not on the road ahead.

Mr. Speaker, it's very important to consider road safety and pursue the best practices possible in doing so. I commend the hon. member for bringing Bill 204 forward. The issue of traffic safety is important to Albertans and to their government. I look forward to seeing this bill passed by this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and contribute to the debate on Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. I would like to thank the hon. member for being a strong advocate for promoting road and traffic safety and responsible driving.

It is important for Albertans to understand that approximately 25 per cent of all collisions involve driver distraction, and anything we can do to help change serious or risky distracted driving behaviours will have a tremendous benefit. Driving in the province of Alberta is a privilege and not a right. The research speaks for itself, Mr.

Speaker. Distracted driving is a form of impaired driving as a driver's judgment is compromised when they're not fully focused on the road. A driver who is distracted is more likely to be in a crash than drivers who have two hands on the steering wheel and eyes focused on the road. We need to discourage distracted driving and to reduce collisions, injuries, and fatalities resulting from this type of behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, if passed and proclaimed, Bill 204 would amend section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act by adding the following after subsection (4). I thought it would be of interest to review what, actually, the bill states. It states:

A person who is guilty of an offence under section 115.1 [titled Cellular telephones, electronic devices, etc.], 115.2 [Display screen visible to driver prohibited], 115.3 [Global positioning system] or 115.4 [Prohibited activities].

Also, it includes

- (a) is liable to a fine of \$250, and
- (b) shall be assessed 3 demerit points in accordance with the regulations.

Currently the penalty for distracted driving is a fine of \$172, and offenders are not penalized with demerit points. Anyone wishing further information in this area can refer to the Provincial Offences Procedure Act procedures regulation. Also, it's important to note that in Alberta drivers that exhibit what is deemed to be more serious or risky driving behaviour could be charged with driving carelessly under the current Traffic Safety Act. The penalty for the existing driving carelessly offence carries six demerit points and a fine of \$402.

As we debate Bill 204, we should consider examining the issue from other jurisdictional perspectives. For example, in June of 2014 the Northwest Territories Department of Transportation almost tripled the fines for distracted driving from \$115 to \$322, which include a 15 per cent victim of crime surcharge. In Ontario the provincial police have indicated that distracted driving is the number one killer on their roadways. In that province it is against the law to operate hand-held communication and electronic entertainment devices, which include iPods, GPS, MP3 players, cellphones, laptops, and DVD players, while you are driving and to view display screens unrelated to your driving. If you break this law, you can receive a fine of \$225 plus a victim surcharge and court fee for a total of \$280 if settled out of court and a fine of up to \$500 if you receive a summons or fight your ticket.

Although the province of Ontario has seen success with their distracted driving law and public education efforts, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recently referred Bill 31, the Transportation Statute Law Amendment Act (Making Ontario's Roads Safer), 2015, to the committee for general government. Highlights of the making Ontario's roads safer act include increased fines for distracted driving, from a current range of \$60 to \$500 upward to a range of \$300 to \$1,000. This would become one of the highest fine ranges in Canada for distracted driving. In addition, it was proposed that regulatory changes would apply three demerit points and add a distracted driving prohibition to the existing graduated licence system driver's licence conditions.

4:40

In October 2014 the province of British Columbia – traffic violations are under the heading Careless Driving Prohibited, section 144, where it states in subsection (1):

A person must not drive a motor vehicle on a highway

- (a) without due care and attention,
- (b) without reasonable consideration for other persons using the highway, or
- (c) at a speed that is excessive relative to the road, traffic, visibility or weather conditions.

Also, it includes subsection (2), which states:

A person who contravenes subsection (1)(a) or (b) is liable on conviction to a fine of not less than \$100 and, subject to this minimum fine, section 4 of the Offence Act applies.

A driver found using a hand-held electronic device while driving may receive a \$167 traffic violation ticket that also carries three penalty points, Mr. Speaker. Offences and infractions that include penalty points will remain on a person's driving record in Ontario for five years and can lead to further penalties, including a driving prohibition. Stricter limitations are also imposed on drivers in the graduated licensing program, GLP, as risks are demonstrated to be higher among new and young drivers due to a combination of inexperience and a tendency toward greater risk taking and significantly higher than average use of electronic devices, and all combined make this group of drivers particularly vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, these examples demonstrate that legislators are taking a renewed active interest to fight the problem of distracted driving head-on. Distracted driving is both dangerous and intolerable. Many had initially hoped that education and awareness campaigns against distracted driving would result in changing driving behaviours. In many cases it is too early to determine whether increased severity in penalties will have the desired effect in jurisdictions that have adopted such measures.

But what we do know, Mr. Speaker, is that demerit points are a far more onerous penalty than mere fines. As such, there is good reason to believe that adding demerits as a penalty may be a far more compelling deterrent for distracted driving. The increased penalties proposed by Bill 204 simply reflect a broader intent and a broader trend that have been occurring in other provincial jurisdictions. It is clear that the hon. Member for Calgary-East believes that we should, and he makes a very strong case for the change.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to add to the debate. I support Bill 204 and look forward to hearing alternate perspectives. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today to speak to support Bill 204, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. I would like to begin by acknowledging the efforts that this hon. member has made, not only representing his constituency but, actually, all Albertans. I'd like to add that as the MLA for Calgary-Hawkwood I personally have met numerous constituents who expressed similar concerns to those this hon. member has brought forward, and I'm sure they will be very happy to see me speak on their behalf to support this one.

Bill 204 has significant value in that it brings the issue of traffic safety to the forefront to be debated and discussed. For this purpose here, I'd like to bring some studies and facts showing how Canada and the U.S. are contributing to this issue here. Federally, Canada has made strides in areas of education and awareness regarding distracted driving. National statistics point to a very strong correlation between distracted driving and road safety. According to the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators, or CCMTA, distracted driving is a diversion of attention from driving as a result of drivers' focusing on a nondriving object, activity, event, or person. They included a whole list of things, including using cellphones.

The organization conducted studies and has concluded that using devices while driving reduces drivers' awareness of their environment to the extent that they are not paying attention to what

is happening around them. The study concluded that it has shown an increase in chances of a collision from 38 per cent to 400 per cent. That's a very large number. In 2006 a survey of the Canadian public about distracted driving was conducted, and it found that two-thirds of respondents were concerned about cellphone use while driving. The study focused on cellphone use while driving in the previous seven days. It was reported that 37 per cent of respondents admitted to using their cellphones, but this was even higher in those aged 16 to 34; it rose 55 per cent. Overall, about 3 per cent of Canadian drivers were observed to be using cellphones by the study commissioned by the CCMTA.

Another study in Canada was carried out in 2009 and 2010. This one indicated that Alberta is among the worst in our nation for offenders, people driving while being distracted, with 4.9 per cent of drivers being observed using cellphones while driving. The next-worst offender is Nova Scotia, with 3.6 per cent.

The public awareness about the risks of distracted driving in general and the use of telecommunication equipment while driving in particular can be increased so that distracted driving is no longer acceptable. Even though the use of hands-free devices is not prohibited for most drivers, research has shown that they can be just as distracting as hand-held devices. Awareness of the risk of hands-free equipment needs to be increased, and I think our Canadian colleagues and CCMTA stakeholders have done a great job of raising public awareness. Recently they launched the Leave the Phone Alone pledge campaign, and the whole purpose for that is to increase public awareness.

Mr. Speaker, let me take a few seconds to compare how our brothers to the south, the U.S., are comparing to us in terms of their studies and research in this area. The U.S. Department of Transportation regulatory campaign against distracted driving is a multimode effort that includes automobiles, trains, planes, commercial vehicles. On September 30, 2009, President Obama signed an executive order directing federal employees not to engage in text messages while driving government-owned vehicles, when using electronic equipment supplied by the government, and while driving privately owned vehicles when they are on official government business. The order has encouraged federal contractors and other entities doing business with government to adopt and reinforce their own policies balancing texting while driving on the job.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, or FMCSA, banned commercial truck and bus drivers from texting while driving in September 2010. Later, in November 2011, it banned all hand-held cellphones used by commercial drivers. In February 2011 the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration banned texting with electronic devices while operating a motor vehicle containing hazardous materials in conjunction with the proposed FMCSA act. The Federal Railroad Administration similarly banned railroad employees from using cellphones or electronic devices on the job following the September 2008 Metrolink crash in Chatsworth, California, that killed 25 people.

Many people in the United States are in the process of enacting laws such as banning texting while driving or using the graduated drivers licensing system for teen drivers to help raise awareness about the dangers of distracted driving.

4:50

According to the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in 2009, 16 per cent of fatalities and 20 per cent of injuries in the U.S. involved a driving distraction. The highest proportion of distracted drivers involved in fatal crashes was under 20 years of age, 16 per cent, followed by those aged 20 to 29, 13

per cent, and light truck drivers and motorists, who are most often distracted, at 12 per cent.

Analysis involving eye glance behaviours indicated that eyes off the road for a duration of greater than two seconds significantly increase the risk of crashes and near-crash situations. Furthermore, the study found that secondary task disruptions such as cellphones contribute to over 22 per cent of crashes and near crashes in the U.S.

Mr. Speaker, as we can see, Bill 204 is a very timely piece of legislation. Again, I would like to thank my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-East for bringing up this piece of legislation in a timely fashion so we can strengthen the safety of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by Calgary-Fort.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. I also want to thank the Member for Calgary-East for bringing this forward. I think it is important legislation that we need to move forward on.

I also wanted to take a moment to bring to light another issue, and that is that – I don't know about you – certainly I see someone driving distractedly at least once a day when I'm out there. I mean, it's at least once a day. These people, when they are doing this, are a danger not just to us who share the road with them but to everybody else out there who is sharing the road with them. I do believe that there's something more that we do have to do, and that is that we've got to bring people's attention to it.

Now, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek said that what she does is that sometimes she beeps her horn – okay? – just to say: hey, you shouldn't be doing that. Maybe that's something that we should all be doing whenever we see it occurring. You know, just a little beep-beep could then become a signal for everybody: "Okay. Watch out. Somebody is not paying attention here." Maybe this is something that we should just sort of pay attention to ourselves, and perhaps it might also help bring attention generally to distracted driving. It's maybe something that might catch on to such an extent that people actually stop doing it. I think it's something that might start shaming people to the point where they realize that this is an activity that they do have to stop. So I'd like to bring that to everyone's attention as a suggestion as to how we can all be part of a solution.

Again, thank you very much to the Member for Calgary-East for bringing this forward.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'm mindful of the time, hon. members, but if we're brief, we might be able to get two more speakers in.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by Calgary-West.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and contribute to the debate on Bill 204, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act 2014, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. Today I would like to thank the hon. member for bringing Bill 204 for debate.

Mr. Speaker, if passed, Bill 204 would amend the Traffic Safety Act by increasing the severity of penalties for persons accused of distracted driving. Currently Alberta experiences one of the lowest fines for distracted driving in comparison with other provinces. Widely supported by Albertans, Bill 204 would introduce demerit points for each distracted driving offence plus an increase in fines. Each offence will be met with a monetary penalty of \$250 plus three demerit points issued on the person's driving record.

Today 90 per cent of collisions are believed to be caused by driver error. Hence, distracted driving is a major issue that must be addressed with diligence and the promise to ensure the safety of

Albertans on the road. Mr. Speaker, in 2004 there were reported 387 fatalities due to distracted driving in Alberta. Soon after 2006 the government launched the Alberta traffic safety plan, which was, unfortunately, still met with 453 distracted driving fatalities. Now, one would believe that with such an initiative we would see fatalities decline, but it was not the case. Instead, fatalities rose by over 60. Finally, in 2010, after the renewal of the traffic safety plan, we saw a record low of 344 fatalities. While this can be seen as a small victory, our job as legislators is still not over.

We currently have one of the lowest distracted driving fines in Canada, with fatalities decreasing in provinces that have implemented harsher penalties. Mr. Speaker, we must implement fines that will deter Albertans from endangering road users. Campaigns alone are not enough; they must be met with legislation that supports them. Furthermore, because our devices are integrated into everyday life, drivers mistakenly assume they can be used safely while operating the vehicle. Nearly 3 Canadian drivers out of every 4 admit to driving distracted on a regular basis. We must work toward lowering the statistics. Data available today conclude that 8 out of every 10 collisions are caused by distracted driving. Text messaging creates a crash risk 23 times worse than driving while not distracted.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, as of 2011 there are more than 352 million cellular phones in use in North America. Nearly 15 people die each day in the U.S. in crashes related to distracted driving, and another 1,200 people are injured. Using hand-held cellular phones while driving is now illegal in 71 countries. This is a telltale sign that change must happen now, and legislators must take notice. Campaigns alone are not going to promote the change that we urgently need to protect Albertans. They must implement it in conjunction with appropriate legislative measures. For this I congratulate the hon. Member for Calgary-East, who is bringing this forward, and I'm looking forward to hearing from other members.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-West, I believe you are next on the speaking list. You have about a minute and a half before the clock will summon us otherwise.

Mr. Ellis: Well, then, I shall be brief, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. It is an honour, of course, to rise and speak to you about Bill 204, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014. My focus today is to explain what distracted driving means and how this impacts a person's ability to drive, which can ultimately lead to accidents. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for bringing this bill forward.

The traffic safety amendment act would enhance the Traffic Safety Act by proposing that monetary penalties be increased from \$172 to \$250 plus the reduction of three demerit points for every offence. The Traffic Safety Act, introduced in 2007, was the first strategy of its kind in Canada and was due to the significantly high number of collisions, deaths, and injuries on Alberta roads. Since the implementation of the plan the numbers have declined considerably, and of course over the past four years traffic fatalities have dropped by nearly 32 per cent. I'm certainly proud to say that I myself have written some of those tickets while I was a police officer in the past. You know, for me, of course, I look at incentives as being a way to further assist in preventing people from driving while distracted, and I certainly believe that this act would help.

5:00

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I do hesitate to interrupt, but as indicated, the time limit for consideration of this item of business has now concluded, as the clock has just signalled.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed with the next item of business, I had indicated earlier today, when the Government House Leader rose on a point of order, that I would be rendering a decision on that point of order tomorrow. However, I have since spoken with at least one of the opposition members and a couple of others who asked about the ruling. So with their good co-operation I need to indicate a ruling on it today.

I would also preface my comments by saying just a couple of things very briefly. First, whereas many other jurisdictions are quite restricted in what is allowed and what is not allowed to be tabled, our protocols and procedures in this House are actually very permissive. It's not infrequent that we have seen the tablings of such items as affidavits, statements of claim as well as other documents that may or may not contain certain allegations.

Secondly, I would note that previous Speakers have in fact brought this matter of what is appropriate to be tabled and what isn't appropriate to be tabled to the attention of House leaders, and I would again request that our current House leaders might want to review that matter yet again.

In conclusion, I have reviewed this matter, and noting what the past precedents of this House have been, there is no point of order in this instance. That will conclude this matter.

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: Hon. ND opposition leader, is that you who is up next? Please proceed, then.

Coal-generated Power

507. Ms Notley moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to commit to the immediate study and drafting of a plan to phase out all coal-generated power in Alberta by 2030.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak to Motion 507 in Motions Other than Government Motions. I will say that this is kind of exciting for me because in my seven years as an MLA this is the first time our caucus has actually gotten either a motion or a bill up while the House is sitting. So, yes, it's a rare thing. Anyway, I'm pleased to be able to speak to this motion.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, this is an important issue, Mr. Speaker. In October the Premier himself stated that Alberta could phase out coal, quote, more quickly than anybody is doing on the U.S. side of the border and that given that coal plants in Alberta, some of them anyway, are nearing the end of their useful lives, this, quote, gives us an opportunity to do the right thing and phase out coal. That, of course, was a correct statement.

In addition, we know, according to a poll done by the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, that 80 per cent of Albertans when asked would like to see Alberta rely more on wind power to help reduce reliance on coal.

We also know that in the fall of 2013 Albertans witnessed the second-largest coal tailings spill in the history of our country as a result of a dam that the government didn't actually even know existed, let alone had inspected. I, frankly, think that the cost of that particular brilliant piece of management is one that we still have not gotten the full accounting of. Certainly, I know that we've not received the report yet about how that happened, so another thing that is overdue. That tailings breach occurred at the same time that the province of Ontario was preparing to shut down its last coal plant and only a year or two after Alberta finished the process of approving yet another coal plant.

You know, there are a lot of reasons why we should be focusing on reducing our reliance on coal, but just let me talk a little bit about some of the targets that I think are reasonable for us to consider. They're not definitive because – you know what? – here's the thing. The government is the one that has access to the resources and the studies and the information in order to actually come up with the best research plan forward. An opposition of four doesn't have as many resources. To some extent that's why we're bringing this forward today as a motion, because we think that where this needs to start is by having this Assembly approve the motion to have a study conducted and completed using all the resources that the government has at its disposal. That would be the responsible thing to do.

We think that we could probably talk realistically about adopting a target of getting at least 90 per cent of electricity from renewable sources by 2050 by phasing out coal entirely by 2030, by ensuring that we adopt a target, at least, of trying to meet 50 per cent of our electricity requirements from renewable energy and energy conservation by 2030, and by adopting a target of meeting 20 per cent of electricity requirements from renewable energy and energy conservation by 2020. None of that is undoable, Mr. Speaker. All that it requires is strong leadership and a commitment to doing better by our environment.

Now, this government has been very good at making grand statements and putting out a lot of press releases about its so-called world-class environmental initiatives. We know that that's mostly just paper. Probably the most clear example of that is this government's climate change strategy, which has been roundly criticized by our Auditor General. Indeed, in 2008, when our climate change strategy was first put forward, it included a number of targets, but within that, it included a business-as-usual strategy: this is what it's going to look like if we don't act now. Well, guess what? We're actually in excess of our business-as-usual strategy. Not only have we not met our targets; we've actually exceeded the predictions of where we would be in the absence of doing absolutely nothing.

So that's where we are, and that's, of course, why our Auditor General has taken the time to tell us that we do such a bad job on that. That's really problematic, Mr. Speaker, because the fact of the matter is that scientists have come to a consensus that we need to ensure that we do not have the temperature of the Earth go up more than two degrees by 2100, or we're looking at catastrophic consequences. Yet the path that we're on right now as a world means that we're going to hit that level at 2035. So everybody – everybody – has an obligation to do their part, and that includes Albertans. There is stuff we can do, but we haven't been doing it.

Now, the fact of the matter is that we also need to do this from the perspective of promoting and supporting our energy industry overall, as has been talked about countless days and times by folks over on the other side. We have a problem with everybody wanting to take our nonrenewable energy product in their markets, and we have a bit of a black eye, and we deserve that black eye. But there is a strategy to win back some of that social licence, and that is to

potentially eliminate our reliance on coal. Indeed, the greenhouse gas emissions produced right now annually by coal are almost the same amount as what's produced in the oil sands as a whole. It's not quite as much, but it's close, and if we could eliminate that greenhouse gas emission from coal, we would earn a great deal of credibility internationally.

Now, this all sounds really good, but the problem is: will we do it? You know, there are lots of nice proclamations and statements that we've heard, but here's where we sit right now. We're the only province in the country without an energy efficiency strategy. We're the only province in the country without a renewable energy strategy. As I've said, our climate change strategy, which was meant to be redone because the Auditor General told us it was not worth the paper it was written on at this point, has been delayed and delayed and delayed. Of course, now it will be delayed until after the election.

So our record is not good, but we can do better. Now, why would we want to do better? Well, there are the health issues. We know that physicians that are opposed to coal-fired electricity talk about the cost that is experienced through the most measurable health consequences, roughly \$300 million a year as a result of visits to ERs, admissions, asthma, and lost days due to asthma simply because of the impact of coal in our environment right now. So there's a lot of money that could be saved there.

5:10

Imagine how many pre-election press conferences the Minister of Health could have if he had another \$300 million a year. It would be just a gold mine. Also, imagine the health that would be protected and the number of Albertans who would not suffer from the negative health consequences of us being the province in the country that relies the most – the most – by a long shot on coal-fired electricity.

What we need, then, Mr. Speaker, is a plan. We need to do more than talk about why this is a good idea and how it might be a plan and how maybe sometimes we say: you know, hey, that's not a bad idea. We need to do more than that. We need a comprehensive plan, and we need one that all Albertans can be part of. That's why we're bringing this motion forward. Because if that is done, then all Albertans can engage, and we can learn about the pros and the cons: what could work, what won't work, what kinds of challenges we would face, what kind of sacrifices we might have to face, all those kinds of things. But we could do it together, and we could achieve something about which we could be very proud. It would be good for our health, it would be good for our environment, and it would even be good for our energy industry. So it's something that we need to do more work on.

There are so many ways we can do it. We can make an immediate phase-out by relying more on natural gas. We can rely on cogeneration. Ultimately, we have the authority to undo the gift that the Harper government gave to our coal plants by extending their life to 50 years. Move it back to 40, and then look at how we can compensate the three plants that could argue that they didn't have fair notice on that one. We need to look at renewables. We need to look at wind. We need to look at solar. We need to look at hydro. But we're not doing that on an organized basis, and, Mr. Speaker, that is something that is long overdue in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to Motion 507 today, which seeks to phase out all coal-generated power in Alberta by 2030. I do agree, obviously, that reducing coal-

fired generation is one action to address greenhouse gases and climate change, but we're already working at addressing this issue from a balanced social, environmental, and economic perspective. This triple-bottom-line perspective is consistent with this government's approach in addressing all greenhouse gases across our economy, not just in power production, which the member herself pointed out.

One of the most notable actions on this issue is the federal government's new, stricter rules for greenhouse gases from coal-fired plants. Set out in November of 2012, these rules require Alberta's coal plants to retire after they've been in service for between 45 and 50 years. Alternatively, they will need to meet clean-as-gas emissions standards; that is, produce the same emissions level as burning natural gas. Under this schedule roughly 60 per cent of Alberta's coal-fired units will retire by 2029. This is a good time to point out that we're already seeing a decrease in coal-fired generation in Alberta. In 2014 natural gas generation capacity exceeded coal generation for the first time in Alberta's history.

The second action on this issue, Mr. Speaker, is the specified gas emitter regulation. This regulation requires large emitters to reduce their emissions intensity or pay \$15 per tonne into the climate change and emissions management fund. This money is used to fund innovative technologies. To date \$249 million has been invested into 100 clean energy projects such as wind energy and waste heat recycling. And I should point out that the coal industry pays the vast majority of this \$249 million.

A third action, Mr. Speaker, is government's participation in the Clean Air Strategic Alliance Association, or CASAA. CASAA provides strategies to assess and improve air quality for Albertans, and its partners include industry, government, and nongovernmental organizations. CASAA's electricity framework has provided a set of recommendations to government for the management of nitrogen oxide, sulphur dioxide, particulate matter, and mercury air emissions from the electricity sector. All of these actions are being reviewed by the Climate Change Task Force, and these actions are only part of the story.

As I mentioned earlier, Alberta is in the middle of a transition away from coal. In 1990 81 per cent of our electricity came from coal. Currently coal-fired generation accounts for much less than half of Alberta's generation capacity mix. Our system planner, the Alberta Electric System Operator, projects our current coal will decrease by a further 10 per cent by 2030. That would mean a total of only 2,500 megawatts of coal-fired generation remaining in less than 20 years. With this transition in mind, Mr. Speaker, it's clear that power generators are making the prudent choice. We don't want to make any knee-jerk reactions that will undermine the reliability of our electricity system. Albertans expect the lights will turn on when they flick the switch, and coal-fired generation is a critical part of meeting our daily minimum demand or baseload. It is relatively inexpensive and reliable. The cost of building different types of generation to replace coal in a shortened time would have a material effect on Albertans' power bills.

Mr. Speaker, earlier than planned retirement of coal-fired generation would undermine Alberta's open and competitive electricity market. In this market investor-owned companies decide what type of generation will be built and when. The companies that built our existing coal plants did so with the expectation that they would recover their costs over 50 years. Forcing the retirement of the newer units in 2030 would mean that the companies would not realize the full value of their investments. They would lose six to 31 years of operational capacity. But it's not just about the losses; it's what the losses would mean for Alberta's electricity system and for Alberta's consumers.

We only need to look to jurisdictions like Ontario or Germany, for example – often-cited Germany – where well-meaning measures have been taken to promote alternative energy. To accomplish an aggressive phase-out of coal the Ontario ratepayers have paid for delays in new plants and cost overruns. Ontario consumers have seen their bills increase dramatically, and they're expected to continue to increase in the future. Mr. Speaker, Ontario currently charges consumers a global adjustment, which adjusts for the regulated costs of the nuclear and hydro generation, the cost of new gas-fired plants to replace coal generation, renewable electricity build, nuclear refurbishment, and contracted rates paid to existing generators. The global adjustment levels for Ontario for October and November 2014 were about \$100 per megawatt hour. For context, the year to average pool price in Alberta was \$52 a megawatt hour. So if we were to adopt Ontario's global adjustment level, it would triple our power prices, and I'm pretty sure the opposition's polls didn't ask whether Alberta consumers would be willing to bear a triple electricity rate.

This is also true in Germany, where there has been a sharp increase in household electricity bills to offset the subsidies provided by the government to promote the transition. Germany has drifted back to coal power, and unfortunately much of that is produced by brown coal, which has very significant greenhouse gas effects. The graph I saw the other day: in Germany last year 47 per cent of their electricity production was from coal fire.

At a time when Alberta's growth and demand for electricity has been amongst the highest in North America, we cannot go down that road, Mr. Speaker. We cannot cause investors to lose confidence in our system. Over the next 20 years our electricity system will need \$20 billion worth of investments to meet the projected demand. This includes building 12,000 to 14,000 megawatts of new generation to replace the coal units scheduled to retire and build additional capacity to accommodate our growth. The only other way to accomplish this, short of the market-based system that we have, is to do public.

Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that in addition to Ontario's current electricity rates, Ontario is carrying \$44 billion in utility debt. Quebec carries \$53.7 billion in utility debt.

Mrs. McQueen: How much does Alberta have?

Mr. Oberle: Alberta has zero, Mr. Speaker, in utility debt. We have built an electricity system larger than the size of the province of Saskatchewan since deregulation with not a penny in public debt, and that's the way we're going to keep going.

Mr. Speaker, it's for these reasons that I will not support this well-intended motion, yet I support the intent. We can and we will do better. We will release a climate change strategy that will put Alberta at the forefront. We will release a greenhouse gas strategy and build upon that a renewable energy strategy, electricity strategy that the member calls for, because it's the right thing to do, and it will place Alberta at the forefront. We'll be ready for Paris this year.

5:20

I cannot support this motion in its current form. Our transition away from coal-fired generation needs to balance the pace of change with reliability and the cost to consumers. We need to ensure the reliability of our system and at the same time look at opportunities for innovation. I believe that a responsible course is already being charted out for the phase-out of coal-fired electricity and that we have a full understanding of the effects of early shutdown.

Mr. Speaker, I submit that this motion should be rejected. Thank you for the opportunity to address it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. members, I have quite a long list of speakers, so I just note that.

I'll recognize next the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the Minister of ESRD.

Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hearing the minister – and I'm going to respectfully disagree with what the minister just said about being so-called debt free. Alberta subsidizes its market, so-called free market, with a zero-congestion policy to the tune of tens of billions of dollars, and I'm not so sure what the public gets from that. What the motion calls for is a plan to accelerate the decommission of these coal plants. What would that do for Alberta if we actually came up with a plan that sped that up?

Now, this is what's interesting about it. We have a problem accessing international markets. Everyone here recognizes that. Our own industry knows that. What's the problem? Well, the problem really is environmental. We know this. We see the argument south of the border. It is the environmental argument that is hurting us accessing that market, and it still haunts us today. We speak a lot of good words about what we're doing, but what we're not doing is demonstrating actual progress. So as the minister points out about our specified emitters regulations, what it's not doing is actually achieving results. What we need to do is actually achieve results, and we're not doing that. So if we were to put in place a plan – and that's the difference here. We're not talking about shutting the lights off; we're talking about putting in place a plan that could get us further down the road where we can demonstrate to our markets that we are not just promising but we are delivering on environmental progress. That is really the key here.

Now, I'm going to back up a little bit because I want to talk about the SRD committee dealing with the issue of hydroelectricity. We have two primary sources of delivering on an accelerated pace. One is that we could tap into dams. Site C in Manitoba is actually looking for a customer source, a market to access, because they lost the U.S. central states as a market. They've got an incredible excess of hydroelectricity. Now, here's the key. With our zero-congestion policy that we instituted in this province, what happens almost on a daily basis with our coal plants is that B.C. Hydro comes and purchases electricity for around 3 cents a kilowatt hour almost every evening as they dial back their dams, and then during the day, the very next day, they're selling it back to us for 6 cents a kilowatt hour. Those are rough figures.

But that continues on a regular basis. Is that to the advantage of the consumers in Alberta who are paying for all these excess transmission lines so they can do this? We can actually turn around in a plan and start putting some of our own assets to work for us. If we wanted just to develop our own hydro, which I'm in favour of, we can do that. We have to, though, come up with a plan on how we're going to do it.

The second thing is that by running an east-west grid connecting Manitoba and B.C. Hydro – we have the ability to tap into B.C. Hydro immediately, but we've got to get Saskatchewan and Manitoba on board. [interjections] Manitoba is on board. They need another customer. Now, you can giggle about that, but you can't compete with that. That's the problem. The cost of that hydroelectricity is that much cheaper than coal.

The thing about coal is – and it's well established. The Harvard six-city study, which is about 50 years old and has been re-evaluated and built upon decade after decade, shows that for every 10 microns of particulate matter the death rate in a city of a million people increases by 100. Now, here we've got a perfect formula

because you're dealing in the Edmonton area with a city of approximately 1 million people. This gives you an idea of what we're dealing with, never mind talking about nitrogen oxide, sulphur dioxide, mercury, lead, and cadmium, all those nasty things that coal does to us environmentally.

What we have here is the ability, and I don't think we have to subsidize anything. I think what the government needs to do is come up with a plan, just as this motion suggests, and on that plan have the incentives to allow the development in areas where these investors would more than happily go. But you have to make that readily available. An east-west grid does a number of things for us environmentally and for our grid. It stabilizes our grid for a much lower cost energy source.

One of the things that we forget when we compare hydro to coal to natural gas is that hydroelectricity is about 90 per cent efficient. Coal never gets above 50 per cent. Natural gas gets above 50 per cent but doesn't get up into the 60 per cent range. So you're talking efficiencies. The lifespan of a coal plant versus a natural gas plant is somewhat comparable. The lifespan of a hydroelectricity station is 100 years and growing. We always do the comparison as if it's 50 years in cost; it's not.

These are the things. If we develop a long-range plan, we could come up with an economic plan to help us environmentally. One of the things by doing this is to allow us to go to the international markets and say: take a look at our environmental record, not our so-called environmental promises. We don't have the record yet. We need the record. By putting together a plan, we could actually build towards something, and that's really important.

With that, going back to the whole issue of particulate matter, when we look at greenhouse gases, our top five coal generators on that scale are not just the top five in comparison to our oil sands but also are the top five in Canada for producing greenhouse gases. We are dealing with on an international market something that is called the low-carbon standard, and we have to think about that when we're trying to access these markets. We have to lessen our carbon footprint. If we approach the markets arrogantly and say that we do not, we could find ourselves penalized because we did not take advance action or progressive action or proactive action, however you want to call it, to get in front of the market.

I will say this. It is not this government's responsibility to ensure that the investors of these coal plants make their profit. That's their business because they wanted that free market. What upsets me is how much consumers are subsidizing those coal plants on a daily basis, and they're not getting a return. I will tell you this. The whole idea of a grid that has zero congestion is a fallacy, yet we're trying to build to that. That is a subsidy that I believe is not conducive to any market at all. These people should be paying for it if they wanted this so-called market, and they're not. They're being subsidized. It prevents other people from entering the market, and that's just fundamentally wrong, in my view.

Dealing with the issue of the greenhouse gas intensity, the data is absolutely clear on this. Coal as a proportion of the electricity generation in Alberta very rarely – I know the minister made a comment that natural gas finally surpassed the amount of generation, but as you would check right now, at this very moment coal is at around 47 per cent of our generation, and natural gas is right around the 40 per cent level for the baseload. Coal routinely is over 50 per cent of our baseload for this province. We need to reduce that. That needs to be part of a long-range plan to reduce that.

I will tell you this. Alberta has something going for it that we have never ever built upon. Where most jurisdictions would love to go to a distributive generation model, what they lack is the infrastructure to even implement it. What Alberta has is the

infrastructure. We have natural gas all throughout this province. We have natural gas generators located all throughout this province. The natural gas infrastructure is there. What we lack is the political will to make that distributive generation model work so we can make the system more efficient, less costly, and we can then start implementing renewable energy sources so we can actually advance an environmental program that will get us ahead of this curve.

5:30

When I look at the grid and I look at the supply of electricity, what Alberta is lacking is a renewable energy that can cover baseload. That renewable energy is at our doorstep. It's called hydroelectricity. That renewable energy is inside our own home. We have not developed it. We have hydroelectricity potential, and we should tap into that. That needs to be part of the long-range plan, how we can make those investments work, and that would work for Albertans.

Even when you approach our oil sands producers, when they look at the amount of energy they need, if we were to develop the hydroelectricity potential north of Fort McMurray, that services our industry. The other thing is that on an environmental level, particularly dealing with flood mitigation, in water conservation, by having these hydroelectricity dams, we're able to conserve and work with our environment.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon, everyone. An interesting topic and one that I think is significant to a lot of us, particularly for myself because there's a lot of renewable energy in my riding down south. If you've been down around Pincher Creek and so on, you'll see an awful lot of stuff down there pertaining to renewable energy.

Nonetheless, with respect to the motion that's been made by the hon. member here, what they're asking for – and I think this needs to be underlined a little bit to get us on track here – is that they're looking to do an immediate study and drafting of a plan to phase out coal-generated energy. I think we've talked a little bit about the stats and all about the other things to do with coal to a great extent here, and I'm not going to take a lot of time with that. Regardless, just a couple of years ago I was involved on the Resource Stewardship Committee, and we did spend an awful lot of time studying one of the things that the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre has referred to, and that is hydroelectric energy.

My suggestion is that the Wildrose is in support of this motion because of two things. First of all, there's a great amount of known information about the harmful effects of these coal-generating plants. We also know that there are a lot of good things about the coal we have here in Alberta, and we have some good technologies to try to offset it. There's no question about that. However, we know that we must move to another source. If the motion is truly about what it seems to be – that is, having a study – I think that the study the Resource Stewardship Committee did on hydroelectric, that spent I don't know how many months doing so, is a great start. I think that this motion could be carried out with little cost and could be, you know, easily accomplished by taking the report that the Resource Stewardship Committee had already filed to the House, dated March 2013, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Oberle: What did they recommend?

Mr. Stier: They recommended an awful lot of stuff. I'll get to that.

In any regard, I think it would be a good start, an extra study to look into how coal plants could be phased out. We could phase over to perhaps hydroelectric as an alternative. That would be a good alternative.

You know, I have some other points here with that in mind. Just for those of you that weren't involved with that committee, we know that eventually we're going to have to phase out coal generation at some point in time. I think we've all agreed to that here. There are some viable alternatives down in my area. We have a lot of wind energy, as I've said, and there's been a lot of talk about solar and so on and so forth.

But nothing is more efficient, from the report that we did, than hydroelectric. Certainly, there are some costs. I'm sure that that is what the minister is kind of chuckling about at the moment. Regardless, as we're looking at this motion and trying to figure out how to move forward – after all, this motion is only to do a bit of studying on how we could move forward – I don't necessarily find the humour in it, quite frankly. We have some good recommendations that we worked upon. There are ways that we can go about this.

You know, these run-of-river systems that they put in place nowadays for the hydroelectric types of plants are marvellous systems. They can include sluiceways that will allow wildlife to be protected, and fish and so on can still travel through the various watersheds, et cetera. It's probably one of the most efficient ways that we can go, and today it represents 60 per cent of Canada's energy portfolio, but it only accounts for 6 per cent in Alberta. It was our conclusion that this was something that we should pursue as soon as we could. It's an untapped potential. It's something that makes good sense as we go ahead. We've already got the information.

To conclude, really, we know that the coal is critically important to current power generation and consumption needs in Alberta, but we must acknowledge that there are other ways to go about phasing it out. I think that I would like to encourage the government to explore these alternative methods, including hydro. The report is done. We're talking about doing an extra study just to see how we could phase coal out. I don't see why we would be against this motion to study a little further. We've already got a lot of the information. You know, yes, we are moving to clean-burning propane and natural gas and all that kind of thing, but this motion is only asking for a study, people. We do a lot of studies in this business, it seems. Some of the information is here. Let's just supplement it, as has been suggested by the hon. member.

That's about all I have to add at this time, Mr. Speaker. I'm in favour of this motion. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the Minister of Finance.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to stand and support Motion 507, which will accelerate the phase-out of coal electricity in the province. You know, it's interesting to hear the government talk about a holistic approach in 2015. Unfortunately, if it is being done, it's not being shared with the rest of us because we've seen 30 years of anything but comprehensive analyses and proper planning for the benefit of Albertans. We've seen short-term decisions made, incentives given, failure to take into account externalities, external costs, including the health and social and environmental costs.

Now we see a government that is struggling to sell its primary products because of our failure to do comprehensive analysis and look at full-cost accounting. By full-cost accounting, of course, I

mean starting with the impacts of mining, the social and health and environmental impacts of the mining itself, then the transportation, the impacts of the building of the coal-fired generators, the jobs that that creates relative to the jobs other energy-producing industries would create, the greenhouse gases, the pollutants, including mercury and other contaminants, that have added their impacts to our environment and reduced our international reputation.

To tout in this House that there's been a broader approach, a triple bottom line, in 2015 begs the question of where this government has been for the last 30 years as we've paid the price in human lives, in social disruption, in environmental contamination, and now in rivers that we can't eat the fish out of because the mercury levels have exceeded the health advisory, in most southern rivers, at least, in this province. Without doing a proper analysis, a full-cost accounting on other, alternate energies such as hydro, such as wind and solar, we're not getting true cost accounting.

This government talks about a level playing field, but we don't have anything like a level playing field. We've been subsidizing the fossil fuel industry for 75 years, and suddenly we're hearing from the government that they want a level playing field. Solar producers get the minimum price because they put in as they're able to while the coal companies got up to \$690 a kilowatt hour last year at the peak demands in the summer. At the same time solar producers were getting \$15 a kilowatt hour. At the same time the coal companies were able to bid at the last minute for the highest price, which is something like \$690 a kilowatt hour. What kind of a level playing field is that when it's so stacked against the renewables, that actually produce greater numbers of jobs, that actually produce much less, if any, pollution – and solar, obviously, produces virtually zero – and indeed add to our international reputation such that our own primary fossil fuel industry could gain a stronger foothold in international markets?

5:40

The other issue that, unfortunately, isn't talked about enough is demand reduction. We constantly talk about energy production, energy needs, but we fail to look at the demand side of energy and how much we could be doing by providing incentives for retrofitting buildings, commercial and residential; helping people with energy-efficient appliances; funding public transit as an alternative to fossil fuels; and even looking at some of the agricultural impacts on greenhouse gases as it contributes to the most serious threat, as I think we all recognize, in this generation, which is climate warming.

I want to just say a little bit about the need to change our terms from "climate change" to "climate warming" because the warming is indeed the real issue here. Certainly, there are disruptions and extreme weather events associated with climate, but we need to emphasize that the climate is warming. The warming is causing loss of icefields, the raising of sea levels, causing acidification in our oceans. It's impacting our fish life. Surely, as Albertans we know that we have to do better. Our international reputation is certainly impacting our economy, not to mention, as I mentioned, our social and health indicators and, bottom line, our economy. I am very interested to hear the minister talk about a more holistic approach to planning. We have yet to see the evidence that they are taking a comprehensive look, including the social, environmental, and job costs of continuing on the same path.

Now, in 2012, as the minister rightly says, the federal rules changed, and there was some sense that there was going to be some phase-out, but unfortunately they added five years to the original plan for phase-out, which means another 40 per cent increase in our greenhouse gas emissions and increased health impacts, particularly, can I say, in the Edmonton area because Edmonton is

right downwind from the big Wabamun plants, some of the oldest in the province. Why should we be allowing a company that was supposed to phase out at 45 years to go to 50 years? Because they can, because they can lobby, and because this government is extremely sensitive to lobbying and to the economic bottom line of their donors.

I looked at some of the donations in 2012, Mr. Speaker, and it was something like \$400,000 from the coal companies in Alberta prior to that election. This really was shocking, and it added new incentives for me to speak out on the importance of a comprehensive, full-cost accounting in our energy mix instead of just assuming that because coal is \$50 per kilowatt hour, according to the minister, that included all of the externalities, which, of course, it doesn't. Emergency room visits, asthma, lung cancer, chronic obstructive lung disease: all of these don't figure into any of these calculations that the minister is giving on the price of a kilowatt hour. Nor does he comment on the very small number of jobs associated with coal-fired power and the four to five times as many jobs that are associated with clean technology and green energy.

There is a real opportunity here to not only talk the talk but walk the walk in terms of putting out all the facts as they are in the literature and to recognize that we are not finding the balance and not accelerating in a way that most of the world can appreciate or respect. We have a serious international reputation problem, and we're losing scores of people every year as a result of our failure to recognize the health impacts.

In my view and in the view of a growing number of Albertans, there are some tremendous new technology opportunities, not the least of which is combined heat and power in association with the oil sands, which could be providing a tremendous addition and an earlier phase-out. I don't know if the minister is aware of the opportunities in the oil sands for combined heat and power, which would double the efficiency, in fact, of our power generation and reduce our greenhouse gases by about 30 per cent.

The minister is busy talking to somebody else, but I hope he will be interested in speaking to the oil sands operators about this tremendous opportunity that simply needs incentives. It needs some financial and other incentives, recognizing that the economic bottom line is not the only bottom line. There are tremendous gains to be made on the triple bottom line if we look at accelerating the phase-out of coal-fired power and taking advantage, obviously, of the transition fuels we have here, natural gas and natural gas liquids.

So the Liberal caucus will certainly be supporting this motion. I'm very grateful for the member raising this real step forward in what many Albertans are anxiously awaiting: a comprehensive plan, a real commitment to moving forward, not just the talk but walking the walk of a comprehensive analysis based on a longer term vision and a plan to include all the externalities, social, economic, and environmental.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I will recognize the Minister of Finance, followed by the Minister of ESRD.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a proud union coal miner for 30 years I have to rise to speak against this job-killing motion put forward by the NDs. This is not just a study, as the Member for Livingstone-Macleod would suggest. If you read the motion put forward by the member, it is to "urge the government to commit to the immediate study and drafting of a plan to phase out all coal-generated power in Alberta by 2030." So it's not just a study. As a member from rural Alberta I think he would want to

stand up for rural Albertans and make sure that we have positive jobs for them moving forward into the future.

The coal industry has been providing jobs to thousands of Albertans each and every year right across this province. In fact, over 1,800 coal mines have operated in Alberta since the 1800s. In the 1860s coal mining began near what is known now as Lethbridge. The first mine to operate right here in Edmonton was in 1883. Of course, my constituency of West Yellowhead was built on coal through the coal branch south of Hinton and Edson. One of the reasons I came west, Mr. Speaker, as a fourth-generation miner is that I was proud to come and work for Luscar coal company.

Mr. Speaker, in 2009 Alberta produced 31 million tonnes of marketable coal. We have strong environmental regulations already in place for the coal industry. The coal industry's reclamation is world renowned for the work they do. The bighorn sheep, for example, are icons not only in Alberta but right across North America of the work done on reclamation in the coal industry. Existing measures are already in place reducing our reliance on coal. However, it needs to be said that there's enough coal right now for the next 600 years to supply Alberta with the energy they need moving forward, and we could be a leader in clean coal technology if we wanted to be.

This year we estimate that natural gas, including cogeneration, will surpass coal as the largest source of electrical generation in Alberta. In 2013 just half of Alberta's actual electricity generation came from coal. The share of coal has been declining for more than two decades. These mines have always provided opportunities for Albertans and create good-paying jobs and in most cases good-paying union jobs, Mr. Speaker, and that should not be lost on anybody. In fact, the average coal mining wage is more than twice that of the average national wage according to information gathered by PricewaterhouseCoopers. The estimated average salary in 2011 was \$92,785 in the coal industry while the national average salary was \$43,700. Jobs in the coal industry provide families with great sources of income, which helps support our communities, our economy, and provides income taxes to both the provincial and federal coffers.

In addition, coal companies support nonprofit organizations that support our rural communities. For example, in my riding alone the Edson Kinsmen spray park was donated by a coal company. Luscar in Hinton provided the curling rink, worked on the community centre, and provided all kinds of different nonprofit organizations with the money to help them through their process. Also Grande Cache Coal was a prime mover in getting the town of Grande Cache built and all the work that they needed in their rec centre and employing people in that area. Mr. Speaker, there are countless examples of how industry supports our rural towns and villages, whether it's Forestburg, Hanna, Wainwright, or Wabamun. In addition to supporting nonprofit organizations, the industry creates opportunities for small businesses and entrepreneurs which contribute to our economy.

5:50

Unfortunately, we've seen what can happen if the industry isn't successful. The community of Grande Cache in my constituency of West Yellowhead is one of those examples. It's heavily dependent on the coal industry. The local mine has been struggling as of late and has had to lay off employees, which has devastated the town. Following the layoffs, a number of small businesses have had to close their doors. This not only has an economic impact, but it creates a psychological impact as doors to businesses close and people move away. The community is struggling, and the ND motion would only create an even more dire situation. We need to

do what we can to ensure the industry is viable so communities like Grande Cache can thrive and survive.

Mr. Speaker, with families across this province losing jobs in the oil and gas industry, we must keep Albertans working. Keeping Albertans working is a priority for our government. Unlike the NDs, we are not going to take actions that cost Albertans their jobs. From Coleman to Robb this industry is important to communities across the province. I am firmly against the ND motion today as it would kill jobs and negatively impact communities in my riding, including Jasper. And people say: why Jasper? Because CN has a hub in Jasper, and those employees take coal to the coast from all of the mines in West Yellowhead. Grande Cache, Hinton, Edson, Robb, Brûle: all communities in my riding that depend on the coal industry.

Let's keep Albertans working, and let's support rural Alberta in our economy, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The hon. Minister of ESRD.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in opposition to this motion for many of the same reasons as outlined by the hon. Minister of Energy and the hon. Minister of Finance. I will say that I think the spirit and the intent of the hon. member with this motion is admirable. However, I think it lacks considerable foresight about some of the consequences of what she is actually proposing.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, is that a lot of the work which the hon. member talked about is already being taken into consideration in a way that accounts for some of the consequences brought forward by the Minister of Energy and by the Minister of Finance. The makeup of our electrical generation from coal to other sources is changing. My colleague the Minister of Energy brought forward the reasons as to why that's happening, so I won't reiterate that, but to quickly summarize these points, there are already federal rules for greenhouse gas emissions from coal-fired power plants. About 60 per cent of Alberta's existing coal-fired power plants will be retired by the year 2029. At that time only 10 per cent of the province's electricity generation will be from coal-powered plants.

The world of alternative energy is an important one for this province and for all citizens across the world. It's important to ensure that as we heat our homes, power our devices, and provide the comforts in our home and elsewhere, it is being met through cleaner sources of electricity that are economical for consumers both large and small. Over the next 15 years I'm sure that we are going to see great progress on this front from solar to wind to biomass and other sources.

At the same time Alberta has an electricity emissions management framework in place. This requires significant improvements in emissions performance in coal-fired units as the years go on. This framework allows for the replacement of older, more emission intensive generation with newer, less emission intensive generation as part of Alberta's electrical system. We're currently reviewing our energy and climate change strategy and approach, including but not limited to the electricity system, and we have publicly committed to shifting to a lower emission source of power, which has co-benefits of air quality improvements in these airsheds. While this strategy is not complete or decided, the preliminary direction indicates that we are committed to the existing provincial and federal air quality and greenhouse gas emission requirements to ensure Alberta has a healthy environment.

Mr. Speaker, just to conclude, the air quality in this province is of a high quality for 96 per cent of the days in the year. This is something that we measure, the ambient air quality, as part of the Alberta Environmental Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

Agency. That will be something that we can continue to monitor to make sure that these emission sources don't impact Albertans' health, and as we see the reduction of them over time, we believe that we do have the right plan in place to do exactly what the hon. member is wanting from a health standpoint for Albertans while considering the economic consequences highlighted by the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Finance.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

We may have two minutes left for the Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to participate in the debate on Motion 507 brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Motion 507 calls on Alberta to phase out coal-generation power by 2030. However, I believe the implications embedded within this motion are harmful for a number of reasons. As we know, due to low oil prices Alberta is undergoing difficult economic times that have overreaching effects on a number of sectors. In order to make the best decisions that do not cripple our economy, we should focus on the promotion of fiscal strength and the continued success of our province's industrial sector.

Alberta is well under way in our efforts to reduce coal-powered plants, as we have already heard. We must be more concerned with how this would affect employees working in the industry; namely, the many individuals who rely on coal plants to feed their families. Mr. Speaker, employees who work in our coal industry are hard-working people who believe in the integrity of the jobs they do and the services that millions of Albertans rely on every single day. Motion 507 fails to consider the human aspect of Alberta's coal industry. What Motion 507 also fails to provide is a viable job strategy that should be implemented in order to address those who will be unemployed as a result of coal plant phase-out.

Reducing coal-generated electricity could help to reduce pollution and smog, allowing for the growth of clean and renewable energy. But these changes take time, and these changes should be done in a well-orchestrated and responsible manner. Any good policy requires extensive planning, and Motion 507 fails to realize any viable workforce plan or strategy. Motion 507 would render many Albertans jobless, without any immediate transition.

Mr. Speaker, how does this motion benefit Albertans, especially those relying on coal-generated electricity as a source of energy and as a source of income like many people in my constituency? Frankly, it does not.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt you, hon. member, but Standing Order 8(3) provides for five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate.

I would offer the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona this time.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much. I will try to take less time than that. Just a couple of quick points. First of all, on the issue of jobs this was a motion to put in place a plan. A plan would include a strategy to preserve and maintain and promote jobs. I find it incredibly rich that a government that has dedicated its whole being, it's whole existence, to shipping long-term sustainable jobs to Texas would lecture me on jobs. That's ridiculous. Moreover, the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that economists will tell you that the multiplier effect on renewable energy is much higher than coal and that, in fact, in the long term there will be more jobs, not fewer.

Let me make it very clear, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's NDP is about creating jobs, not about killing them. I'm very tired of these ridiculous, tired old fearmongering talking points from a bunch of folks that don't want to move forward, because this is about moving forward. This is about making a decision to understand that we're a modern province that needs to take responsibility for the

environmental consequences of our decisions. That's what leadership is, that's what planning is, and that's what good government does. This kind of negligent see no evil, hear no evil, stick our head in the sand kind of approach has not served Albertans well. It didn't serve people living downstream from the dam that wasn't even inspected, and it's not going to serve us going forward.

I'd like to make a couple of points. There was a change in regulations around coal, and as the Member for Calgary-Mountain View rightly pointed out, those changes made the problem worse, not better, and the Minister of Energy knows that. As for the specified gas emitters regulations, that's what the Auditor General said was not working and was not going to get us anywhere because this government is not doing a good job on it. That's why we need to change this.

Let me just finally renew or re-emphasize a point made by my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, because I hadn't realized this: \$400,000 in election donations in the last election year from the coal industry. Mr. Speaker, really? We are so far behind the rest of the country, and now I'm starting to see even more why that is. That's why we need a change in government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope people will vote in favour of this motion.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 507 lost]

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, March 16, 2015

Issue 21e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, March 16, 2015

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Transmittal of Estimates

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

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Acting Speaker: The Lieutenant Governor transmits interim supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province and of certain sums required from the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Mr. Oberle: Madam Speaker, I now wish to table the 2015-2016 interim supply estimates. When Budget 2015 is tabled on March 26, the fiscal plan for the entire fiscal year will be presented. However, these interim supply estimates will provide spending authority to the Legislative Assembly and to the government as of April 1, 2015. When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize the approximate spending of \$61.5 million for the Legislative Assembly and \$10.6 billion in operational funding, \$1.3 billion in capital funding, \$256.8 million in financial transactions funding for the government, and \$386.9 million for the transfer from the lottery fund to the general revenue fund.

Madam Speaker, interim supply amounts are based on the department's need to fund government programs and services.

Government Motions

21. Mr. Oberle on behalf of Mr. Campbell moved:
Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2015-16 interim supply estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Acting Speaker: This is a debatable motion under Standing Order 18(1)(i). Are there any members who wish to speak to the motion?

Seeing none, we will ask the question.

Would you like to close debate, hon. minister?

Mr. Oberle: No. I'll call the question, Madam Speaker.

[Government Motion 21 carried]

22. Mr. Oberle on behalf of Mr. Campbell moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the 2015-16 interim supply estimates for six hours on Tuesday, March 17, 2015.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, this motion is not debatable under Standing Order 61(2).

[Government Motion 22 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

We have had a request to revert to introductions. Are there any opposed to reverting to introductions at this time?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a friend of mine, Brian Willoughby, in the government gallery. Brian is a long-time friend and a member of the Camrose council. I just wanted to welcome him and introduce him to the House.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise this evening to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly several students we have from the Alberta Students Executive Council. We have Kristen George from Grande Prairie, Shannon Peacocke from CSA, Cody Weger from CSA, Joshua Bettel from SAIT, Bailey Daines from Red Deer College, Alex Willkie from Medicine Hat College, and Thomas Ridgeway from the ASEC association. I ask all hon. members to welcome our visitors to the gallery.

Bill 17

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Chair: Chair.

Mr. Strankman: Madam Chair. I'll get it right yet, possibly, if I keep going around the bases there.

I would like to reiterate some of the comments made the other evening regarding the supplementary supply estimates. There are several interesting line items in there that are onerous, I guess, to say the least, with the financial situation of the province. One of them is the potential of an injection of cash funding into carbon capture and storage, some \$2 billion to date, and there is potential for further allocation. It's my understanding that this is not necessarily a complete science, and I think it should be made known to the Chamber and to others across the way that this is questionable. There's an ongoing question that's being debated, and I think possibly during the election cycle that will become a situation if the government does decide to go ahead.

One of the other things that I'd like to bring forward is the expenditure of some \$400 million on the federal building. To me, Madam Chair, that's exorbitant, extraneous, and extremely wasteful in this day and age, in what we might consider to be a frugal government. Certainly, it's not necessarily, as the members opposite call it, a government of new management because that was brought forward previous to that. It's certainly, again, an example of an overextension of the government.

7:40

The final thing I would like to bring forward is, I think, probably the most significant comment here and something that was specifically mentioned as a line item. It relates to the refurbishment, I guess, of what you might call in some people's minds an extravagance, the Kananaskis golf course. The Kananaskis golf course competes against private industry, and it's not necessarily the government's place in this case to compete against private industry much the same as the government took a position on government aircraft that government aircraft is also not necessarily required nor should compete in private industry. It's not government's place to compete with private industry; it's government's place to create regulation or reduce regulation to allow private industry or private enterprise to go forward.

Madam Chair, those are my main points. I think there may be further discussion in this regard as we go forward. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd just like to respond to a couple of the comments and to clarify the situation on carbon capture and storage for the House. You'll recall some years ago now that the government of Alberta set up a \$2 billion fund to invest in carbon capture and storage technology. This was not a go-alone thing. We're in fact co-operating with a number of other nations in the world: the United Kingdom, Norway, and others that have science institutions. We had planned to incent a number of projects up to \$2 billion.

What eventually happened was that two projects came forward, funded to the tune of \$1.3 billion. We've only paid out about \$300 million of that right now as both of those projects are under construction and they don't get paid until they meet construction timelines. Since assuming the helm of the Department of Energy, I committed that we would suspend our spending at \$1.3 billion. We will not go beyond that, yet the funds flow from the current \$300 million until we reach \$1.3 billion. The two projects in question: the quest project will be finished at the end of this current year, so most of that will be in payout this year; and the Alberta trunk line will be in full production next year. So over the next two years the rest of the \$1 billion will be paid out for those two projects.

Madam Chair, the carbon capture and storage fund that the member says is incomplete science: generally incomplete science requires that you complete the science. We're participating with other organizations in the world. But we've frozen our spending at \$1.3 billion. There are no cost overrun provisions in either of those contracts, so the spending will not go beyond \$1.3 billion, but it does require some time to get there until they meet the timelines.

Most recently the Department of Energy in the United States is examining our projects. They want to be involved from a science point of view in the validation and monitoring research that's going to go on. They've proposed that we establish a centre of excellence on the data. We fully intend to do that. It's going to be housed in Alberta, though, not in the United States. We've decided to suspend any further spending, additional projects, until some of our international partners (a) have a chance to review the data that's happening here and elsewhere and (b) we think we've made our contribution.

The member talked about the federal building. I think everybody heard the Infrastructure minister say that all things being equal, if that project were proposed today in our current fiscal climate, most likely we would not have proceeded with it. Nonetheless, we did proceed with it some years ago. We've got contracts in place, and we're not going to break contracts. In addition, Madam Chair, that's

a heritage building. The cornerstone was laid by none other than John Diefenbaker, I believe. It was sold to the province for a dollar some 20 years ago and sat languishing, roof leaking and everything else. The hon. member will get to see the inside of it in detail. His office is going to be in there as are many other members of the Legislature. It's a beautiful building, and it's an Alberta heritage building, so it was important.

The Kananaskis golf course, that he mentioned. We're not competing with private industry there. In fact, we've got private industry that was lobbying to have us complete that golf course because it's a major economic driver in the region, and lots of spinoff businesses are sitting there with no business because people can't use the Kananaskis golf course.

Kananaskis is also an asset of the government of Alberta, in fact of the people of Alberta, and we're going to maintain our assets as prudent property owners do, Madam Chair, so that's what that's about.

Finally, the planes. Of course, the member knows that we sold the planes. The Premier, under new management, decided that we would sell the aircraft. We were not competing with private business there. We had our own aircraft; many governments do. The Premier, we think rightfully, decided, "enough of that" and we sold the airplanes. Not much more to say than that, Madam Chair. We don't have any planes anymore.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any others? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's always good to enjoy hearing the minister, but I will tell you this. To hear that a government-funded golf course is not somehow competing with private enterprise: I would have to disagree with that.

Madam Chair, I have an amendment to this bill, and I have the 95 copies here.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we'll pause for a moment while we distribute the amendment.

Hon. members, this amendment to Bill 17 will be known as amendment A1.

Hon. member, if you'd like to, go ahead.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 17, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015, be amended as follows:

- A Section 2 is amended by striking out "\$459 250 000" and substituting "\$451 250 000."
- B Section 3 is amended by striking out "\$704 609 000" and substituting "\$703 439 000."
- C The Schedule is amended
 - (a) on page 3 following "Environment and Sustainable Resource Development"
 - (i) by striking out "200 014 000" and substituting "192 014 000", and
 - (ii) by striking out "48 085 000" and substituting "46 915 000"
 - and
 - (b) on page 4
 - (i) following "Operational amounts to be voted under section 2" by striking out "459 250 000" and substituting "451 250 000", and
 - (ii) following "Capital amounts to be voted on under section 3" by striking out "704 609 000" and substituting "703 439 000".

Now, Madam Chair, what this amendment is proposing to do is to take that money slated for a golf course and remove it from this

authorization. It's quite simple. We are hearing from government members that this is a unique time in budgeting. In other words, everyone has got to pull up their bootstraps. Everyone has got to be willing to cut. We made a proposal to cut the Auditor General after the committee, an independent committee, authorized about a half million dollar increase. We cut the Child and Youth Advocate's office. We're looking at roughly 9 per cent across the board in total cuts – right across the board, universally speaking – in every department. We've had the Premier tell the public-sector workers they have to be prepared to renegotiate, to give up something.

7:50

All this may be well and good – that's a debate for another day – but the debate today is simply this. A golf course got damaged, and that is sad. It really is sad, particularly if you're a golfer. But the fact is: should we be spending \$2 million to build a golf course – we have \$1.1 million, \$1.2 million in this budget – and \$8 million to keep it open just while we're fixing it? That doesn't even make sense. You can't ask the public to accept that when you're asking them for cuts. This is about priorities, and this golf course, well intentioned – and it may be a five-star golf course in the sense of pride and joy of this government – does not warrant this kind of expenditure at this time.

A prudent, reasonable businessperson who had suffered this same damage, in spending \$2 million to fix their golf course, would not spend \$8 million to keep it open. They would at least just spend \$2 million to fix it while they remained closed. This is something that the public will not buy into, and it's imperative that this government take a look at this in terms of looking at priorities. What should be funded as: this is what we need? What should not be funded because we want something? That's critical to this.

I mean, there are lots of options for this golf course. We could lease it out if it's a money-maker. One of the things we can't even find out from this government is: what is the revenue source from this golf course? How much revenue do we actually make in a year? We don't get that information; that's quite interesting. Now we're going to be throwing this kind of money at it. What is the bottom line here? What is the bottom line?

This amendment requires that we just take this money out and tell the public: we're going to cut back here. You know what? If the government members want to hold a golf tournament, they can go to a public golf course versus Kananaskis. We don't need to be funding that today. That's simply what this amendment does.

I want to know from the government members: are you willing to actually go out on the campaign trail and say that we spent \$9 million to almost \$10 million to fix a golf course while we're going to cut teachers, while we're going to cut front-line workers? I know you say that you're not going to, but they're feeling the pinch today, and we don't have room to squeeze. You're looking at cutting various departments like the Auditor General, who could actually help us, who could actually show us where we can cut efficiently, because where we're spending money, there's no proof that it's actually producing anything.

I would hope that the government members would actually support this amendment. Let's withdraw that money from this bill, and let's be prudent and reasonable and spend money wisely. These are taxpayers' dollars.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Speaking to amendment A1 on Bill 17, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015, the hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's an honour to stand up and speak against this amendment. I have to give the member some credit in the sense that he certainly knows how to generate some talking points or a sound bite in the time of fiscal austerity that we're going through. Certainly, you know, I don't imagine that if you went out and asked Albertans at this time, they would say that a golf course is a priority.

However, the member is clearly leaving out some of the facts around this particular item in the supplementary estimates. The facts are that he alluded to what a business would do. I can tell you that if a business had an asset – the golf course is about a \$50 million plus asset which was destroyed significantly during the floods – and had an insurance policy on that asset and if the insurance company was going to step forward and pay for that company to rebuild that asset, particularly a big portion of that, but you did have a small deductible, let's say about \$2 million on that asset to rebuild that asset for the company, and if the insurance company was willing to do that, it would make sense for that company to take the insurance company, that they've been paying all along, up on that agreement to rebuild that asset, to pay the deductible.

Now, to rebuild that asset takes time. That asset wasn't completely destroyed. There was approximately \$18 million of that asset that was still intact. It does not make sense to allow that portion of that asset to go into disrepair while the rest of the asset is being rebuilt, funded in the majority by the insurance company. This is strictly asset management, which on this side of the House we understand needs to be done prudently on behalf of taxpayers. In fact, there actually would be more additional expenses to the taxpayers through the remediation of the site there – those would include cleaning up all of the debris and doing something with the current assets that are still available – that would be over and above what is actually being paid by the government right now to rebuild that asset.

Now, if that hon. member wants to have a debate around whether this government should own a golf course or not, that's fair. That's a fair debate. But that's not what this is about. This is about asset management. We currently own an asset which suffered significant damage. We had an insurance policy on that in the form of provincial assets being covered by the disaster recovery program in the arrangement between the provincial government and the federal government. What we're doing is capitalizing on that to make sure that Albertans have the same asset afterwards that they had before the flood.

I could go into a whole bunch – I believe the hon. Minister of Energy talked about it before – about the economic spinoffs around that. You can be assured that the hon. member was right when he said that the other businesses were supportive of this. This is a place where tourists go, where Albertans go, yes, to recreate. It is the job of government to provide opportunities for Albertans to recreate. Many people that go and visit this golf course do a weekend trip and go visit another golf course in the area, that is owned by a private business. They understand that, and that's why they wanted this provincial asset rebuilt. Again, there is well over a million and a half dollars created in taxes every year from this golf course. It employs 150 people on an annual basis. That's directly. Indirectly there's other employment.

So while the hon. member sounds really good – and I'm sure he's going to try to take all the credit he wants in front of the camera about this being a misspent priority in a time of frugality – he's missing a whole bunch of facts and not explaining those to Albertans. This is sound asset management, and in fact it would cost Albertans more in the remediation of the site and with some of the contracts that are in place and getting out of those contracts than it actually would to do what we're doing, which is to then rebuild a provincial asset that was there before the flood, that will now be in

place years afterwards, that will create a whole bunch of economic benefits for Albertans, particularly in the tourism industry and particularly in the Bow Valley area, that was impacted significantly by the floods in 2013.

Mr. Anglin: A great argument. I'm just not buying it, Madam Chair. I'm not buying it. It's a great asset, yes. What makes you think that you have to reclaim it this year if you don't fix it this year? That's the part that doesn't make sense to me. It did get damaged. Now, you mentioned the debris, the removal of the debris alone. Well, if you're going to fix the golf course, you've got to remove the debris anyway. If this is a natural preserve – I mean, I'm not buying the argument that it's got to be fixed this year. I will buy the argument that it's a valuable asset. I don't have a problem with that. What I have a problem with is that we're looking at expenditures this year. It got damaged 18 months ago. I understand that. Maybe it needs to be repaired over a longer period of time, when we're in a better position budgetwise.

8:00

But when you're going into a position with an austerity budget where there are county bridges that are impassable right now because there's absolutely no funding for those bridges and we're going to fix a golf course, that doesn't make sense to me. There's a bridge in James River Bridge, which is a community. They need a quarter of a million dollars to fix the bridge, and they're being told there's no money coming to fix the bridge. But we're going to spend \$8 million for a golf course just to keep it open while we spend another \$1.1 million to finish it and fix it. That doesn't make sense to me. The operational money makes no sense to me. We don't need it open for one more year.

The other thing that the member says is: we're not presenting all the facts. The answer is true. You're not presenting all the facts. What is the generating revenue from your so-called \$50 million asset? Has it ever paid for itself? Does it even make money? I mean, we can go on and on about this, but you're not giving us the figures. You're not being transparent, and we need that to make sure that the money is being spent wisely. This business of saying... [interjections] Could I ask you to be quiet, please? Thanks. It's just loud in my ear.

Okay. What we're looking at is priorities. That's it. I'm not saying that you get rid of the asset. I'm not saying that you don't fix the asset. But the Health minister will even tell you that when he looks at a hospital and he's going to look at building hospitals versus fixing hospitals, one thing he will absolutely stand up and defend me on is that he'll prioritize what's best for us. Building that golf course is not in the best interest of the public right now. If you say that it is, then I ask you to prove it. Show the revenue that it's going to generate, that if we spend this kind of money now, we will get a return of X amount that shows that it's worth it. You can't do that because it's not happening. That's the problem.

My argument is simply this. I'm not saying don't do it. I'm saying: in this supplemental budget pull it out; do it when you have the money. We have senior citizens who need certain medications that are life-saving, certain medications that make for a better quality of life going into their final days, that are not covered by the province because we don't have the money. We have all sorts of priorities that are in line that are not funded.

All I'm saying in this amendment is that this is not a priority here and now. If you say that it's a worthwhile endeavour and it's a worthwhile asset, I'm okay with that. I'm just not okay saying that we've got to spend that money right now while we're asking everyone else to cut, because – you know what? – golfing is nice, but you know as well as I do that the golfers in this province are

heading to Palm Springs in the wintertime, and when these golf courses open, they're all over the province. There are lots of golf courses. Having one golf course not operational while it's under repair or while it's waiting to go under repair because we just don't have the money now is not the end of the world for this province. It is not a high priority, in my view, and that's where I'm going with this. So I'm not saying that we have to reclaim it. I'm not saying that we have to abandon it. I'm just saying that it's not a priority this spring, in 2015. Maybe it needs to be moved out.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Energy on amendment A1.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Madam Chair. I always look forward to the comments of the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, who, as the Minister of Environment points out, does occasionally omit the facts, occasionally makes up a few while he's talking, and that's always an entertaining conversation. For example, he started his motion for amendment by talking about 9 per cent cuts across the board, even across every ministry. There is nothing whatsoever in the record of this Assembly or any motion or budget or anything before us that would suggest any such thing. It's just simply not true, Madam Chair, but that doesn't matter. We'll make up facts as we go along.

He talked about that we'll be breaking contracts left and right.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: A point of order has been called. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on the point of order.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I think that the hon. member, by suggesting that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre is omitting the facts, is violating the rules of the Assembly. Furthermore, I would like to point out that the Minister of Finance of this province is on the record in public making the assertion that not only will there not be any increases included in this budget for inflation and population growth, but there will be an across-the-board reduction of 5 per cent. Now, the government may have changed its mind, and it's well that they might because I would suggest that the firestorm of public opinion would consume them. But I think the fact of the matter is – and I want to put it on the record – that those statements have been made in public by the Finance minister, and for the minister to assert otherwise is simply not true.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, can you give us the citation for your point of order, please?

Mr. Mason: Yeah; 23(h), (i), and (j).

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Oberle: Madam Chair, those citations would suggest that I had somehow impugned the hon. member or made some incorrect statement when the actual fact of the matter is that this hon. member can go on what he may have heard or hadn't or what CBC had quoted or hadn't. What I said was that there's no such suggestion before this House that's being considered at this time. We'll have to wait for the budget, to see what that brings about. That's a statement of fact, and I believe that automatically means there's no point of order.

May I continue, Madam Chair?

The Deputy Chair: I will just rule on that point of order. Just give me one minute, please. Half a minute.

Thank you, hon. members. We know that in this Assembly members will certainly disagree from time and time, and there may be a dispute as to facts. Clarifications have been made, so let's move on.

Debate Continued

Mr. Oberle: Madam Chair, in his introduction he also talked about the necessity of breaking contracts when, again, no such facts are in evidence before the House here. In fact, if the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood wants to bandy quotes about, the actual quote given is that we won't be breaking contracts. So let's just straighten that out. None of those things ever stopped the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Let's just put this in simpler terms. About the golf course: the federal government under the disaster recovery program will fund up to 90 per cent of the flood damage cost of this facility. He mentioned in his discussion about prudent businessmen what a prudent businessman would do. Well, perhaps he could describe to me one prudent businessman in the world who would pass up 90 per cent cost recovery to repair his asset that was damaged in a flood. If indeed we accept his amendment to stop the payment on the flood-damaged golf course, the citizens of Alberta will be liable for the cost. Even if we don't lay it out, we lose the value in the asset, which, I might point out, becomes an item in the budget, and we lose a writedown of \$10 million instead of getting up to 90 per cent back from the federal government. No prudent businessman in his right mind would consider any such thing. Again, the member omits facts where it's convenient for him to do so.

Now, Madam Chair, I want to point out something else about the member, and sometimes his facts don't line up. When, some time ago . . . [interjection] oh, pain, pain. No hon. member attempted to make greater hay than this hon. member in discussing the transmission system of Alberta. We were wrong to build transmission, we were wrong to use DC conversion, and all of that hocus-pocus. So what does he say today in his debate? He argues in the first half that we need distributed transmission because we have a huge transmission overbuild: if we would just distribute generation out around the province. Then in the second half of his speech this afternoon he argues that we should build transmission across to Manitoba to pick up hydroelectric power. Who is going to pay for that one? And it requires DC conversion because you can't get across the Saskatchewan border without DC conversion. So the hon. member uses the facts quite loosely.

He's always got the sound bite ready, as the hon. minister of Environment says, but the fact of the matter is that none of his arguments hold water. It is a prudent investment for the government of Alberta to repair this golf course and recover their money and maintain their assets. We don't pay for it; it's an insurance policy. If the member really wants to argue that we should forgo an insurance policy and pay for it ourselves: knock yourself out. I'm sure he'll figure out a way to do it.

8:10

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

On Bill 17, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015, A1, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I'm pleased to rise to speak to this amendment, which I am going to support. This amendment follows some questions that I raised when we first debated the supplementary supply estimates last week. You know,

the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre has stated that he's not in favour of this particular golf course because it competes with the private sector. I take a somewhat different view with regard to that. I believe that this is an amenity of the park that the private hotels and resorts that operate in that park want to see operating because it brings them customers. So I would flip it around the other way and say that this particular golf course is actually a hidden subsidy for private companies. Nevertheless, it's an asset that we have.

I am not opposed to having a publicly operated golf course. The city of Edmonton has a couple of them and is able to offer golfing at reasonable prices for ordinary people. I'm not saying that the Kananaskis is anything like that. The question, really, for me, Madam Chair, is a question of priorities: what are the priorities of the government at a time when revenues are tight? We've never said that you don't have to make changes or adjustments when your revenue is less than you expect. It's just a question of which changes you make and which programs you support and which programs you don't support.

Now, I was struck that when the committee that directs the officers of the Assembly – help me out here, Madam Chair.

Some Hon. Members: Legislative Offices.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, all you helpful hon. members.

The Legislative Offices Committee tried to provide an increase in funding for the Auditor General's budget, and they voted in favour of that. We supported that. They also voted down a motion to increase the funding for the children's advocate. We didn't support that decision; we thought that that funding should be there. But then the Premier thundered from on high that there was absolutely no money, and he directed the committee members to go back and reverse their decision, which, like the dutiful caucus members that they are, they did.

Now, my question is this, Madam Chairman. If we don't have a few thousand dollars for the Auditor General and for the children's advocate to look after children who are in care – and we dealt with that issue quite extensively just today in the House, and the need for that is so clear. If those children aren't a priority and the golf course is, then there's something wrong. If the Auditor General, who does a wonderful job most of the time in keeping track of government waste and making sure that the government is on track with its own policies, is not a good investment, I don't know what is.

To me, it's not that they're going to pay \$8 million in operating costs for this golf course, and it's not that there's another, oh, almost \$2 million, 1 and a half million dollars, something like that, in capital that is being spent. When children who are potentially in danger are told that the cupboard is bare, then I think that the government should be ashamed of itself because it clearly has the wrong priorities.

Now, the ministers have said: well, we're going to get back 80 cents or 90 cents on the dollar for this investment. They haven't offered a shred of proof of that, Madam Chairman, and there's no guarantee, in my view, that this money will be returned to us. If they have some, I'm happy to see that, but in the meantime I'm going to take that suggestion with a grain of salt.

I think, in the end, that this really reveals a callousness on the part of the government in how they establish the priorities for the government and for the various programs. You know, when it comes to making sure that we protect tourism and the tourist industry in this province, they are willing to spend a lot of money. When it comes to protecting vulnerable children, they're not. And nothing could be more telling of what's wrong with this government, Madam Chair, than that.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Oh, thank you so much, Madam Chair. I should offer some proof, I suppose. If the hon. member has ever visited the federal government's website and reviewed the disaster recovery program, which was approved for Alberta and in which we need to spend money in order to get the money back, that, I think, would be fairly rock-solid proof unless the member doesn't believe the written policy of the federal government and the payments that have been made to this point. That's entirely possible. I'm not sure what bats circle his belfry.

Madam Chair, you know, you talk about callous. What does the spending on the Auditor General or the child advocate have to do whatsoever with a golf course? We make a decision on spending based on what's the right thing to do. In the case of the golf course it's the right thing to access an insurance policy. We actually believe – the hon. member won't agree with this or believe it – that the child advocate and the Auditor General should be funded properly. They are, as a matter of fact, amongst the highest in the country, which is why we don't support additional spending. This government is prudent with the taxpayers' money. The investment that we're talking about this evening is cashing in on an insurance policy, and anybody that wouldn't do that, I'm afraid, is not managing their assets very well. It's just simple. I'll drop my argument right there.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

On Bill 17, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015, the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler. Amendment A1.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Chair. I certainly am coming to enjoy the discussions in this Chamber. We're going from bats to energy to corporations. I happen to live beside a corporation – if I should follow the argument of the Member for Calgary-Klein – and the corporation is called Saskatchewan. In that corporate jurisdiction they believe that the government should also operate buses and run it on a profit and loss. You know, in other jurisdictions across the country that private enterprise – not relating to bats, but relating to dogs – is called Greyhound, and they operate that private enterprise, so there's a jurisdictional difference there.

In this case I take would some umbrage at the Energy minister's comments saying that we have to spend the money so that we can get the money from the federal government. I think that's possibly certainly true, but the perceptions in his mind and the perceptions being presented are onerous at best. In my riding I have health needs, and many members will be reminiscent of my fighting for the simple reallocation of some small amount of funds to the Consort acute-care beds. There are people who need those facilities, and they forego luxury.

There's a difference between a need and a want, and that operates in many corporate jurisdictions and should operate in government jurisdictions. The funding that's being brought forward here in the case of the Kananaskis golf course, I believe, is simply more of a want than a need. It's illustrious, and it's extravagant, and it flies in the face, if you will – no pun intended about the flies – of frugality. In a government that's reaching a new level of indebtedness, why not set an example of leadership? And this would be only one way that you could exhibit that leadership.

8:20

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre on A1.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, I think we were discussing A1 all this time if I'm not mistaken, but we ended up into electricity. That's just shocking. I don't know how that happened.

Mr. Mason: It's revolting.

Mr. Anglin: Revolting is what it is.

And it's interesting because the member talks about stretching the facts. I don't know where we separate on this. But one is that Manitoba would be willing to build 2,000 kilometres of transmission line to the States versus 400 kilometres to the Saskatchewan border. That's a no-brainer for Manitoba, to try to access the market. The key is to try to get Saskatchewan involved, but that's another negotiation. But the other side of the province with site C, that's a piece of cake for Alberta because we get generation trapped in Grande Prairie.

Now, getting back to the subject matter at hand. I just wanted to clear up that the member, you know, is a little bit low on voltage on the understanding of what's going on in the transmission system. But I am not low on voltage when it comes to understanding the spending. Now, if I hear the minister correctly, they are in charge. This government is in charge of tabling all the proof necessary to prove what it is saying, but it has not done so. In other words, if you have a \$50 million asset, what is it producing on an annual basis for revenue, and is it actually making money? Because you were talking about the businessman mentality here. I want to know, the opposition wants to know: is this really producing for our province? I mean, that's what you'd base this on.

The insurance money that the member's talking about. I have a lot of questions about that, but without proof of the insurance being tabled here, the policy itself, I can't ask those questions. But this one question does beg an answer. Sure, fix it for \$1.1 million. Why \$8 million to keep it open? That's a valid question. That's a valid question. If you think it needs to be operational during this short period of time for \$8 million, that doesn't make sense to me. That doesn't make sense to me. Now, if you want to be prudent – I presume it's an 18-hole golf course. Nobody ever said anything different. But if that presumption is correct, why don't you fix it into a 9-hole golf course, tell them to play two rounds for 18 holes, and save yourself a little bit of money? And then when the times are good, go back and rebuild if you want to do something like that if the investment is worth it. I don't know.

What I do know: on a level of priorities, you have a golf course that – I presume part of it is functional by the way you're talking. Part of it is functional now. Part of it is not functional; it needs to be fixed. That's what I'm taking from your conversation. If that's the case, what I'm saying here is simply this: there are times that we need to be reasonable and prudent, and if you're telling me that this is a \$50 million asset that must be fixed now, before this next budget is tabled and out there, I'm asking you to show proof and table it in this House so we can question that. And you have never done that. But what you have here is a luxury. And it is a nice luxury. The fact is: I'm not buying the argument without proof that it's got to be done and it's got to be done now.

I'm going to tell you what needs to be done and be done now. We need some rural bridges fixed, we have some communities that have senior facilities that need to be built, we need schools to be funded, and we don't have that. We have teachers that you say you value, but you're going to squeeze them, and you're going to squeeze them even more. That's a valuable asset. When we look at other areas of services this government provides that are good services like our road system – we need to fix our roads – some of that is going to wait. And those are valuable assets. This is about priorities, and I

can't see how this golf course is a priority, and I've seen no evidence that it has to be fixed now and cannot be fixed after our next budget comes in or even next year. That has not been stated.

The other thing about insurance policies – and it's been done before. You have the ability to negotiate, even with the federal government, based on our own fiscal situation. Presumably the government understands the situation we're in because Canada's in it. They understand that. I see no reason why you can't go back and say, "Hey, we have this situation here. Can we extend this one or two years?" Because it's just not reasonable to spend that money now, given all the cuts that we're going to bring forward.

Just in closing, Madam Chair, it was the Minister of Finance who basically used that 9 per cent across the board, and he publicly stated so. I believe it had to do with the cost of inflation plus that 5 per cent cut that the member from Edmonton here recently mentioned. We were listening to that. We're waiting for every little evidence of what the budget will be when you table it on the 26th, but right now we're dealing with this issue and why we have to spend this kind of money when Albertans are going and getting pink slips, one after another. We're talking about raising revenue. We're talking about cutting spending, but we're going to spend money on a golf course. It makes no sense to Albertans. You can't sell this during the election. We're going to campaign on it. When I say we, that's anyone in the opposition. It's a bad priority.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

On amendment A1, Bill 17, the hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Madam Chair, it's amazing. The more that that member speaks, the more that he actually makes the argument for why we need to actually make this investment today. So I'm going to start off just real quickly educating the hon. member. It's very obvious that he doesn't golf very much, and that's fine. He's busy. He's got a big constituency. He probably doesn't get out to golf too much, and that's fine.

A golf course is typically 18 holes. This golf course, I believe, was a 36-hole golf course, and there were all but a handful of holes that were damaged, meaning that if you really wanted to play golf on the course right now, you could probably play on four or five holes. For me personally that would be okay because I would actually have a chance to break a hundred, Madam Chair, but, you know, most people actually want to play on a golf course that actually has a regulation 18 holes. Okay. So what happens with those four holes that don't need to be rebuilt? They need to be maintained, right?

On a golf course there's this stuff called grass, and it's usually one of the biggest parts of a golf course. The grass has to be nice, has to be taken care of. You don't want weeds on it. You want it to be nicely watered in order for it to be maintained, or else you end up having to replace it in the future. So on those holes that currently exist that you could play on, we need to maintain them up to a standard where you could play on them, or else they would go into disrepair and need additional work some time on in the future before that becomes playable again.

What this hon. member just argued was that we should postpone the rebuilding of the golf course because we don't have enough money. He was saying: I'm not going to argue that you shouldn't rebuild it and take up that insurance policy. He said: you should postpone it. And what, continue to pay on an ongoing basis the maintenance on the asset that is currently of value? That doesn't make any financial sense, hon. member. You know it doesn't, and we all know it doesn't.

Hey, this is a very unfortunate circumstance that happened to tie into a very unfortunate financial position that we are in as a government, and I'd be the first one to admit the optics aren't great, but when you're on this side of the House, you're asked to make decisions that go beyond just optics and asked to make decisions around what makes the most rational, thoughtful decision. I can't conceive of anything that is any more irrational than saying, "Let's put this off and do it two, three years down the road," while continuing to pay and maintain the operating costs for the assets that weren't damaged. That doesn't make sense whatsoever. What makes sense is to try to build this and get the construction done as soon as we possibly can to take advantage of the insurance policy that is in place so that we can eventually get it up and operational and start collecting the revenue that it generates when it's in operation. That's what makes the most financial sense, Madam Chair, and I would ask all members for that reason to turn down this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

8:30

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Well, I just want to address one thing because I know that it's been part of the government's speaking notes with respect to the decisions around the children's advocate and the Auditor General's requests for funding that were turned down and the 2 per cent reductions that were made across the board to the officers of the Legislature.

I know that the Minister of Energy has just repeated that these two offices are the best funded of their kind in Canada, more than adequately funded and that they don't need any increases and they can sustain the 2 per cent reduction. I just want to point out a few things, Madam Chair. With respect to the request from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate this was to pay for three investigators and two analysts.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, can you bring that back to A1? We're on the amendment.

Mr. Mason: Yes. What I'm trying to do here, Madam Chair, is to respond to some claims that were made in debate on this by the minister. I had started the debate by trying to contrast the government's priorities for golf courses with their refusal to fund these two important offices, so I think it's very important to clarify exactly what these requests were that were turned down, and I'm going to turn my attention as well back to the golf course.

Five staff had been previously approved by the same committee to handle increases in investigations after the mandate of the office was broadened to include investigations into the deaths of children and youth within two years of them receiving government services. So those positions are no longer funded, apparently. I don't know what adjustments the office is going to make, but they have increased responsibility for investigating the deaths of children in care or who are receiving services, and this is what the government unfunded. So that's one indication of the priority of this government.

The second claim that's been made about the Auditor General is that he's the most lavishly funded Auditor General in Canada. What they fail to point out is that the Auditor General in Alberta, in addition to making operational audits of government departments, is also the auditor of record for the various agencies of this government that spend money or handle a great deal of money. So AIMCo, Treasury Branches, and a number of other organizations are additional responsibilities of the office that Auditors General in other parts of the country simply don't have. To claim that because our Auditor General's office budget is larger and, therefore, he can sustain the cuts doesn't make sense.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, could you bring it back to amendment A1, please. You made your point.

Mr. Mason: Yes. I would like it if the Auditor General had the resources to look into this decision to fund this golf course, Madam Chair, because I think that he could shed a great deal of light on what the government is actually trying to pull here.

Again, Madam Chair, I just want to clarify those particular points, and I want to say very clearly that I think this government has the wrong priorities. We should be putting children and finding real savings in government expenditures ahead of lavish luxury golf courses at fancy resorts.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre on amendment A1.

Mr. Anglin: Absolutely. Still on the amendment and the rationale for spending the money. We're talking about the reasonableness, whether or not this is a prudent expenditure or whether it's a waste of money. If I hear the government correctly, they've got to spend this money now or they lose a \$50 million asset.

To the hon. Minister of ESRD. Could you, then, answer me: why are we rebuilding a 36-hole golf course in a flood plain that is at risk of being flooded out in the next flood? It's a very reasonable question. We've done this with homes where we're not allowing them to rebuild, and we're actually paying for properties in some cases. There are flood victims out there that have yet to see a finalization of their monies that are required, and that's just for basic living, but we're talking about a 36-hole golf course here and the luxury of it. The minister himself said that he would prefer to play on a regulation 18-hole golf course.

By the way, we do play golf in the west country. It's a little bit rougher than the luxury some of these ministers might be used to. We're a little bit tougher golfers out there, I guess. We break more clubs. I don't know. The fact of the matter is simply this: the priority of spending this money. The big question is if it's such a valuable asset, why are we rebuilding it in a flood zone, in a flood plain that is at risk of being washed out again in the very next flood? Are we throwing more money away, again, when this should not be rebuilt there? That's why maybe this money needs to be pulled out now.

I will say this. What has not been given, and maybe it should be, is how much of the golf course is operational. I don't know. Maybe the minister can answer that question. I'm trying to understand why the public should fund this with taxpayers' dollars now, why this can't wait. Why can't we do so much? You can't tell me that we can't go back to the federal government and negotiate here if it was so important that you fix it. The fact that that money now has priority over so much else is just not sellable. It's not sellable to the public. They're not buying it. It is a lost ball, as far as I'm concerned, on the golf course.

So if the minister could explain that, I really would like to hear that.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members who wish to speak on amendment A1 for Bill 17?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Chair: The question has been called.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:37 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

For the motion:

Anglin	Sherman	Strankman
Mason	Stier	

Against the motion:

Bikman	Johnson, L.	Olesen
Brown	Kennedy-Glans	Pastoor
Cao	Khan	Quadri
DeLong	Klimchuk	Quest
Donovan	Leskiw	Rodney
Ellis	Luan	Sarich
Fawcett	Lukaszuk	Smith
Fenske	Mandel	VanderBurg
Fraser	McIver	Woo-Paw
Horne	McQueen	Young
Jeneroux	Oberle	

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 32
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We will now go back to Bill 17. Are there any comments, questions, or further amendments to be offered for Bill 17?

Seeing none, the question has been called. Are you ready for the question on Bill 17?

8:50

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 17 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Mr. Oberle: Madam Chair, I would move that we rise and report at this juncture.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports Bill 17. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 16 Statutes Amendment Act, 2015

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Donovan]

Mr. Donovan: I guess I did my speech yesterday, so I'll move it from there. Call the question.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 16, Statutes Amendment Act, 2015?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a second time]

Bill 15 Securities Amendment Act, 2015

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Campbell]

Mr. Oberle: I believe the minister had completed his remarks, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other members who wish to speak in second reading on Bill 15, Securities Amendment Act, 2015? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise and speak to Bill 15, the Securities Amendment Act, 2015. This bill is a continuation of the old Bill 42 from 2013 and Bill 3 from 2014, so it's been around for a long time and somehow just never really managed to make it through the Assembly. We have some interest in this bill in that it ensures the proper enforcement relating to securities and point-of-sale-related amendments and amendments that support continued harmonization of derivatives regulation. As well, it has some housekeeping amendments.

Under this Constitution, the Constitution of the country that was really created in its original form in 1867, a very, very long time ago, regulation of securities was given to the provinces. Now, Madam Speaker, it's my view that that is no longer the appropriate way to regulate securities, which are largely in these days very international. To have a system where each province separately regulates its securities in the absence of national regulation is a parochial and antiquated system. Now, having given the power to the provinces, they are unprepared, of course, to relinquish the power.

The question, then, really is where we ought to go. There's a recognition of this, a recognition, I think, even on the part of the provinces as they try to move towards some more harmonization of the regulation, but they won't admit that it is really not appropriate any longer in today's world for the provinces to hold this particular jurisdiction, so securities do continue to be regulated by a patchwork system involving provincial-made statutes governing the basic framework that varies from coast to coast as well as instruments set out by the Canadian Securities Administrators, which act as binding rules, and CSA national policies, which act as interpretive guidelines. Most of the actual rules and regulations are contained in the national or multilateral instruments as determined by the CSA in consultation with each province and industry experts. Each exchange also has its own set of rules and standards for listing.

Now, derivatives are not as well regulated as other securities and are mostly traded over the counter, meaning they're not subject to many of the exchange requirements or the investor protection that those other exchange rules create. Derivatives played a very large role, Madam Speaker, in the 2008 global financial crisis precisely because they were not adequately regulated. Bad debts were bundled into securities, which were bought by investors without the ability to know what was underlying those securities. It was difficult for investors to have access to enough information to know in what they were actually investing, and no one was providing

adequate oversight because of the enormous regulatory gaps. Because most derivatives were traded over the counter, meaning not traded through exchanges, there was even less oversight. We think that this bill in that sense is a positive step towards increasing transparency and investor protection in the ever-growing derivatives market.

However, the same deficiencies that exist in securities regulation as a whole will continue until they are addressed. For example, Madam Speaker, derivatives will now be regulated similar to most other securities but are still subject to some exemptions which are outdated or not working properly. When were the thresholds for the accredited investor exemption last updated? A net income of \$200,000 is no longer particularly rare or exceedingly high. That's a lot of money to most people but among the investing class perhaps not considered to be a very, very large number.

We need to have a national regulator, in our view, though, Madam Speaker. Of those countries which regulate securities, Bosnia and Herzegovina is the only other country in the world without a national securities regulator. You know, calls for a national regulator date back to 1935 and include the 1964 Porter Commission, a 1979 study by the department of consumer and corporate affairs, the 1994 memorandum of understanding between the Atlantic provinces and the federal government, the 2003 Wise Persons' Committee report, and the 2006 Crawford panel. There has been a regular call from people who've studied this issue in this country for the national regulation of securities. As it stands, it looks like B.C., Ontario, and the federal government are going to be entering into a co-operative regulatory system, and Alberta will be left out.

The need for this legislation perfectly illustrates the absurdity of continuing on without a national regulator for securities. We have to keep wasting government time and resources or those of the ASC in updating legislation and harmonizing with other jurisdictions across the country. If we had a national regulator, all of that time and resources could be better spent on enforcement and investigation to better protect Alberta investors. Madam Speaker, capital markets are increasingly integrated and increasingly global. It's inefficient and in many cases impossible for a provincial regulator to handle these complexities. A system of 13 different territorial and provincial regulators also leaves us vulnerable to fraud or simply increased regulatory failure.

9:00

The asset-backed commercial paper crisis in 2007-08, costing billions of Canadian dollars, was a symptom of the problem. Asset-backed commercial paper, or ABCP, is a type of commercial paper that is collateralized by other assets and typically matures within a month. They are derivatives. The IIROC, or Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, found plenty of blame to go around. Banks and investment dealers sold ABCP to unsophisticated retail investors without a clear understanding of the product. The rating agency DBRS bestowed its highest score on much of the paper even though rival agencies Standard & Poor's and Moody's refused to even put a rating on it because of the flawed, Canadian-style liquidity agreements.

Canada's financial services industry and indeed all industry is less competitive without a national regulator. There are significant costs to companies and investors when they need to research 13 sets of laws and rules, applied through 13 different securities commissions, for each deal or investment. The lack of a national regulator also places a significant regulatory burden on small and emerging companies, who don't have the resources of major companies to deal with each regulator's filing fees and requirements.

Now, it seems clear that this PC government's opposition to the national model is at this point a case of putting the interests of oil and gas and its investors ahead of the interests of less sophisticated investors. It's smaller investors, with less knowledge of our securities system, that are at risk without a national regulator. They're the ones that fall victim to Ponzi schemes and high-risk investments as they try to keep up with a fast-moving economy.

Madam Speaker, Canadians as a whole lose billions of dollars a year to securities fraud. I've had the opportunity to meet with a number of individuals who've been put in this position and have spent years and years trying to recover their investments. Reports put the loss at about \$2.1 billion just for Albertans alone, so I think we have a responsibility to ensure that the rest of the province is not taken advantage of. The stakes are simply too high when you're talking about someone potentially losing their life savings. As I mentioned, I've met with people who have lost their life savings, and it's heartbreaking as they try to recover them.

It was too good to be true is a very, very harsh lesson to someone on a fixed income, and it appears that our provincial regulator is not strong enough to prevent this type of thing from happening. There are countless examples out there: for example, the Harvest Group, facing a half billion dollar class-action suit after bad real estate ventures; Platinum Equities, which took \$51 million from Albertans; or Shire International Real Estate Investments, a \$20 million fraud. In many of these cases the provincial regulator took action but only after the fact, due to wide exemptions on who has to register and report under our securities laws. In the case of Platinum one of its top marketers had already been fined by the Alberta Securities Commission, but that was clearly not enough to prevent it from happening again. Madam Speaker, that leaves vulnerable investors holding the bag.

I want to just indicate that we're generally going to support this bill despite those very serious reservations because there is some strengthening of securities protections for investors in this matter, as I indicated at the beginning of my speech. But I do want to firmly and once again put on the record the position that we've taken all along, which is that some form of national regulation of securities is essential in this country. That doesn't mean that it has to be entirely within the control of the federal government. It's quite possible that provinces working together could establish a national regulator for securities by being co-operative with one another, and that would satisfy the constitutional requirements and, at the same time, provide the kind of protection for investors and the type of regulation of securities that we believe is necessary.

We put this forward. Unfortunately, the province has not shown leadership, and now the federal government is moving in with the support of Ontario and British Columbia to establish a federally controlled regulator. It's not ideal, but they have capitalized on the glaring inability of provincial regulation to protect investors, and we've seen more than enough examples of that right here in Alberta, Madam Speaker.

On that note, I'll take my seat.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 15? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark?

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Alberta Liberal caucus supports the bill without amendments. Canada, unlike many other countries, has a decentralized securities regulatory regime. As such, it must rely on its provincial governments to enact legislation supporting the ongoing reform of the Canadian regulatory system. The changes proposed in Bill 15 are part of a national effort to harmonize securities rules and mirror those being made in many

other Canadian jurisdictions. Bill 15 builds on the earlier regulatory changes that our caucus supported during the spring and fall 2014 legislative sessions.

Madam Speaker, as a province and as a country we need to be doing everything possible to protect investors and maintain the integrity of our capital markets. If the 2008 global financial crisis taught us anything, it's that complacency and a lack of regulatory vigilance can quickly and catastrophically shake world markets. No country or jurisdiction is immune from the effects of a market collapse. Therefore, it is important that we all do our part to support the health and stability of the world financial system.

Madam Speaker, Alberta Liberals acknowledge that the proposed changes are necessary for Alberta to be able to honour its national and international commitments to improving securities regulation. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now in effect. Are there any members who wish to question or comment on the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark?

Seeing none, are there any other members who wish to speak in second reading on Bill 15, Securities Amendment Act, 2015?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

Bill 13

Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Fawcett]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members who wish to speak on Bill 13, Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to speak to this bill. This bill approaches a very important issue, the protection of Alberta's waterways, particularly those in southern Alberta, that serve so many purposes from recreation to irrigation to drinking water.

Now, Madam Speaker, I want to indicate that we support this measure. The threat of invasive species, including zebra mussels, is too great to ignore. It's high time, I think, that we take steps to protect this. The bill would create a mandatory inspection system for boats along the southern border with Montana and the eastern border with Saskatchewan. Manitoba, which is always a progressive, forward-looking government, that our government often copies and steals a lot of their really good ideas from – and that's a good thing because they're good ideas, you know – has taken similar legislation. In fact, if you want to know what the Alberta government is going to do, just look at what the Manitoba government did three years earlier, and you'll probably get an idea of what's coming.

9:10

Dr. Sherman: They copy Liberals, not New Democrats.

Mr. Mason: I'm sorry. The government of Manitoba is not a Liberal government. I hate to disillusion you, hon. member.

The bill also serves to enhance the authority of fisheries officers and guardians and would not result in additional costs for boat owners. Those owners who are found to have zebra mussels or other invasive species on their vessels will have their boats cleaned at the province's expense. Inspections will be placed at the existing inspection stations already owned and used by the province for other reasons.

I think there are lots of things that we can say about these species. Zebra mussels have caused millions of dollars in damage by clogging up water pipes. They've altered the food chain in lakes. They present a threat to swimmers, who may cut themselves when stepping on sharp shells, and they create toxic algae blooms that can kill fish and birds. They decrease property values.

Another one, Madam Speaker, is Eurasian water milfoil, which reduces biodiversity by competing with native plants. It reduces oxygen levels in water, that can kill fish. It hinders recreational activities like swimming, boating, and fishing due to accumulation of plant debris. It can create stagnant water, which is the ideal habitat for mosquitos, impede flood control, water conservation, and irrigation works.

I think that some things have been done, but more needs to be done. It's been proven that washing boat hulls reduces the chance of transfer of invasive species to a new lake. Almost two-thirds of boaters do not currently clean their boats before changing lakes. A study suggested that additional management efforts would be helpful, so, Madam Speaker, it's more than enforcement. There have to be education measures included, and we think that the bill is a useful step in improving the environmental record of this government, but they sure have a long, long way to go.

The NDP has been a long-time supporter of environmental protection, and the government has not, in our view, done all that it should in the past to deal with things like blue-green algae and, you know, of course, the birds in the tailings ponds in the oil sands and so on. There's a lot of work to be done to protect wildlife, to protect our natural environment, but this is, I think, a positive step in the right direction. As a result, Madam Speaker, we will be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that. I couldn't help but rise and show appreciation for my colleague across the aisle and say how much I appreciate him and agree with what he said because if I heard him correctly – and I was listening carefully – he said that our government constantly brings forward ideas that are right and proven. He did say that, and I agree with him.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, this is not Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Mason: I'm making a point of order.

The Acting Speaker: Oh, all right. The hon. member has called a point of order.

Mr. McIver: Madam Speaker, sometimes it's hard to give a compliment.

Mr. Mason: You're very good at giving compliments to yourself.

The Acting Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, your point of order.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Mason: Yes. Well, Madam Speaker, under 23(h), (i), and (j) I would just indicate that I did not say that the government always does the right thing. I did say that sometimes they get the few good ideas they do have from the Manitoba NDP government.

Debate Continued

The Acting Speaker: Thank you for your point of clarification, hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Again, Madam Speaker, as I just said, the hon. member made it clear that this government brings forward ideas that are both good and proven, and I thank him.

The other point that I would like to agree with the hon. member on as well as the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, that brought this forward, is that this is important. It might be one of the most important things we do this year. I would urge members to support it. Protecting our waterways: I can't think of anything more important, Madam Speaker. There's nothing more key to our success as a civilization, and the waterways are important for agriculture, for everything that we do.

I thank hon. members for their support, and I'm certainly proud to stand and express mine as well.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Is anybody wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, we'll move to the next speaker, the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think it's very interesting that we talk about this aquatic invasive species. Only as recently as last summer I was travelling on an irrigation tour with the Member for Little Bow. We had a very informative time and very interesting discussions about the species. So some of the information that I'm going to relate may be divisive, and possibly the Member for Little Bow could weigh in to provide discussion on my comments here.

While no one wants to see the devastation in Alberta that can be brought about by this invasive species, we have some questions and some concerns about the wording of the bill. Section 25 empowers officials to enter or pass over land without warrant to enforce or ensure compliance with this act. Section 26 empowers an official to enter and inspect any place or conveyance without warrant to carry out inspections to determine if there are subject organisms. Madam Speaker, that's concerning, to say the least.

Firstly, we'd like to ensure that prevention of the spread of AIS is the focus of any amendment or the bill. Passing over land should be done only in circumstances where fisheries officers have reasonable grounds to believe that AIS does exist on that property.

Secondly, we would like assurance that this level of authority to enter and inspect any place or conveyance or boat is limited to inspection stations. We also have questions about the implications of implementing these mandatory inspection stations.

As I've previously stated in the Chamber, I live along the Saskatchewan border, and I know that it's a very porous border both for farm implement transport and the transport of any sort of husbandry or, in this case, possibly watercraft. So my questions are: where will these stations be physically placed? Do they require buildings and/or specialized equipment? How will these inspection stations be staffed and at what cost? Will the impact of transportation or traffic be minimized?

Again, while we do not want to see AIS here in Alberta – and the Member for Little Bow and I saw possible visible problems in relation to that – we want to balance the level of the threat, while at this point it's quite low, with the level of authority needed to ensure that Alberta remains free of AIS.

Madam Speaker, I have had some experience, again, in my residency along the Alberta-Saskatchewan border with the control

of rats that like to transport in from Saskatchewan both in feed and animal husbandry.

We would also like the government to explore alternative means of controlling the threat, including public education and benign biological impediments, if and when required, as opposed to relying solely on laws and legislation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). Anybody wishing to make comments?

Seeing none, we'll go to our next speaker, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've been following this issue probably for two and a half years now and was first exposed to it when I attended PNWER. It certainly was an issue that was on everyone's agenda who is aware of the danger that this province faces if zebra mussels and quagga mussels get into our system.

9:20

I think at this point in time – and I know that the hon. member that just spoke ahead of me had many questions. I'm not sure that we're at the question point. I think we simply cannot do nothing. We must do something. Irrigation is the heart of our sustainable resource, which is agriculture, in this province. Oil and gas is great, but we still make your food in southern Alberta, and we need water to do that. If these little mussels get into our irrigation pipes, most of which are now closed – they're not the open canals of the old-fashioned way of doing irrigation – they could clog them, probably within months. They're very, very difficult to get at. You would have to pull your pipes apart to actually remove these little mussels.

One of the things that is really important – and I did personally go to a couple of inspection stations last summer. It was voluntary at that point, and certainly some people with their boats just drove by, but some did stop, and I asked them why they stopped. What made them stop? They said: because they had actually spoken to somebody in Arizona, where they know that both Lake Mead and Lake Havasu are devastated because of these mussels. These are the mussels that then attach themselves to boats and come into Alberta.

These mussels originated, if I'm correct, from Russia. They came in on the big boats in the great lakes. They have gone from the big boats, and they've gone down the east coast of North America. They've come across the bottom via boats, and now they're working their way back up. They actually can still survive in the Alaska cold. This is a huge, huge, issue.

The inspections, I am very pleased and I'm trusting – and I thank the NDP for their support for this bill – will be mandatory. One of the easy ways to do it, that doesn't take an awful lot of people's time, is that there are dogs that are trained to sniff out these mussels. Often with the boats, particularly the ones that have the big ballast tanks, because they create bigger waves and people can sort of almost surf behind these boats, that water stays in there, and it's very, very difficult to get inside the tanks and actually look. Even if you drain them, the little mussels could still be in there, but the dogs can sniff them out, and then people can go further. The other place that they often hide is on the propellers of the boats. They'll go up into the water intake.

I'm just going to speak a little bit more because I will speak more in committee when I actually have my notes. The education part, I totally agree, is one of the most important parts of it. Any of the boat shows that are in the province I know have people there to be able to explain exactly what happens and why we need to inspect these boats and why we're not trying to make life difficult. I can assure you that for \$75 million a year it would be very, very difficult if it ever got into our irrigation ditches and our pipes.

There are other invasive species, certainly, that have been mentioned already, and they are also something that we must pay attention to. But at this point in time I am working very hard toward the eradication of any kind of mussels that would come into our province. I was raised on Lake Winnipeg lakefront property, so I know what a good lake should look like. Lake Winnipeg, unfortunately, is not one of those anymore. They also now have the mussels, that have come in on boats from wherever. Some of the rocks that people use as protection against the waves on their lakefront properties are now covered in those mussels, and certainly you wouldn't dare walk on them without very heavy shoes because they would just rip your feet apart.

I think I will leave it there because I will be speaking more in committee, but in my mind – and, of course, it's because I'm focused on it – I think it's one of the most important bills that we're going to pass during this spring session. It's very important that we get it, that we get it passed, and that we get working on it right now. People will be coming back with their boats, the snowbirds will be coming back with their boats, and if we can stop them at the border and get that education part of it going, I don't think it will take long before the whole province or any boater really understands the danger of not cleaning their boats.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). Are there any members who wish to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Strankman: Yeah. I'd just like to ask the member a question.

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

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd just like to ask the hon. member a question. She says that these mussels are extremely difficult to control, so I want to know if any organic treatment is available. I understand that it is, but I want to know the efficiency of it.

Ms Pastoor: I'm sorry that I can't answer that question with any great authority, but my understanding is that there isn't an organic that would actually dissolve them. You have to physically scrape them off. They're almost like barnacles. I don't know if anyone's ever had a boat that had barnacles on it from the sea. I know from my experience on a seagoing yacht that we had electrical wires around the inside of the boat, and it would sort of vibrate, and it kept the barnacles off. But, basically, you just take your boat to dry dock and scrape them off, and I think it's fairly similar with the mussels.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We have a few minutes left under 29(2)(a). Are there any other members who wish to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, we will go back to second reading of Bill 13. The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think this government has barnacles, but I'm not sure they can scrape them off. Maybe they can be voted out. Who knows?

An Hon. Member: It's your job to get rid of barnacles?

Mr. Anglin: That is my job. That's right.

The bill itself is a good bill. This is, as some of the members have stated, serious business. It's a serious issue. I do have a question for the minister, and I hope that when we get into Committee of the Whole, the minister can answer some questions relative to the

funding and the personnel for actually enforcing this, because it's going to take manpower. This is not just something that we can legislate and pretend it's going to be done very easily. I'm real curious as to, when we're dealing with the specific issue of how we're going to battle this invasive species, where the funding is coming from and how it's going to actually be implemented so we can get ahead of this and do what we need to do. This is something that, in my view, is a good bill on the intent side, and it's a necessary bill, but it has to work. It just can't be something in words. In practicality we've got to be able to make sure that we can make it work so that it does what we want it to do.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to say a few words of thanks to PNWER, the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region, because they were actually the ones who really started targeting this problem. I've got to name one state within PNWER that was very much the leader, and that's the state of Idaho. We were very lucky to actually hire one of their experts. We hired Kate Wilson away from them. She has been the very effective lead in this area, and we really appreciate her in the ESRD staff.

There were some earlier questions about control measures. There were some promising results using potash in Manitoba. We tried it in Manitoba. We actually did manage to stop them in the small bays that they were in, but it didn't, of course, kill the whole lake, so they are still there. We have shown, you know, that in a concentrated, small area, yes, the potash will work, but in a larger body of water there's just not that much potash to be able to dump in there. So in terms of the controls that are available to us, if they do ever get up here, then I'm afraid that at this point we have not yet found what would do it.

9:30

I just wanted to make sure that PNWER was recognized for taking the lead on this. Of course, they're closer to Lake Mead, where it's essentially totally wiped out that lake for anything except for the quagga and zebra mussels.

Anyway, I'm very glad that this is moving ahead. We do need that extra strength of making it mandatory for your boat to be inspected, and hopefully we can keep them out.

There is one other point I wanted to make. We are very lucky in that we have the headwaters to pretty well all of our waters, so if we can keep them out, we will be able to keep them out of Alberta. Unfortunately, the converse is also true. If we get infected in Alberta, that means that the provinces and the states that are downstream from us also get infected, so our responsibility is actually a little bit higher because of this.

Thank you very much for bringing forward this legislation. I call the question.

The Acting Speaker: We have Standing Order 29(2)(a) first, hon. member.

Seeing none, is there a member?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker: The question has been called.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wonder if in view of the hour and of significant progress made, we might move to adjourn this evening until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:33 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 17, 2015

Issue 21a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Speaker
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Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 17, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. May we find the resolve required to put aside some of the differences that divide us so that progress may be made for those whom we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Brent Rathgeber. Mr. Rathgeber served as an MLA in this fine Assembly for Edmonton-Calder from 2001 to 2004 and since 2008 has sat as Member of Parliament for Edmonton-St. Albert, which happens to be my federal riding. In September 2014 Brent published a book, *Irresponsible Government: The Decline of Parliamentary Democracy in Canada*. He will be more than happy to sell one to anybody who wants to purchase for the price of \$19.99. Mr. Rathgeber and I correspond on a regular basis as we deal very often with common constituents and immigration matters. I would like to ask Mr. Rathgeber to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you 79 students from Michael Strembitsky school from my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. Joining them today are teachers Ms Natasha Lalani, Ms Palinka, Ms Pennington, Mr. Lucas McCaw, Mrs. Tanya Boyko, and also joining them are five parents: Mrs. Melissa Syrenne, Mrs. Joyce Hebert, Mrs. Sandra Anderson, Mrs. Mandie Taylor, and Jamie Sveinson. This school represents students from 25 different ethnicities and quite a diverse group of students who are here today. I ask my guests – they are seated in both galleries – to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other school or education groups?

Seeing none, let us move on to the introduction of other important guests that we have. Let's start with the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the Premier.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my family, who are here with me today. They are seated in your gallery. We have my wife, Maggie, who has put up with me for over 21 years – God bless her soul – and our sons Levi and Blu, future Alberta agricultural producers, who, I must say, have given me more than a few grey hairs. I would ask that the hon. members please give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you the members of the Métis women's security council who are in the gallery. This council was established in December of 2013 to provide the Alberta government with advice and direction on breaking down the barriers that face Métis women in our province. We have with us a group of amazing women: the chair, Michelle Fournie; Audrey Poitras; Brenda Holder; Hope Henderson; Karen Mackenzie; Lisa Higgerty; Loretta Calliou; Manikot Thompson – if you could all stand – also Marie Delorme; Rachelle Venne; Sandra Sutter; and Sherry Cunningham. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask my guests to rise and receive the warmest welcome from this Chamber.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of my constituents who represent the Leduc County Coalition, or LCC. They have come today to witness me tabling a summary of some 7,000 letters of concern opposing Edmonton's proposed annexation of some 38,000 acres of Leduc county. I would ask them to rise as I read their names: LCC board members Clarence Shields, Ed Moussa, Lynette Schurko, and Doug Wright; Leduc county manager, Mr. Brian Bowles; Mayor John Whaley; county councillors Clay Stumph and Tanni Doblanko; and county residents Mr. Schurko, Nicky Smith, Dave and Barbara Wedman, Dellia Tardif, Judi Trelenberg, and Jim Niederhaus. I would ask that the members of the Assembly give my guests the warm traditional welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, followed by the Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you and to all members of this Assembly Mrs. Sharon Smith. Sharon is a Wildrose candidate for Leduc-Beaumont and has been living in Alberta for over 20 years. I have never met anyone as passionate about speaking on behalf of her community. As a Leduc resident she's here to join other concerned Albertans about the recent annexation proposal for Leduc and its impact on her constituency. She has a beautiful family and, on a personal level, is someone I call a friend. I'll ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism, followed by Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I introduce to you and through you and to the members of this Assembly Kim Bugera and her children Keira and Jackson Laansoo. I see that Keira and Jackson are wearing green today. Kim is a very successful business owner in Morinville, and she is living up the hill from the MLA from St. Albert. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the Minister of Seniors.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to introduce to you and through to all members of this Assembly two guests from my constituency who are seated in the public gallery. As we all know, postsecondary education is a cornerstone of our society as Albertans. Olds College is a postsecondary institution in

my constituency that sets a high standard for all educators. Olds College provides vital courses and education to students from all over our province, our nation, and, in fact, the entire world. It is a versatile institution, and it has become a hub of activity and a pride of the town of Olds. It's my great pleasure to introduce them. I'd ask them to stand as I call their names: Tammy Forbes, associate vice-president of external relations, and Jordan Cleland, vice-president of advancement. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you John Hart, the president of the First Special Service Force Association and the son of Geoffrey Hart, a First Special Service Force member, who has since passed away. Mr. Hart has driven up from Medicine Hat to join us today to recognize the important contribution of the men of the First Special Service Force, an elite Canadian-American commando unit established in 1942, also known as the Devil's Brigade. Last month 42 surviving members were honoured in Washington with the congressional gold medal, and today the city of Edmonton honoured the Devil's Brigade and the bravery borne by this elite group of soldiers. Accompanying Mr. Hart is Bree Claude, executive director of policy, planning, and legislative services branch with Alberta Seniors. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Whitecourt-St. Anne.

1:40

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour, my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two constituents from Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. Seated in the members' gallery today we have Matthew Boonstra and his grandfather, Dick Baker, who live in Fort Saskatchewan. Matthew has been involved in many activities in fundraising throughout the community. It is his goal to enter the military and at some point to add political science to that career path. I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome from the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great opportunity to introduce to you and through you my mayor from the town of Whitecourt, Maryann Chichak. Maryann, please stand up. She's a great, dedicated mayor, who is caring and loving and one of my best supporters in Whitecourt-St. Anne. Thank you for being here.

The Speaker: Thank you. Are there others?
The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House a friend, Ronald Brochu, who is married with two adult children, four grandchildren, and one on the way. He's also worked 40 years as an auditor in private practice with the Canada Revenue Agency and the Alberta government. He's been a senior tax auditor across the province. Mr. Brochu will be a candidate for the Alberta Liberal opposition in Edmonton-Gold Bar. Please stand, and we'll give you the warm welcome of the Legislature.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Two minutes each for these members' statements. I show Calgary-West, and then I'm not sure who is next, so if somebody would alert me to that, I'd be happy to recognize him or her.

Let's start with your statement, Calgary-West.

Devil's Brigade

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Officially they are the First Special Service Force, an elite Canadian-American commando unit under the U.S. Fifth Army, established in 1942 and trained near Helena, Montana, but in legend and fearsome deed they are the Devil's Brigade. The precursor to what we think of as Special Forces, these men fought in the Aleutian Islands, Italy, and France during the Second World War, taking on the toughest assignments and some say never losing a battle.

Last month 42 surviving members of the Devil's Brigade were honoured in Washington, DC, with the congressional gold medal, the highest civilian honour the United States Congress bestows. At the ceremony that day were Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, our Premier, and two Albertans who served in the Devil's Brigade, Maurice White of Edmonton and Leonard Corbett of Calgary. The Devil's Brigade comrades and fellow Albertans Bernard Cooper of Calgary, Henry Planger of Pincher Creek, and Lloyd Lewis of Canmore were unable to attend the ceremony.

Today the city of Edmonton honoured the Devil's Brigade. I'm proud to rise on behalf of the government of Alberta and honour the service of Mr. White, Mr. Corbett, Mr. Cooper, Mr. Planger, Mr. Lewis, and all the surviving members of the Devil's Brigade. Congratulations for this richly deserved honour bestowed upon you by our friends south of the border.

Sadly, the generation that fought the Second World War is leaving this life. It is almost 70 years since the end of the war, and it is a year this month since the end of Canada's military mission to Afghanistan. Just this past weekend family and friends and military personnel mourned the passing of Sgt. Andrew Doiron, who lost his life in Iraq. All of us who live in freedom in this great province in this great country owe a debt of gratitude to the men and women who serve in our armed forces. Thank you to the men and women who serve this province, who serve this country, and to their families for their dedication and tremendous service.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by Lethbridge-West.

Eliminating Violence against Women

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the years we've all stood in this House at different times to applaud impassioned and sincere speeches to mark International Women's Day or stand united in our calls to end violence against women. While it is incumbent on all of us to be vocal in our condemnation of domestic violence and violence in all forms against women, it must go with action. Despite our best hopes and increased awareness, there's no denying that this generation of women – call them Martha and Henry's daughters; call them the new Alberta or the Charter generation – have grown up with violence. A sickening survey from 2012 revealed that 1 in 10 Alberta men said that it was okay to hit a woman if she makes him angry.

Mr. Speaker, violence is never okay. We all must ensure that no woman and no child is forced to remain in a home where someone

thinks it's okay. Yet in 2013 17,000 women in Alberta were turned away from women's shelters in this province, 17,000 women that went out in search of help and were turned away from a safe space. This is due to inadequate transition housing for women ready to leave the emergency shelter, and it is due to inadequate income under Alberta Works to be able to afford an alternate accommodation. This blocks access to thousands that then seek emergency aid in the women's shelters and forces them back into danger.

Alberta is less than two weeks away from a budget that this Premier has said would be defining for the next 10 years. Well, the Premier may be right. If in the next 10 years we see thousands more women and children turned away from shelters or denied the help they need, then this Premier will have defined his legacy indeed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by Highwood.

Unlimited Dance Collaboration in Lethbridge

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to this House about some exceptional people who have made myself and Lethbridge exceptionally proud. On March 17 through 21 the University of Lethbridge will play host to a uniquely Albertan show that seeks to break down the barriers for people with disabilities while it entertains the audience. *Unlimited* is a collaboration between the U of L drama professor Lisa Doolittle and Pamela Boyd, founding artistic director for MoMo Mixed Ability Dance Theatre in Calgary, along with local organizations supporting people living with disabilities. Mike Sawchuk from the U of L was in my office last month explaining that the cast is made up of student performers from the U of L's dance and theatre for all abilities class, which itself has six students with developmental disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, this show is an innovative endeavour that will allow people with disabilities to represent themselves on the stage, which is just as important as including them in the workplace, in relationships, and in the community in general. *Unlimited* is the third phase of a project initially begun as a series of theatre/dance workshops for people with disabilities, exploring the challenges of meaningful employment in partnership with the Lethbridge Association for Community Living.

The show has grown out of the U of L's unique innovation to proactively include a group of people with disabilities in a for-credit university drama course along with nondisabled students. Professor Doolittle is also investigating the effects of inclusive practices on the postsecondary level of education. Lethbridge is well known as a community that promotes practices which include people with disabilities, and I believe this is yet another example of that attitude.

Mr. Speaker, this government is also firmly committed to the belief that all Albertans are equal regardless of their level of ability, and I believe that *Unlimited* is a perfect example of that philosophy in action. It is an opportunity for inclusion that deserves recognition, respect, and admiration. I hope that anyone who has the opportunity to attend a performance of *Unlimited* does so, and I would ask that my fellow members join me in congratulating the University of Lethbridge for this unique and important accomplishment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood, followed by Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Okotoks Water Supply

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The town of Okotoks has achieved one of the lowest per capita water consumption rates in North America and continues to reduce water consumption even while increasing population. In fact, they've seen a 41 per cent reduction in water use while the population increased by 45 per cent. Despite these efforts Okotoks has now reached its capacity in drawing water from the Sheep River.

The residents of Okotoks have done everything they can to conserve. They came together and embraced water conservation controls such as having restrictions on watering their lawns so that odd-numbered addresses water on Thursdays and Sundays at designated times while even-numbered homes water on Wednesdays and Saturdays. They also have a popular water conservation rebate program, which reimburses residents as well as institutional, commercial, and industrial utility consumers for purchasing water-efficient appliances. Their efforts have won them a 2015 FCM sustainable communities award.

Okotoks residents have done their part, but they now need the province to meet them halfway. In February the town formally applied for water pipeline funding under the water for life program. It is crucial for the town to secure a new water source, and their proposed option is to build a water pipeline from Calgary. The proposal is supported by the Calgary Regional Partnership, who recently wrote a letter of support on their behalf, and the Okotoks Chamber of Commerce. What benefits Okotoks benefits Alberta. Without this pipeline the town's potential and their ability to build new residential communities and attract new businesses will be severely constrained.

I made it my goal to ensure that Okotoks is successful in obtaining a provincial commitment to help build this water pipeline. I think by now the Transportation minister has come to expect me to raise the issue with him every time I see him, and that will continue, Minister. Securing funding from the water for life program to build this pipeline is an essential part of the strategy to grow our community in a healthy and vigorous manner.

I would also like to thank the town of Okotoks for working collaboratively with their regional partners to find a solution that might eventually be expanded to help others in the region, and I hope to see it become a reality soon.

The Speaker: Thank you.

1:50

British Home Children

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, between 1869 and 1940 orphaned and abandoned children arrived in the British Commonwealth countries, including Canada, from Great Britain. They came to be known as the British home children. These children rarely had a choice and were often forcibly taken from orphanage societies or poor families, some with and some without the consent of their parents. All were uprooted from any close family or relatives, and many were separated from their siblings, who were often the only family they knew. About 100,000 boys and girls aged six to 18 were shipped across the sea to Canada.

Some of the children were fortunate to be welcomed into loving homes. Others were not so lucky and were often used as cheap agricultural or other manual labour. Many were denied proper shelter or educational opportunities. They often worked in brutal conditions that can only be described as bondage. Many home children ran away from their guardians, searching for a better life. Some of the children overcame the trauma and adversity of their uprooted childhood and ill-treatment and went on to lead productive

and fruitful lives. However, all of them bore the scars of being deported from their home and family.

Two thousand ten was proclaimed as the Year of the British Home Child by the Parliament of Canada, and a commemorative stamp was released to honour these children who had been sent to Canada. Other nations, including Australia and the United Kingdom, have apologized for this shameful episode in history. Nova Scotia and Ontario have proclaimed September 28 as British Home Child Day. Mr. Speaker, I urge the government of Alberta to recognize the lives of these British home children, as other provinces have, and to declare September 28 British Home Child Day.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, for those of you who've sent me notes about the timings, please know that the clock actually froze a day or two ago. It has since been fixed, and we're monitoring it today to make sure that it doesn't freeze again, we hope. So thank you for your notes, but please stand advised of that.

Let us begin with the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Your first main set of questions.

Government Spending

Mrs. Forsyth: Last week when I asked the Premier why he's set on raising taxes, he begged the oppositions for some alternative ideas. It's no wonder why: Michener, licence plates, ending sole-sourced contracts, divorce by nursing home. All opposition ideas. But here is another. Your government just voted to spend another \$10 million on the Kananaskis golf course. So why don't you go ahead, take the Wildrose idea, and roll back the ridiculous spending on the golf course instead of raising taxes on hard-working Albertans?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, speaking of Wildrose ideas, the latest is that they should block the Keystone pipeline, which has emerged as a policy of the Wildrose Party. I wonder if the hon. member would really like to speak to that and reassure all Albertans that they've not moved to the left of the NDP in terms of their economic position.

Mr. Saskiw: Point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. Opposition House Leader, your point of order has been noted during that response.

Let us move on to the first supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I'll be pleased to speak to that. The only people left are you guys.

Premier, Albertans need hospitals. They need schools. Albertans don't need their government spending millions on privately run golf courses, accessible to only the wealthiest of Albertans. Now, today we hear that the Premier is actually increasing the pension top-ups of the highest paid government executives. Those making \$140,000 or more will see the taxpayer-funded portion of their pensions increase by 22 per cent. So here's another idea for you, Premier. Why don't you just go ahead and roll back that pension top-up instead of raising taxes on hard-working Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Prentice: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. But another idea of the hon. member's party that we certainly won't accept is her party's suggestion that not only do we block the Keystone pipeline but we immediately start a royalty review. Perhaps the hon. member

could reassure Albertans that this is not their case to destroy jobs and investments in our province.

Mr. Saskiw: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Opposition House Leader, your point of order has been noted at 2:04.

Let's move on with the final supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: You know, Mr. Speaker, it's funny how he picks up something that's going on in the leadership review, and he refuses to answer the questions that are important.

This pension top-up for the highest paid management in the government will cost taxpayers millions. The Premier says that we're all in this together, but his actions don't follow his words. Last year the government ignored a management wage freeze and instead quietly gave them all a raise costing taxpayers at least \$50 million. So, Premier, if you won't cancel the pension top-up for upper management, will you at least take the Wildrose idea and roll back the \$50 million pay raises instead of raising taxes on hard-working Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the Wildrose has got it wrong. There is no pension top-up for senior officials. I can say to you that pension benefits of government employees are not increasing with this change at all.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions. The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, I'll send him the information.

Public Body Executive Severance Payments

Mrs. Forsyth: Last fall's Accountability Act failed to address the massive severance payouts rampant throughout the agencies, boards, and commissions of your government, Premier, severances that have cost taxpayers millions. Under your new management, Premier, these payouts continue. Last year the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission paid out \$382,000 in severance to their VP of strategy, transformation, and ethics. That's three times the annual base salary. Premier, are these the kinds of severance payout payments that Albertans should expect from your new government?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Premier said: we are under new management. We brought in the Accountability Act, that says that we will not pay out any more than six months maximum, and that's going on right now.

Mrs. Forsyth: Let's try this one. That same year the AGLC forked out another \$370,000 in severance for another high-paid executive. The VP of lottery and gaming services went home with a total of \$567,000 last year. That's a taxpayer-funded position, and under the Premier's watch nothing has been done to rein in these kinds of payouts. Under the new management of this Premier is it acceptable for the AGLC to be handing out \$700,000 in severance for just two people?

Mr. Campbell: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, as I said, under this Premier's watch he's made it very clear that we are under new management, and we passed the Accountability Act last fall saying that we will not pay more than six months' severance to senior employees, and we're living to that vision. Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: The AGLC is exempt from the sunshine list, and it's exempt from the Premier's Accountability Act. There are hundreds of so-called arm's-length organizations, and they account for the vast majority of government spending, yet basic accountability like salary disclosure and severance caps does not apply to any of them. So much for your new management. When will the Premier get serious about transparency and accountability with Albertans' money and order an end to these massive severance payouts in all areas of government?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have over 314 boards and agencies and commissions in the province of Alberta, and the Premier has put forward a committee to look at reviewing all of these boards to make sure that they aren't redundant or duplicating services. We will make sure that all boards and commissions and agencies follow the same rules that we set out in the Accountability Act, and under this new management of this Premier we'll make sure that we're accountable to all Albertans.

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

Political Activity of Premier's Staff Member

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's go back to September 6 of last year. The Premier is elected leader of the party. He's taken the stage. "My election as the leader of this party marks the beginning of a commitment to integrity and the acceptance of responsibility." But now we see the Premier shrugging off allegations of bribery and his staff meddling in party affairs. My question is to the Premier: why is his principal secretary interfering in business while being paid by Albertans?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, party business and government business are clearly different; that's understood by myself and by everyone in my office, and clearly anyone in my office who's involved in party politics does so as a volunteer and does so on their own time.

Mr. Strankman: Respectfully, Mr. Speaker, the principal secretary is paid a handsome \$190,000 to help the Premier govern the affairs of the province. Let's go back again to the Premier's speech. "Albertans expect excellence and they expect performance from those who are in positions of trust. They will not accept excuses." Again to the Premier: why is his principal secretary, paid by Albertans, interfering in PC Party business?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think we clarified yesterday that internal party matters . . .

Mr. Saskiw: Point of clarification, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: . . . really have no space or place in the Assembly here. These are rules that I didn't make up. These are rules that you yourselves made, but, hon. Premier or somebody, if you wish to respond and clarify again the position on this and how it might relate to government policy, that would be in order for someone to do.

No one is rising to that, so let us move on to the final supplemental.

2:00

Mr. Strankman: We'll try it again, Mr. Speaker. To be clear, using a government paid sick day to allow you to do partisan activities is unacceptable, no ifs, ands, or buts. These actions directly question the ethics of the government. In that same space the Premier asked Albertans to judge his government on "the actions we have taken, the progress we have made and the integrity we have displayed." To the Premier again: what are Albertans to think if he refuses to

explain these actions by his principal secretary's apparent misuse of government funds?

The Speaker: I didn't cut off the questions, so I am wondering if anyone wishes to answer that, bearing in mind what I read yesterday from House of Commons.

I see no one rising to answer, so let us move on to Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Women's Shelters

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In 2013 17,000 women and children were turned away from Alberta's women's shelters due to lack of necessary resources to help them. Of the many thousands of women who use or need shelters, 50 per cent are aboriginal. In the face of pending PC budget cuts those numbers are almost certainly going to increase. This is a tragic failure of the PC government to protect society's most vulnerable. To the Premier: how have you allowed this deplorable situation to worsen if this government is supposed to be under new management?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The human costs of family violence are immeasurable, as the hon. member has stated, and the impacts can last a lifetime. We must work together as a community to reduce future incidents of violence. Some of the things that we are doing are funding the emergency shelters, having protection orders that allow families to stay safe in their own homes, screening and counselling, and, of course, assisting families through the court process. Annually the government of Alberta spends about \$70 million on many of these services to help women and families.

The Speaker: First supplemental. The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These 17,000 women and children are fleeing abuse and violence at home. When they're turned away from shelters, they're forced to return to unsafe, unhealthy conditions. This horrible situation is made worse by the fact that income supports are so inadequate that they don't allow women to escape the abuse and afford a place of their own. With the PCs' radical budget less than two weeks away, will this Premier commit to improving, not worsening, access to these services for women and children in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, shelters are only one part of the equation. It's the second-stage housing, the affordable housing, that we're working on. We know that many of the services that we provide include support for dealing with sexual assault, mandated treatment programs, counselling, and collaborative community response programs and services. In 2013 we developed the Alberta framework to end family violence. Under that framework we established the Family Violence Death Review Committee. We're looking forward to hearing the report from that committee.

Dr. Swann: With all due respect, frameworks and meetings don't solve the problem of transitional housing. It's precisely the transitional housing that is grossly underfunded. That means these 17,000 women and their children cannot get into the emergency shelter because the transitional housing isn't there. What are you going to do to improve that? Are you going to continue to tie the safety of our women and children to the price of oil, Mr. Premier?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government funds fully 97 per cent of all women's shelter spaces in the province. Sometimes women are turned away, but they get additional supports through phone, through counsellors that we can set up with them. It's a wraparound service we provide to women who come to an emergency shelter. We will continue to support women and families, I can assure the House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, you rose on a point of clarification. My apologies for not noting it, but I have noted it now, and it was at approximately 2:01, during the exchange of questions that involved the Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Let us move on to the leader of the ND opposition.

Hospital Infrastructure Priorities

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When reviewing the state of our Edmonton hospitals, the documents read a little bit like the plagues of Egypt: asbestos, mould, insufficient protection for fire and lightning bolts. Yesterday I released documents showing that crowded hospitals mean cancelled surgeries. In today's documents we learn that because of PC neglect, when people actually get in the door, the buildings themselves have also not received the care they need. My question is to the Premier. Why has your PC government failed to maintain our hospitals, leaving us years behind on critical maintenance?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We spend over \$70 million a year on maintenance on facilities across this wonderful province. Where there's an emergency, we move forward and fix it right away. Asbestos is sometimes in a building; it's been there for 20 and 30 years. If it's not touched, there's no danger to it. I think that trying to make a big scare out of this is a bit irresponsible.

Ms Notley: Well, what's responsible is asking the questions that are directed towards you.

To the Premier again. Last night your caucus passionately defended a decision to invest 2 million capital dollars in the rebuilding of a luxury golf club that some experts suggest will likely flood again. Meanwhile today's documents show that for the last five years your government has denied roughly the same amount of money for the removal of asbestos from one of Edmonton's largest and busiest hospitals. A luxury golf course, asbestos removal in a hospital: are these the priorities Albertans can expect under your government's new management?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, that's an incredibly unfair comparison. When we move forward and evaluate the needs we have in our various hospitals, we will take care of the needs. That will be the primary concern. We do spend over \$70 million a year, and we'll continue to do that. This government is committed to maintaining the facilities in this province.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can certainly agree with the minister that those comparisons are awfully unfair. They're unfair to the people of Alberta. That's who they're unfair to.

Over the last five years the cost of urgent repairs to Edmonton's hospitals neglected by this PC government has amounted to almost a quarter billion dollars. To the Premier: if this is how well your government stands up for health care in the good times, how can

you expect Alberta families to trust you to protect our hospitals when the cutting starts?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, this government will cut costs, not care. We're committed to making sure all of our facilities are in the best of care. There are a lot of facilities in this province. We do a priority list, and we work as hard as we can to make sure every dollar is invested as best as possible.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Municipal Funding

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This PC government talks a lot of blarney when it comes to fair and equitable distribution of industrial tax revenue between regions and different population densities. For example, Strathcona county gets immense benefit from its proximity to refineries while the city of Edmonton relies heavily on inconsistent MSI funding from the province. The government talks about the importance of regional co-operation but doesn't mandate it. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why do you continue to defend a system that leaves some regions looking for a lucky clover while others are rolling in a pot of gold?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to say Happy St. Patrick's Day to everyone in the House. With an Irish background, I certainly want to say that, and I love the questioning.

Mr. Speaker, this government works very hard with municipalities as our partners to ensure the funding is important for them. MSI funding is a formula funding, \$11.3 billion, a formula that was made with the partnership of the AUMA, the AAMD and C, and the Alberta government. That's how we deliver programs, in partnership with our partners.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, given that there are gross inequities even between regions of lower population densities, where some are lucky to have a railway or pipeline run through them and others are left with nothing but potato fields, why does the minister allow some municipalities to prosper while others struggle through no fault of their own?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. All of the municipalities have a great deal of work that they're doing in their communities, rural municipalities as well, especially resource-based communities, with the roads, the wear and tear and that. What I will say to this hon. member and to members in the House: as we're doing the renewal of the MGA, this is certainly one of the many, 54, topics that we're discussing.

The Speaker: Final supplemental. The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the city of Calgary, which is the largest population centre in the province, is expected to provide a rainbow of services both for its citizens and those from surrounding communities, all with insufficient funding, why hasn't the minister mandated a more equitable share of revenue from the periphery to where it's needed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that if the hon. member would talk to those in rural Alberta with the AAMD and C or those in urban Alberta with the AUMA or talk to the mayors of Edmonton or Calgary, there's never enough money. I think it would be clear that all municipalities would say that. But in saying that, what we have done is made sure that we work with our municipal leaders and partners to find formulas like MSI that they agree on, that they all come together in consensus on, a long-term program, \$11.3 billion, to help them be sustainable. Working with our partners on those funding formulas is important for this government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

2:10 **Aboriginal Construction Career Centres**

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today a new, two-year aboriginal construction career centres pilot project was announced with NorQuest and Bow Valley colleges. The program is designed to bring more aboriginal people into construction careers in the province, and I was really pleased to hear about such a program. But we've been talking about the troubling fiscal situation in this province, and we know that we need to do more with less. My question is to the Premier. Given the fact that we are in this fiscal situation, how are we able to afford additional programs such as these?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, we've been clear that despite the fiscal challenges that we face as Albertans, we still need to invest in programs that are crucial to Alberta's future. That certainly applies to the aboriginal career construction centres opened at NorQuest College and Bow Valley College today, really important projects that pave the way for aboriginal people to have careers in the construction industry, supported by government, by the colleges, and by the private sector.

Ms Calahasen: Again to the Premier: given that this program takes place at the colleges in Edmonton and Calgary yet we have a large aboriginal population in the corners of our province, are students enrolled in NorQuest and Bow Valley the only individuals eligible for this program?

Mr. Prentice: No, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, any member of the aboriginal community who's looked into having a career in the construction industry is eligible and available and is welcome at the aboriginal construction career centres at Bow Valley College and at NorQuest College. This will be incredibly valuable to aboriginal people to get them jobs in the construction industry.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you. To the Premier again: given that recent media reports have suggested that we are looking at a downturn in the number of jobs in the construction industry, is now really the right time to be funding construction-related job programs like these, given the fact that they may even be just the greatest thing that ever happened?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are many opinions on the economic circumstances we face, but this government intends to continue to invest in infrastructure in this province to build the infrastructure we need, and we want to see fair and equal opportunities for employment in the construction industry. These programs give aboriginal Albertans a leg up, a chance to get started,

a chance to have a career, support their families in the construction industry. That's why it's so important.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, the Premier prefers to answer questions from his own side than from the NDP.

Allegations of Criminal Wrongdoing

Mr. Mason: Apparently, this government believes that when it comes to potentially criminal allegations against a member of cabinet, the PC Party can serve as police, prosecutor, and judge. My questions today are about government policy. To the Premier: is it government policy that decisions about investigation of possible criminal allegations against a member of the government should be determined by the PC Party and not by police?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, the PC Party and the government of Alberta actually have one thing in common here. We do not investigate anyone. Police investigations are done independently by the police and the Crown prosecution service. I trust this member is satisfied with that answer.

Mr. Mason: Hardly so, Mr. Speaker.

Given that in our legal system we have prosecutors whose job it is to prosecute individuals when there is sufficient evidence that a crime may have been committed and given that these prosecutors work for the public and not for a political party, to the Minister of Justice: is it government policy that prosecutors should no longer worry about deciding whether or not to prosecute criminal allegations against government members because this will be taken care of by the member's party instead?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I previously said, it is a well-established principle in common-law jurisdictions that the Crown prosecution service operates independently of any political interference whatsoever. Nothing has changed in that respect, and I'm not aware of any criminal investigation or anything to which the member alludes.

The Speaker: The hon. member. Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, certainly, deciding that some of these matters are to be dealt with as internal party matters may be construed as interfering with the administration of justice.

Given that Alberta has judges who are responsible to decide the guilt or innocence of people accused of criminal acts and given that they also ensure that the accused has a fair trial, to the Minister of Justice: is it government policy that judges will take a back seat when it comes to criminal allegations against government members because a political party will now handle those matters? Will the accused be allowed representation . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice, if you wish to try and comment on this.

Mr. Denis: Again, Mr. Speaker, there are three orders of government in this country: the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary. The judiciary operates fully independently in any part of this country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

School Construction

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton-Manning is a fast-growing constituency with a large number of young families. These families are of course concerned about schools for the children in their community. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Can you assure my constituents that school capital funding will continue to be a major item in this year's budget?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure the hon. member is aware that I can't speak about any specifics ahead of the budget being tabled on March 26, but I can say that it is a major concern for many Albertans. I want to assure this member and others that I'm well aware of the need to continue building infrastructure in this province. Eleven hundred children are born in Alberta every week, and last year 300 people moved here every day. Schools are needed in this province, and we will continue to build them.

Mr. Sandhu: To the Minister of Infrastructure: given the recent announcement that planned starter schools will now move forward as full-build projects, can you please reassure my constituents that McConachie school is still moving forward as a full build?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the member and his constituents that, yes, it is. This school is a kindergarten to grade 9 school. It has an opening capacity of 750 students and can rise to a capacity of 900 students. This is a school that is estimated to have a contract in place by June of this year, with an opening date of sometime late in 2016. The fact remains that within the last week alone six additional schools have now had their contracts awarded . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Sandhu: Again to the same minister: will you make it a point to advocate for more school infrastructure in the capital region, especially since the price of oil is so low?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The capital region is a very vastly growing jurisdiction in our province, obviously. Currently in the phase 2 bundle of schools there are 17 school projects within Edmonton. There are 10 in the construction phase. There are two that are currently out to tender. There are five in the design phase. In addition to that, there are an additional 18 school projects that have been announced in phase 3 of our school build, and we will complete every single one.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Airdrie.

Light Rail Transit Funding

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta's two major cities traffic congestion has reached intolerable levels. The closure of just one major artery in Edmonton has led to traffic chaos for hundreds

of thousands of Edmontonians just trying to get to work. In Calgary traffic congestion has been unacceptable for years. Both cities are crying out for funding for desperately needed light rail transit and other public transit. To the Minister of Finance: your government seems to have found a pot of gold for all sorts of other election goodies, so when can we expect some more much-needed funding for our major cities, including light rail transit?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd just ask the member to stay tuned for the budget on March 26.

Dr. Swann: Given that investment in critical public transit infrastructure is often tied to funding from other levels of government and given that the province has tied its funding of these projects to the price of a barrel of oil, when will the government take LRT funding off the royalty roller coaster so that Edmontonians don't have to wait decades before LRT can expand into its rapidly growing west end?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has been quite clear that we're going to come out with our budget on March 26. We'll have a 10-year financial plan. Again, we've been very clear that we are going to get off the roller coaster of oil. We're going to depend on less and less of it over the 10-year plan in our operating budget. I suggest the member stay tuned. I think it'll be good news for everybody.

Dr. Swann: Given that hundreds of thousands of Albertans would not be stuck in traffic today if this government had made funding of public transit a priority, as Alberta Liberals have long advocated, why is this government still continuing to download so much of the financial burden of urban transportation onto already-cash-strapped cities?

2:20

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I would disagree with the first part of the member's statement, that people will take public transit. I mean, people use their vehicles in Alberta. We understand that that causes some issues, but we will continue to work with our municipalities. We have the GreenTRIP program in place, and we will continue to do all we can to invest in light transit and do what we can to educate Albertans on the popularity of and the importance of taking public transportation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie, followed by Livingstone-Macleod.

Urgent Health Care Services in Airdrie

Mr. Anderson: Thanks. Mr. Speaker, in 12 months the city of Airdrie will pass the 60,000 person threshold. It is now the largest population centre in all of western Canada without access to 24-hour urgent health care. This is becoming a dangerous situation for such a large population centre in that almost 60,000 residents, who on a good-weather day are 45 minutes away from the nearest 24-hour facility, in the winter are often completely cut off due to dangerous road conditions. To the Minister of Health: will the government ensure Airdrie is provided with access to 24-hour urgent health care as promptly as possible?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we thank the member for his passion for his community. You know, we're looking at programs all the time where we can upgrade and improve opportunities for care within communities. As Airdrie is growing so quickly, we're going

to have to take a long, hard look at that community as it is really one of the fastest growing communities in our province. We appreciate the question.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, in co-operation with local health professionals, philanthropists, private developers, concerned citizens, and the city of Airdrie community leaders have submitted a proposal that would build a roughly \$35 million health park with access to 24-hour urgent health care which will cost the province only \$4 million of that \$35 million build. A pretty amazing deal. Minister, will you agree to review the proposal as soon as possible to assess whether it is a fiscally responsible way for the province to address Airdrie's current and future health care needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I think it's incredibly exciting that a community would come together and be so dynamic and creative to put together a program in which they can partner with the province. We will take a very serious look at that. I think that more and more in our province communities like Beaverlodge and Bassano and others are coming together in order to work with the province and develop their health care system. We really appreciate the member's community, and we want to thank them very much.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, the Airdrie health park proposal would also allow the province to move the beds and equipment from the current eight-bed urgent care clinic to the new health park. It would also allow for small overnight shifts of health professionals to staff the new facility 24/7 and would permit the expansion of urgent care as is so desperately needed given our current facility's multihour waits. This would be an amazing improvement for health care in Airdrie. Minister, will you commit to working with our community to ensure Airdrians have access to the urgent health facilities we need 24 hours a day?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, given the proposal that the community wants to put forward and the needs and the growth of the community, we'd be more than willing to sit down with, discuss, and look at options to make sure that Airdrie gets the kind of care they need. It's very exciting, again, to see communities throughout our province wanting to work with the government to find solutions. Rather than always trying to find a way not to do, they're finding a way to do.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Highwood.

Disaster Recovery Program Claims

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This PC government promised to close 90 per cent of all eligible DRP files by the end of March of last year. Not surprisingly, that didn't happen. Not even close. The same government made another promise recently to add another \$20 million in a campaign-style announcement with the Premier and the Member for Highwood, but this move raised concerns residents had of the timing. To the Premier: we know your government likes to campaign with public money, but how can you in good conscience play politics with flood recovery?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is not playing politics with flood money or flood recovery. More than 80 per cent of the 10,500 files have been completed, and our

government has provided more than \$100 million to Albertans to help rebuild and remediate their homes. Last year in October we made a commitment to triple the staff for the appeals and made a commitment to have those appeals completed by December. Promise made, promise kept.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. Only six workers, as was just mentioned, were originally assigned to close these files after the devastating floods. This number was raised, as they've just said, to 18 with pressure from the opposition, still less than the number of workers you sometimes see working at a Tim Hortons. Why does your government always have money for MLA offices, severances, planes, cellphone bills, and vacations but can't seem to find the necessary resources to get these files closed and Albertans back on their feet?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addition to what I just said, we also made a commitment with the hon. Premier and the hon. Member for Highwood to make sure that we added additional staff with the DRP files. We did this so that people in southern Alberta who were devastated by the largest disaster in Canadian history had the opportunity to have a caseworker working directly with them. In addition to that, we removed the eligibility of 50 per cent and increased it, now advancing 90 per cent of eligible expenses to help fast-track payments for complex cases. We have made a commitment to have these most complex ones done . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
Final supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, and thank you to the minister. Again, my question was to the Premier.

Many victims of the 2013 flood continue to remain frustrated by the government's slow and confusing response, delayed now by almost two years after the floods. Premier, we all know the DRP process is complex, but considering more than 20 per cent of eligible files now remain open two years later, do you plan on doing anything differently going forward?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the largest natural disaster in Canadian history, as I said, 10,500 cases. More than 80 per cent of those cases are completed. We are now dealing with the most complicated cases, and we have made a commitment, our Premier and our government, to make sure we're there until every one of those cases is completed. We're working very hard with the communities and with individuals and with caseworkers designed for them so that they can get the services they need, with an increase to 90 per cent of costs for them. This is real action under new management.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Okotoks Water Supply

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The town of Okotoks has achieved one of the lowest per capita water consumption rates in North America and continues to reduce water consumption even while increasing in population. Despite this, Okotoks has reached capacity. In two short years the town is expected to have a water deficit. To the Minister of Transportation: when can the residents

and businesses of Okotoks expect to have approval for a new water pipeline, which will allow development in and around the town?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to this hon. member for the question. She has been a great advocate for her constituents on this issue, and her efforts should be commended.

I'm well aware of Okotoks' desire to increase their water capacity for this proposed pipeline, and we've been working closely with the municipality and the Member for Highwood on a solution. As the member knows, I'm not at liberty to discuss details contained in Budget 2015 until it is tabled on March 26. I'll have more details on the water for life program to share at that time.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Given that much if not all of the provincial government share of the funding for this project would likely be coming from the water for life program, how does this program determine which projects are priorities? And given the urgent need where does Okotoks stand on that priority list?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to ensuring all Albertans have access to clean drinking water. Since 2004 the water for life program has provided more than \$875 million to more than 150 projects, and we know the demand is growing. At this time we know that Okotoks' ability to provide residents with a reliable source of clean drinking water is not in jeopardy, and we'll continue to work with the municipality to address capacity issues as the town grows.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Smith: Thank you. Given that Okotoks is a leader in water conservation and yet has still reached its capacity under its current water licences, what will the government do to ensure that water needs for the town are met while we're waiting for this pipeline to be built?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, both the water for life and the Alberta municipal water/waste-water partnership programs are vital to this government's ability to ensure Alberta communities have the water infrastructure they need. Projects for both programs are prioritized on the basis of need, with health, environmental protection, and operations-related issues addressed first.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Edmonton Land Annexation Proposal

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today there is going to be a petition presented by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont with the signatures of nearly 7,000 of his constituents in opposition to the annexation plans of the city of Edmonton, plans that would expand the city and take over some of the best farmland in the world. This government has a history of ignoring Albertans, so what assurances can these 7,000 people have that the government is going to take this issue seriously?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

2:30

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. For those members from those communities that are in the House today, there is a process in this province with regard to annexation, and it's very clearly laid out in the Municipal Government Act. Both the county of Leduc and the city of Edmonton are going through that process. We value that it's an independent process, and we let them work through that process.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the minister represents the neighbouring riding of Drayton Valley-Devon, which includes a portion of Leduc county. This decision will impact her constituents as well. Will she commit to meeting with the Leduc County Coalition and ensure that their voices are heard?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I always meet with my constituents, and I value meeting with my constituents on this issue. But also, what I've let all of the parties know is that there's a process with annexation. It's an independent process and a fair process that's laid out for all municipalities to work together on areas where they can find mediation and come together. At the end of the day they can go to the Municipal Government Board, and that is the independent process that we'll go through regardless of where an annexation happens in this province.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Leduc and Leduc county have shown that they have a good working relationship and that they are willing to sit down at the table and have a real discussion on important issues that impact their citizens, what options are available for the Leduc County Coalition to ensure their voices are not muffled by the city of Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. It's very important for the people in the municipalities of Leduc county and Leduc city and the areas of Edmonton as well to be able to voice their opinions and their concerns with regard to annexation. That is all part of the mediation process. That's very well defined in the Municipal Government Act. Certainly, it's very much so that Leduc county hears from their ratepayers in this very important process for them. They are doing that. They are here in the House today. They've tabled a petition that the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has accepted as well. The process is working, and they'll continue through that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Tailings Pond Management

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October 2013 the dams storing tailings at the Obed mountain mine near Hinton failed. This became a significant concern to all of the residents of Wood Buffalo as a large, dark plume of solid particulates travelled up the Athabasca River. While the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo shut off their intake valve on the water treatment plant as it entered the region, residents still feared for the quality of their drinking water. To the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development: while I know the Obed dam break is still under

investigation by the AER, what is being done by this government in the interim to ensure that the Athabasca or any other waterway will be protected from other potential spills?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans care deeply about the quality and quantity of their water resources. After the Obed incident all coal mine dams were investigated to ensure that they all had structural integrity. We are on an ongoing basis continuing to work with the cumulative effects management association, stakeholders – such as industry, aboriginal groups, and ENGOs – to gather scientific and traditional knowledge about the watershed to ensure that the river and that the watershed is safe for now and future generations.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. What has been learned from this dam break, and how is it being applied to oil sands tailings pond containment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This serves as a reminder of the environmental risk associated with having tailings on our landscape. This is why we take the safety of dams very seriously. Alberta was the first jurisdiction to institute dam safety legislation. This is why we introduced the new tailings management framework last Friday, to make sure that we can reduce the amount of tailings that are on our landscape moving into the future.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Allen: Thank you. Also to the Minister of ESRD. The reclamation of oil sands tailings continues to be a concern. How will the tailings management framework address tailings reduction and ensure that the appropriate cleanup occurs without cost to the taxpayer?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under the new tailings management framework existing ponds are to be remediated, and we want to make sure that we slow the growth of any new tailings. Limits on new tailings will be in place. As well, there will be requirements for the treatment of existing tailings on the landscape. There will be triggers and limits that are in place under the framework to drive escalating regulatory responses to ensure that there is proper cleanup of tailings.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Menthol-flavoured Tobacco Products

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. A student group in Calgary called BAM is joining the chorus today calling for menthol to be included in the flavoured tobacco ban brought in by Bill 206. This has already been supported by the World Health Organization, Canadian Medical Association, Canadian cancer and lung associations, Heart and Stroke Foundation, Alberta Medical Association, Public Health Association, Alberta Policy Coalition for Cancer Prevention, Action on Smoking and Health, and this very Assembly, just to name a few. Why is the Health minister the only one who doesn't think it's necessary?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, this House passed recently the most comprehensive antismoking bill in the country. It actually passed the bill rather than talked about a bill.

Dr. Swann: Why don't you answer the question, Mr. Minister? Why are you the only one that doesn't?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I thought I answered the question. We passed a very comprehensive antismoking bill, which deals with a great number of issues with flavoured tobacco and makes sure that our young people are protected.

Dr. Swann: Given that any doctor or health minister, for that matter, worth their salt would know that preventing smoking is the key to preventing lung cancer and other chronic lung disease and that menthol flavouring increases attractiveness and addictiveness of tobacco, especially for youth, why does the minister who says that, quote, children are the priority, end quote, not support the single most important health policy that would protect them from this addiction?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we do agree with the hon. member that smoking is a very, very, very bad thing to do, and we would encourage people not to smoke. We will in the fall look at other alternatives, but that will be in the fall.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Affordable Housing in Rural Alberta

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Affordable housing is a serious issue across Alberta, but in ridings like mine in rural Alberta it's becoming a crisis. Housing is becoming less attainable, and layoffs are occurring across many industries due to the low price of oil. This makes affordable housing a very serious issue in rural Alberta. In my riding of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake there are few to no opportunities for affordable and attainable housing. To the Minister of Human Services: given that this economic situation has made things worse for our lower income families, what role will this government play in ensuring that those low-income individuals and families do not end up going homeless in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Regardless of the economic climate we want to see that every Alberta family has a good quality of life and access to supports when they need them. Albertans can contact Alberta Supports, with knowledgeable staff to help them to find basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter, of course, or even health benefits and getting child support payments. In addition, we have 53 Alberta Works offices across Alberta for help and training for individuals to enhance their skills or to advance their careers.

Mrs. Towle: To the same minister: given that the government is facing a \$7 billion shortfall this fiscal year, how will the government ensure that attainable and affordable housing remains a priority, and will they review all options and partnerships to build more affordable, attainable housing in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that more than 10,500 people have received housing wraparound supports since

the launch of the housing first program. We're currently working with the Minister of Seniors on a housing strategy, and I think partnerships are absolutely essential. I look at the Alberta rural development network and some of their great ideas. I look forward to working with many partners just like them.

Mrs. Towle: To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: given that rural Alberta has unique challenges to access affordable and attainable housing, what is your ministry doing to promote employment in rural Alberta, specifically to ensure that Albertans are not forced to always rely on the use of government programs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Things we deal with in our ministry are people without jobs and jobs without people. In January with Human Services and the federal government we helped fund the Women Building Futures online program to help train women in the trades so that they can get some of those high-paying jobs and look after themselves. We're also working to educate and train Alberta's workers with the federal government through the Canada-Alberta job grant. More than 490 Alberta employers and 3,450 employees have already benefited, and there's more to come.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Medicine Hat.

2:40

Public Service Right to Strike

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2013 this government passed Bill 45, an unprecedented attack on the rights of workers to strike. Since then the Supreme Court of Canada concluded that the right to strike is a fundamental freedom. Given that the Supreme Court has affirmed that legislation similar to Bill 45 is unconstitutional, will the minister of labour please tell us whether he intends to respect the rights of workers to strike and repeal Bill 45?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I think it was last week that the Premier talked about that we are going to go ahead and work on essential services legislation. I made it clear that when we do that, we will have respectable two-way dialogues with our workers and the people who represent them. If the topic of Bill 45 comes up, we will listen to what our employees' and their representatives' concerns are, and we will take those seriously.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the Supreme Court of Canada decision has rendered many of our laws in this province that prohibit striking illegal, including Bill 45, and given that I think that the Supreme Court of Canada's decision was in fact predicated on some of the laws that we have created here in this province in the first place, to the minister of labour: is the government prepared to pay the million dollars a day for every day with unjust and unconstitutional laws that remain on the books here in the province of Alberta?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is talking about a legitimate issue. But, to be clear, the Supreme Court of Canada's decision was predicated on Saskatchewan legislation specifically, not on Alberta legislation. Having said that, the hon. member's concerns are legitimate. Our ministry has begun to act and will continue to study that decision, and we'll act accordingly.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Supreme Court of Canada has affirmed the constitutional right of public-sector workers to strike as a fundamental freedom and given that Alberta's legislation not only prohibits certain public-sector employees from striking but also fines them astronomical amounts for simply threatening to strike, will this minister affirm today that he will not enforce these essentially illegal laws as directed towards public-sector workers?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member asked if we were going to enforce legislation that hasn't been proclaimed; think about that. I think the answer is quite obvious. We cannot possibly enforce legislation that has not yet been proclaimed.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the bell for question period time has rung, so we will stop here and continue on with members' statements in 30 seconds.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks for your member's statement.

Retrospective by the Member for Strathmore-Brooks

Mr. Hale: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Serving as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta has been a privilege and an honour. I rise today as a proud representative of the amazing, resilient, and hard-working constituents of Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Speaker, many great things have occurred since I was first given the opportunity to represent the citizens of Strathmore-Brooks, and I am extremely grateful and humbled that my role has contributed in some small way to the betterment of all Albertans. I've been privileged to address a variety of important and diverse issues, including the importance of fiscal accountability and governmental transparency, the importance of the detection of invasive aquatic species, as well as making sure our seniors' voices have been heard in this House.

The bonds forged in my time here have shown me that strength and courage abound in our great province. Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day we are all Albertans. We all want to build on the great legacy that has made our province so successful and catapulted our presence on the global stage.

Some important issues in the constituency of Strathmore-Brooks are the status of the Bassano hospital, the Strathmore hospital, along with wildlife management issues and agricultural policies that still need to be addressed. Rest assured, Mr. Speaker, I will continue to bring to light these issues in whatever capacity I can, as I did as an MLA, a citizen, and most importantly as a proud Albertan.

As Alberta goes through some challenging times, I hope the people of this great province realize that we're all in this together and that we must continue to work together so that we can weather the storm and continue to be proud of our great province.

Mr. Speaker, I will forever remember my days here in the Legislature and all the interesting people I have had the privilege to meet and the many new friendships I have made. I would like to wish everyone the best with this old cowboy saying as you continue to represent the people of Alberta: my friends, may your horse never stumble, your cinch never break, your belly never grumble, and your heart never ache.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the five requisite copies of a summary of 7,000 letters that were presented to me as the MLA for Leduc-Beaumont by the Leduc County Coalition, and they were introduced earlier. The LCC is a group of county business owners, landowners, and residents who are committed to fighting to save our county from the proposed annexation of some 38,000 acres by the city of Edmonton. They believe that this is an unnecessary tax grab and that any boundary adjustments should be through a negotiated process that recognizes the future needs of both communities.

Mr. Anderson: I have two tablings; they're actually petitions, Mr. Speaker. The first is 1,000 signatures – this is in addition to 2,500 that were submitted earlier – with regard to residents in Airdrie asking for a 24-hour urgent health facility in their community.

The second one is 100 letters from parents around Westbrook school who have a very serious problem with regard to speeds in and around their school. I'm hoping that the Transportation minister can look at these letters and decide if it would be warranted to reduce the speed limit around the school to protect those students better.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I had the Member for Calgary-Buffalo next, but I see no presentation there, so let us move on to the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to say that Alberta Justice supports victims first, and as such I'm going to be tabling five copies of the victims' services status report for 2013-14. These programs provided services to more than 71,000 Albertans, 15 per cent under age 18. More than 2,800 volunteer advocates, board members, and special-purpose volunteers contributed 161,047 volunteer hours during this report year.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Fawcett, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, response to Written Question 10, asked for by Ms Blakeman on April 14, 2014:

Which municipalities in Alberta have lands that are classified as flood prone?

On behalf of the hon. Mrs. McQueen, Minister of Municipal Affairs, responses to written questions and motions for returns asked for by Ms Blakeman on April 14, 2014. Response to Written Question 1:

What progress has been made on the formal commitment to develop a big-city charter, announced by the Minister of Municipal Affairs in a government news release on June 18, 2012?

Response to Written Question 2:

Which 10 municipalities had the highest property tax rates in Alberta for the 2012 and 2013 calendar years?

2:50

Response to Written Question 24:

How many safety codes officers in Alberta have been specifically trained to evaluate homes affected by the June 2013 flood and assess whether they have been flood-proofed to a sufficient

degree to warrant removal of the notice that the government has placed on the titles to those properties?

Response to Written Question 31:

For those property owners who received disaster recovery program compensation in 2013, what is the wording of the notice the government will place on the titles to those properties?

Response to Written Question 32:

Who are the members of the government's Disaster Recovery Committee, the body referenced in section 2.2.2 of the Alberta disaster assistance guidelines and section 7(3) of the disaster recovery regulation?

Response to Written Question 33:

As of January 1, 2014, how many homes in southern Alberta were deemed or estimated to be eligible to apply for disaster recovery program compensation in relation to the June 2013 flood, and of those, how many submitted applications for compensation, how many were offered compensation, and how many accepted the offered amount of compensation?

Response to Written Question 34:

As of January 1, 2014, how many disaster recovery program compensation claims from the 2010 flood in southern and central Alberta were appealed to the Minister of Municipal Affairs pursuant to section 8 of the disaster recovery regulation, and how many of those resulted in a reversal or modification of a previous decision made by either the Alberta Emergency Management Agency's director of recovery operations or the managing director?

Response to Written Question 35:

As of January 1, 2014, of the total number of southern Alberta residents who applied for disaster recovery program compensation in relation to the June 2013 flood, how many have requested a formal review of their files by the Alberta Emergency Management Agency's, AEMA, director of recovery operations, and how many have subsequently requested that a decision on their file by the AEMA director of recovery operations be reviewed by the AEMA managing director pursuant to section 7 of the disaster recovery regulation, and how many have subsequently requested that a decision on their file by the AEMA managing director be reviewed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs pursuant to section 8 of the disaster recovery regulation?

Response to Written Question 36:

How many municipalities requested financial or technical assistance from the government for riverbank stabilization or flood protection for the period between the southern Alberta flood that occurred in June 2005 and the flood of June 2013?

Response to Written Question 37:

As of January 1, 2014, what is the average length of time that it has taken to conclude disaster recovery program compensation claims in relation to the June 2013 flood, and what is the average compensation that has been paid?

Response to Written Question 38:

As of January 1, 2014, how many disaster recovery program compensation claims are outstanding from the 2010 flood in southern and central Alberta?

Response to Written Question 39:

As of January 1, 2014, how many disaster recovery program compensation claims are outstanding from the May 2011 wildfire in Slave Lake?

Response to Written Question 40:

What was the commencement date of LandLink Consulting Ltd.'s current five-year contract with the government to administer the province's disaster recovery program?

Response to Written Question 41:

What positions did Barry Giffen and Rick Thrall, LandLink Consulting Ltd.'s president and managing partner respectively, hold when they were employed by the government of Alberta?

Return to order of the Assembly MR 2, a copy of the report of the provincial advisory panel on community flood mitigation that

proposed \$830 million in flood mitigation measures at the Alberta Flood Mitigation Symposium held in Calgary on October 4, 2013.

Return to order of the Assembly MR 8, a copy of the performance review of LandLink Consulting Ltd. referenced by the Minister of Municipal Affairs during the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship's consideration of the ministry's 2013-14 estimates on April 17, 2013.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we have two points of order and one point of clarification to deal with before we move on to Orders of the Day. Let's hear the first point of order. It was raised by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills during the first exchange of questions and responses.

Point of Order Referring to Party Matters

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise according to Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), and I'd like to combine both of those two points of order.

Mr. Speaker, you never hesitate to stand up on so-called party matters, but it was not the case today when the Premier was referring directly to internal party debates, something that is clearly on the surface related to party matters. I suggest that's a double standard, and that's why opposition members lose confidence. Those same rules should apply to every Member of this Legislative Assembly no matter how important they are and no matter if they are the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, if we're going to go down that route, we can talk about promises made during leadership campaigns and all that kind of stuff. In fact, the Premier himself in 2003 promised, when he was running for the leadership of the PC Party of Canada, free tuition for everyone. You know, bowls of rainbows and lollipops and magical unicorns as well, I think, were part of that promise. He promised in the most recent leadership campaign term limits, which, of course, is unconstitutional – and the government hasn't even attempted to put that forward – and no taxes and so forth. The Member for Calgary-Hays promised to have bars open till 4 a.m. Are we supposed to debate that here in the Legislature? The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs talked about increasing taxes, carbon levies. Is that supposed to be talked about here?

Mr. Speaker, you know, we've been very clear in the Wildrose in our commitment to export our most important product, strongly in support of Keystone – I wanted to clarify that – but I suggest that in the past few days you've prevented us from even speaking on what you deem to be party matters. Here's an issue that's clearly a party matter. So not only was it a double standard not to prevent the member from speaking on these issues; I would ask that at a minimum those comments be retracted in their entirety.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, first of all, for his service the last three years to this Chamber. I didn't have a chance to do so, and I wish him well, whether in the practice of tax law, criminal defence, whatever law he may have practised as well, or in whatever he may decide to do. He's a very honourable professional.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that's where my rainbows and lollipops, though, do end. He was referring to internal party debates. Well, it's routinely referred to as to what members of a party may say, and there's a clear delineation between what a member of a party may

say or asking an actual question of a party in the Chamber here. I'm actually going to table five copies of a reference to what the Premier was talking about: a member of his party, someone who is seeking the leadership, wanting a review and study of our royalty policy. I quote: I know this is the kiss of death for any politician to talk about, but I believe that it's time that we put everything on the table; I think it's really time that we looked at that formula.

On top of that, this same member goes on to state: why should we have a Keystone?

Mr. Speaker, this was a matter of opinion that the Premier was talking about, and the reality is that these positions are very similar to the New Democratic Party in this province. These positions are not what a conservative party would say, and that is the delineation that the Premier was talking about. He was simply talking a matter of opinion. There's lots of debate, comparison, and contrast in this Chamber, but it's very, very clear to me that there is no point of order because the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills just doesn't want to concentrate on the inconvenient truth that the Wildrose is very similar to the New Democrats.

The Speaker: Are there others? Does the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition wish to weigh in on this?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, what this member is saying is ridiculous. This is the same member that says that we're so right that we don't know where we're going to be. It's been very clear. I left this party in 2010 because of the royalties that the previous Premier, Premier Stelmach, was bringing in. Including the Member for Airdrie, that's the reason why we crossed the floor in 2010, because of what this government was doing with royalties, what they were doing with health care and everything else that they were dealing with. So if the Premier wants to get off his horse to fight the pigs, we'll be ready to fight him.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? No?

We're dealing with the two of these at the same time, I understand, so that will take care of the point of order raised at 2:03 and a subsequent one that was raised at 2:04.

I want to begin by stating that at the time of this question-response exchange, when the Premier rose to speak, there was such an uproar here that I found it very difficult to hear parts of what was being said, which is why I've ordered the Blues. Nonetheless, I have received the Blues. It's not uncommon for people to raise issues about ideas and policies and so on espoused by members with respect to their party's position on a matter. In fact, in this House it's frequently the case that opposition members, sometimes from all three opposition parties, preface their questions or their preambles by using the word "PC," which typically stands for Progressive Conservative. Now, I wouldn't stand and rule that out of order, as I haven't, so I'm trying to be as consistent as possible. But when matters deal with internal – internal – party matters, they ought not be raised here, and we all know that.

3:00

Now, in this instance I have read the Blues, and I will promise you this: I will be more vigilant going forward, assuming I can hear the questions and answers. If you want the Speaker to intervene and stop any references whatsoever to any party matters, I can be extremely strict about that. You may not enjoy it, but I can be extremely strict. Internal ideas, internal policies, internal party matters are something that is a little bit of a grey area, but you can tell by the temperature, the tone, and the temperance, or lack of, there that accompanies each of these questions as to whether or not it is a legitimate point of order that is forthcoming or if it's more

the case of a difference of opinion, a dispute on the facts. As we know, there are frequently two different versions of the story and all of those other things that Speakers like myself and others have stated in this House many, many times. Those situations do occur. Hon. members, at the end of the day everyone gets a chance to stand up and clarify what their point is, and I believe that has happened here, so I will be more vigilant going forward, I can assure you that.

However, one thing I did want to point out was that I believe, hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, you said something about how the Speaker prevented someone from asking their question, which is why today I've skipped through *Hansard* as quickly as I could just to see when and where that might have happened. I don't see it yet, but I will look and see if that was in fact the case because, typically speaking, I have tried to allow the full question to be asked such as happened today when the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler rose. I did not interrupt his question. He asked it in full, according to the Blues, and at the end of that exchange I even stated the following according to the Blues. "I didn't cut off the questions, so I am wondering if anyone wishes to answer that, bearing in mind what I read yesterday," and so on.

So the full question, hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, was asked by you, and I allowed it to be asked. I wasn't sure where it was going, and frequently you don't know where some things are going until you've heard the whole question. I do my best to try and ensure that that is a consistent approach that I apply.

So that is the case, and as such I find no specific point of order here, but I have indicated what I will be doing going forward, so everyone should be forewarned about that, please.

Now we have a point of clarification. The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Point of Clarification

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was referring to previous days where you prevented members from asking questions.

Mr. Speaker, on this point of clarification I think this is a vitally important question here. Earlier today the Member for Drumheller-Stettler asked a question about how tax dollars were being used. The question was in reference to whether or not taxpayer dollars were used for partisan purposes. Tax dollars. Taxpayer dollars. Of course, there's precedent for this and why this is important. Previously it was found that government planes were used for partisan purposes. We asked those questions in the Assembly because it involved taxpayer dollars, and those dollars were subsequently repaid by the PC Party.

Here the member asked a question, and it was in reference to whether or not a staff member, who is paid by taxpayer dollars, was doing partisan political activities. That's entirely an appropriate question. Mr. Speaker, I'm asking whether or not that's your ruling, that we in the opposition are not supposed to ask questions about whether or not an employee who is employed by taxpayers can participate in political activities during working hours. If that is the ruling, it is unprecedented, and it is completely uncharted territory.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Anyone else wish to chime in on this? It's just a point of clarification. I'd be happy to proceed.

Seeing no one, let me proceed. Thank you for asking, hon. member, because it gives me a chance to explain a couple of things again. First of all, as I said just moments ago, when I was addressing the first two points of order, I did not interrupt the hon. member's question. In fact, the Blues would show a full question that ends with a question mark in case one, where he asked about a principal secretary interfering in business while being paid by Albertans; in

question two, something to do with a principal secretary paid by Albertans interfering in PC Party business; and question three, to do with government funds, also ends with a question mark, so I believe I allowed full liberties there for the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, and the full question is there.

Now, in between those questions and responses I stated the following. I stated, "Hon. member, I think we clarified yesterday that internal party matters..." – and then you rose on your point of clarification – "... really have no space or place in the Assembly here." I went on and made another comment, and I gave it as a cautionary note, but I did not bar the question from being asked in any way, shape, or form.

Also, while I'm on the point of clarification, neither did I prevent someone from answering it. I asked if they would like to answer, and according to what I have before me, the Premier stood and answered question one, and then the point was asked by me if someone from the government side wishes to stand up and explain how this does or doesn't relate to government policy. No one rose, and I stated that. No one rose to answer, but I gave an opportunity, and I did the same with the next one, too. To be clear, I ended that one by saying: I see no one rising to answer the third question either. But an opportunity was provided. That point of clarification is appreciated, and I hope so, too, are my comments in regard to them.

As such, we will now move on.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 17

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015

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

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today and move third reading of Bill 17, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, you wish to go next?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Speaking on third reading.

The Speaker: I would normally go to the Official Opposition, but I see they've waved off that opportunity, so why don't we go straight to you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate an opportunity to just say a couple of words in closing on Bill 17, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015. I certainly did outline our concerns in the Legislature here in, I believe, second reading, but just to highlight those again. Certainly, we see the utility of the supplementary supply in many areas, but it also, I think, highlights some indiscretion and poor choices that this government has made in regard to both health care and long-range planning for infrastructure, schools particularly, and then, of course, the issues around legal aid.

I guess an issue that's really come to light, I think, even more specifically than people would have noticed, is in regard to the Kananaskis golf course. Now, in the larger purview of this government and the very large budget that we deal with here each year, the number is not as big, but I think there's a certain symbolism around the Kananaskis golf course that many Albertans remember from its inception, back when it was first built, and the

controversies around that. In the intervening years I think it's worthwhile for us to consider again the value of that particular golf course in the Bow valley here in 2015. We know that since the golf course was built many, many years ago, there were many more private golf courses built in the same Bow valley area.

3:10

This is very sensitive ecosystem that is very limited in size. The scope of development in the Bow valley over the last 30 years has been quite significant, so maybe this is just a moment in time where we can reconsider the value of that space in the most sensitive area of the Bow valley still retaining itself as a golf course in the first place.

Certainly, in the face of other budget constraints that we have to deal with here in the Legislature, I think that maybe it's prudent for us to reconsider putting extra money into this golf course project when (a) I think that maybe the circumstances have changed considerably in terms of other golf courses being built already in the valley, (b) the chances that this same place would be flooded again with extraordinary meteorological circumstances, and (c) perhaps the opportunity to use this as some other purpose with the view to restoring some of the natural Bow valley ecosystem as well.

So that's one issue that I think that all Albertans should take notice of. Again, sometimes it's not the very expensive budget points but smaller ones that people can have a better sense of. You know, why would we choose to spend money on expensive golf courses when other health and education issues go wanting?

Otherwise, as well, we see that the legal aid is in the sup supply, but again I just wanted to reiterate the value of long-term planning and commitment to this program so that people have access to justice. The instability around legal aid funding has led to many people not being able to access proper legal counsel. We have some restoration of that funding here but only as an intermediate sort of measure. I would like to see long-term, stable funding for this program so that all Albertans have equal access to justice when they need it.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise here today to speak on Bill 17. The only few comments that I would have are that I simply cannot understand why the government would want to expend millions of dollars in order to run a luxury golf course, especially when the Premier has stated that we're in tough economic times, especially when he has stated that the budget is going to end up with massive cuts to our most vulnerable as well as seniors and those types of things. I think when, you know, people go out there and talk to average Albertans and they explain how their money is being spent, if you go door to door and say that this is where your government is spending money, millions of dollars on a golf course, yet they want to raise your taxes or they want to cut seniors' programs and other things like that, I think to most people, when you go to their door, that would be very alarming to them.

Mr. Speaker, I guess my question and my hope is that the government reconsider spending this amount on this luxury golf course and instead do the right thing during this economic downturn and actually start prioritizing. I think that if the government is asking Albertans to pay more in taxes, at a minimum they have to

cut wasteful spending to have any type of credibility with Albertans. Of course, we don't need tax increases right now. What we need to do is cut wasteful spending, and this golf course expenditure, where it's millions of dollars, would be the first easy step.

I think that it's shocking that the government hasn't had a reply for why this is a priority over schools, why it's a priority over seniors' programs. I know when I talk to seniors in my community – just last week I talked to a whole bunch of them about, you know, the expenditures on golf courses. They were quite alarmed by that. I think that most Albertans, when they become educated on it, become alarmed at it and completely frustrated with their government. So, Mr. Speaker, I don't think we should be spending money on fancy golf courses, and I hope the government would reconsider that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Are you rising on 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Yes. I'd like to ask the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills – again, he's discussed the golf course and his discussions with seniors. I was noticing that in my constituency a lot of seniors are concerned with the increase of the rental rate of their accommodations. I was wondering if the member could enlarge on that.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A great question by the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler. You know, seniors are on fixed incomes. When they see things like their power bills doubling and tripling, you know, of course it's on the fixed component of their power bill, where even if they turned off their lights, their power rates would still go up. Now their rental rates are going up as well. There's a lot less left on the table.

When you're spending millions and millions of dollars on a golf course yet gouging the people who built this province, I think most of them will have a serious problem with that, not only seniors but also their families. I mean, oftentimes if the seniors can't afford to make ends meet, their loved ones have to assist them. I think that if they knew their government was spending tax dollars wisely and it was just a true financial crunch, most Albertans would be okay with it. But the fact is that when you're spending money on things like a golf course or carbon capture and corporate subsidies for carbon capture or brand new MLA offices, severances of upwards of half a million dollars for VPs of strategic relations, I think it's very difficult to go to those people that built this province and say: "No. You have to have rental increases. You have to continue to be gouged on your power bill."

Mr. Speaker, this is where you have a government that has been in power for 44 years, and it's tired. It's out of touch. Again, I thank the hon. member for his question, and I hope that the government would reconsider and stop the funding of this luxury golf course and instead perhaps put it to priorities such as seniors and other individuals in Alberta who helped build this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. There are still a couple of minutes left in 29(2)(a) if anyone wishes to participate.

Seeing no one, let us move on to the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, these bills are normally routine. It's part of doing the government's business, and we all understand that. But the issue of funding a golf course and particularly spending \$8 million to keep it operational while it is being rebuilt is absolutely something that this public cannot understand when it measures what this government considers a priority. That's the question that never did get answered in debate in Committee of the Whole, and it's too bad that it couldn't. The minister brought forward the issue dealing with insurance, yet he didn't provide any evidence of what we're dealing with with the insurance covering this golf course.

There are so many questions around that and the justification of why this should be. Why now of all times, 18 months after the disaster? Eighteen months after the disaster people are still waiting for their settlements, still waiting for their disaster relief, yet we're going to fix the golf course now. We can't wait any longer. The answers that we got just do not fly. The public does not accept what this government has so far provided as evidence of why they've got to provide basically \$10 million now and could not wait, could not defer, could not come up with any other agreement.

It's all about priorities. We've got seniors that are in need of medication that is not covered, and this is quality of life and life-saving medication that is extremely expensive that seniors must foot the bills for themselves. That is not funded. We have the issues of flood mitigation, that still are not funded, that communities need to protect against flooding. We have bridges that need to be fixed in rural areas, and they're not getting fixed because there's no funding. The priority list goes on and on and on, dealing with these necessary essentials, and unfortunately this government has decided that this asset, that it claims is so valuable, must be now fixed for the price of around \$10 million.

3:20

What I do not understand, if it is that valuable an asset, is why are we rebuilding it in a flood plain when we have told other communities that you cannot build in flood plain? That we need to understand. This doesn't make sense. We're not going to allow somebody to build a house of roughly \$400,000 in value in a flood plain, but we're going to put this \$50 million asset, supposedly, back into a flood plain. It doesn't make sense. How long will it be before it washes out again? Given the fact of what we're dealing with with climate science, I would argue with you that this so-called 100-year event, which seems to occur now about every other year – I don't know why we're calling it a 100-year event given the frequency of these events. But the fact is that it's not a matter of if it's going to be flooded out again; it's a matter of when it's going to be flooded out again.

Again, it goes back to the priorities of this government, and these priorities are a mixed message. They're out of line with the public's priority of what is prudent, fiscal, responsible spending of taxpayers' dollars. That's the one big issue that I have with this bill, the fact that we are spending money on something that is nice. It is certainly, possibly, something that's worth while showcase-wise for somebody that has a lot of money to spend, but we don't have a lot of money to spend. We need to evaluate what is absolutely necessary now and separate that from what . . .

An Hon. Member: Tourism.

Mr. Anglin: I don't have a problem with tourism. Prove it to me that it pays. That's all I ask of the government. Prove it to me that it pays off because you haven't done that. What you've shown me is that this is a black hole for sucking money, taxpayers' dollars, that has not produced a return of profit. I argue to you right now

that if it did produce a return, you would have shown us by now. Prove it. All we've asked is to show us how this works, that it has paid off huge dividends for this government. I think the public might be able to buy that, but you've not done that. What we have seen, in the public's view, is a black hole that sucks taxpayers' dollars away from hard-working taxpayers, with no great return. That's what's offensive about spending this money on this golf course now, and it's just not acceptable.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. The Member for Drumheller-Stettler on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night we heard the minister of ESRD expound on the values of the golf course, and that's well received and well appreciated, but he also commented that a good part of this funding was federal funds brought forward. To the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre: I'd like to know if he's aware of whether or not the federal involvement, subsistence to this program would and will or could be directed to the replacement of a facility that's on a designated flood plain.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, did you wish to respond?

Mr. Anglin: In the interest of political unity I think I'm done.

The Speaker: Anyone else? There are four minutes left under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

If not, let us move to the next speaker. Does anyone else wish to speak to third reading of this bill?

If not, hon. President of Treasury Board, would you like to close debate at this time?

Mr. Campbell: I'll just call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a third time]

Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

Hon. members, before we commence this afternoon's consideration of interim supply, I would like to review briefly the standing orders governing the speaking rotation. As provided for in Standing Order 59.02, the rotation in Standing Order 59.01(6) is deemed to apply, which is as follows:

- (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes,
- (b) for the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (c) for the next 20 minutes, the members of the third party, if any, and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (d) for the next 20 minutes, the member of the fourth party, if any, and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (d.1) for the next 20 minutes, the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent Members and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,

- (e) for the next 20 minutes, private members of the Government caucus and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf, may speak, and (f) any member may speak thereafter.

During the above rotation speaking times are limited to 10 minutes. Once the above rotation is complete, speaking times are reduced to five minutes.

Provided that the Chair has been notified, a Minister and a private Member may combine their . . . speaking times, with both taking and yielding the floor over the combined period.

Finally, as provided for in Government Motion 22, approved by the Assembly yesterday, the time allotted for consideration is six hours.

Interim Supply Estimates 2015-16 General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund

The Deputy Chair: The Committee of Supply has under consideration the 2015-16 interim supply estimates.

I will now recognize the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to move the estimates. The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Madam Chair. I request leave to introduce Bill 18, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Madam Chair, interim supply estimates provide funding authorization until the new budget is approved. This is not unusual for government. In fact, it is required whenever spending authority is required to bridge the gap between the prior fiscal year and the passage of a new budget. Authorization is needed so that the government can continue to provide services until the budget is passed. These estimates are based on the department's needs to fund government programs and services. Government spending is typically higher in the early months of the year. This pattern occurs because some of the payments are due on April 1 for the first quarter, and some annual payments are also due on April 1. Members will note that the interim supply is inordinately high compared to what is expected for the overall government budget simply because there are a lot of front-ended costs that need to be paid out in the first quarter.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Just to clarify, you are moving the estimates and not the bill.

Mr. Campbell: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: We are moving the estimates. All right.

Members of the opposition. The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Madam Chair. I mean, we're talking about millions and millions of dollars, and that's all the minister has to tell us. We're only given this very brief statement, and he's not providing any details at all to this Assembly. It's pretty alarming that he's requesting that we vote on these measures without providing any details whatsoever. Millions of dollars. As the opposition we just got this.

I guess I'll just start with the glaringly obvious one, the \$28 million requested for the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. Why on earth would we need this money allocated if, you know, the Premier hasn't made up his mind on whether there's going to be an election?

3:30

I think this is actually almost comical. I mean, the Premier has publicly stated that he's not sure when the election is going to be called, yet they're requesting \$28 million for the Chief Electoral Officer. I guess my question is – and, Madam Chair, I'm wondering whether or not we can go back and forth. My question is to the Minister. What is the \$28 million for when it comes to the request for the office of the Chief Electoral Officer? Would you be willing to respond, Minister?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. The fact of the matter is that this is basically a vote on the monies that we need to run the government from April 1 until the budget is passed. All of the money that is in the interim supply estimates will be completely debated once the budget is tabled on March 26, so the opposition will have a clear understanding of what the money is for, and they'll have the ability within the estimates to sit down and have that conversation with the various ministers.

Madam Chair, we know that the legislation for the electoral act says that we need to have an election sometime between March and May of 2016. The electoral officer has to prepare for that date, and it takes some time to do that, usually about a year out. We know from reading the *Hansard* from Legislative Offices that the electoral officer is looking at some, maybe, different ways of handling the votes, some of them being electronic. So it's important that the electoral officer know that he has the funding available and that he can start to move forward with the process that meets the legislation that says that the event has to happen between March and May of 2016.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess if this money is needed right now, the Chief Electoral Officer would have put in a request for the \$28 million and specified what exactly he would be spending the money on. Or are you coming here today to this Assembly and simply saying, "Yup, 28 million bucks. Let's go with it"? I mean, what details are there? What is this going to be spent on? I don't think taxpayers would understand saying that, you know, the Chief Electoral Officer is looking at doing some new stuff. I mean, what exactly is this \$28 million going to be spent on?

Mr. Campbell: Well, again, Madam Chair, as I said, the budget will come out on March 26. The details of the budget will be discussed after that date. I'm not at liberty to discuss those details right now. I suggest if the member has questions of the electoral officer that he go talk to the electoral officer.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Well, thank you. I guess, presumably, the government, who is requesting \$28 million, would either know what the \$28 million is going to be spent on or the Chief Electoral Officer would have told them what the money is going to be spent on. But apparently this is some state secret. The minister doesn't know. The Chief Electoral Officer, according to him, hasn't requested the funds. So it's a little bizarre here that we're going to be debating numbers, we're supposed to have a debate in the Assembly, and we have a minister that doesn't know how this money is going to be spent. I mean, I think it's important when you're talking about millions and millions of dollars that you come here prepared to say,

you know, what exactly this money is going to be spent on. Just spell it out for us here.

Mr. Campbell: Madam Chair, I suggest the member clean the wax out of his ears. I've already said that the electoral officer went to Legislative Offices and made the request for the funding. That is all in *Hansard*. If the member has any other questions for the electoral officer, I suggest he either goes and talks to Leg. Offices or he goes and talks to the electoral officer, and he'll get the answers he needs. I'm not at liberty to talk about the budget until it's tabled on March 26.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess you're at liberty to tell us what these numbers represent. I mean, is it not your role to come here to the Legislature and know roughly where the \$28 million is going to be spent? Or do you not have that off the top of your head? I mean, it's a large amount of money.

I'll just move on though, Madam Chair. It appears that the minister does not know where this money is going to be spent other than that it's in *Hansard* somewhere apparently.

I'll move on, Madam Chair, with just a question regarding the \$20 million for the Legislative Assembly Office. I'm just wondering if the minister can provide a breakdown of what that money is going towards, whether it's the cost of moving into the new office building.

Mr. Campbell: Well, again, Madam Chair, the support to the Legislative Assembly would have gone in front of Members' Services. They would have brought their request forward. I can tell you that the support to the legislative offices of \$20 million is to pay wages, salaries. I mean, we have leg. assistants that we have to continue to pay. We have staff to pay.

You know, the reason we bring interim supply, in fact, is that as of April 1 we have to make sure we have money to run the government until the budget is passed. It's that simple.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Just a simple question: what's the rough breakdown between operational, capital, and financial expenses in the \$20 million?

Mr. Campbell: Again, Madam Chair, the Legislative Assembly doesn't answer to me; the Legislative Assembly answers to Members' Services. The Speaker would have brought forward his budget request to Members' Services, they would have debated that, they would have said yea or nay to it, and that's what we have in front of us.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Madam Chair. My next question is on the \$256 million in financial transactions. I'm just wondering whether or not the minister can elaborate on what that means and what that represents.

Mr. Campbell: Again, Madam Chair, I can't make this any clearer to the member. This is interim supply monies to run the government from April 1 until the budget is passed. Until the budget is tabled, I'm not at liberty to talk about what the amounts are or what the amounts are to be used for. On March 26 we will table a budget. All of these figures will be in that budget. The members from the

opposition will have to sit down with each minister and talk to that minister about their department and about their spending.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I guess my point is that, yes, these dollars represent the time period from April 1 until the budget is passed. The budget is going to be put forward on March 26. It will be passed in – you know, we can all guess how long it would take to pass a budget. What in that time period of four or five weeks could happen where the Chief Electoral Officer would need to spend \$28 million? I wonder what that is. I'm just wondering if the minister can confirm here today that during that time period the \$28 million would be for an election. What else could it be for, Minister? What would the Chief Electoral Officer need \$28 million for in that short time period between April 1 and how long it would take to pass the budget? What would he need that money for, Minister?

Mr. Campbell: Madam Chair, I don't know if I'm in the twilight zone or if it's Groundhog Day. I made it very clear that we have legislation that says that we have an event that will happen between March and May of 2016. The electoral officer comes to us and asks us for his funding because he has to get ready for it. This isn't something that you just snap your fingers and all of a sudden the electoral officer is ready to go. We know that the population of the province is growing, so that means there are going to be more ballot boxes. There are going to be more people involved in the process. As I said, when the electoral officer was at Leg. Offices, he talked about going electronic, so that has to be looked at and the cost, and money has to be spent on that. That's what the \$28 million is for.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Madam Chair. As mentioned by the minister, the election has to be sometime between April 2016 and June 2016.

Mr. Campbell: March and May.

Mr. Saskiw: March and May of 2016. What we're talking about is funding between April 1, 2015, and May or June of 2015. The election is deemed to be in 2016, and we're talking about monies in 2015. If the election is going to be held in 2016, why would he need \$28 million in the year 2015?

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

3:40

Mr. Campbell: Well, Madam Chair, as I've said, this doesn't happen at the flick of a switch, and our budget runs from April 1, 2015, to April 1, 2016. Any prudent budget person would make sure that there's money available to do the job that has to be done in the time frame as we've done with all of the departments and as we've done with all of the officers of the Legislature. We're prepared to help the electoral officer out so that he can do his job properly.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's interesting that you can say that with a straight face. The question here, I guess, is on the \$28 million that he's requesting for this time period of April 2015 to roughly the end of May. In his experience has a Chief Electoral Officer ever had the upfront cost of \$28 million a year before the

election? Is that typically the case? You know, let's spend \$28 million a year before the election. Or would most of those costs happen relatively prior to an election? I guess that's my question. Is the Chief Electoral Officer – are you saying that he came to this Assembly and said, "I need \$28 million a year before a scheduled election"?"

Mr. Campbell: Well, first of all, Madam Chair, the electoral officer doesn't come to the Assembly; the electoral officer goes to Leg. Offices. Again, I think the hon. member is a member of Leg. Offices, and I think that he should review the notes that were done there, and he'll understand the process.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.
The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think what we'll do as the Official Opposition is to write a letter to the Chief Electoral Officer and simply ask him whether or not he requested from this government \$28 million a year before the projected election. I think he's going to come back here and say that that's not the case, and if that's not the case, then the hon. minister will have misled the Assembly here today. I think there's no way the Chief Electoral Officer asked for \$28 million in this time period. It's impossible. It hasn't happened. It's fiction. I was on the committee that hired the Chief Electoral Officer. He was talking about electronic voting and all that stuff. It does not cost \$28 million. And he would not implement it a year before an election.

What I would suggest is that a \$28 million expense would be the cost of an entire election, which he would not need a year before that election. So I just question it. I'd just ask the minister very clearly this question. Did the Chief Electoral Officer ask for the \$28 million during the period of April 1 and the passing of the budget? Because if he hasn't, he has misled the House.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Madam Chair, the only person misleading the House is the opposition. I've been very careful in my comments, and I've said very carefully that the Chief Electoral Officer went to Legislative Offices and asked, and it was \$28 million to run an election. I've said that that process has to happen between March and May of 2016. I've also said that we will put in our budget the \$28 million. The electoral officer knows that he has the money. He can start the plan for what he has to do moving forward. And that's only prudent financing on our part.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess, you know, I think everybody in this room knows that because it's being requested in just that specific time period, from April 1 to about the middle of May – \$28 million to be spent in that time period this year from April 1 to the middle of May – that there could only be one possible reason to spend that money, and it's an election. I think it would be interesting if the minister could actually just spell it out and say that there will be an election during that time period. It's interesting how he can say that that's not the reason for the money with a straight face. It's astonishing. It's a skill set.

I guess, Madam Chair, I'll continue onwards. The other questions that we had were with respect to whether or not the minister can with these dollar figures let us know in terms of, specifically, support for the Legislative Assembly and whether that breakdown is partially in capital, partially in operational, and whether any of that \$20 million that's requested for that time period is for moving

MLAs into the brand new MLA office building. Is any of that \$20 million for that?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Madam Chair, I don't have that information right at hand, but I can get it for the member.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.
The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Madam Chair. Could I use some of my time at the end of the allocation?

The Deputy Chair: Yes, you can.

Mr. Saskiw: I'll cede the floor, then, to the other opposition party.

The Deputy Chair: Just a minute. I've got to get a ruling on exactly what you meant there because you had an hour slot between you and the minister, and you've used about 18 . . .

Mr. Saskiw: I'd like to add that on the end instead.

The Deputy Chair: I've been informed that if you want to give up your time to other opposition members, you can do that, but we'll continue with the rotation, so no guarantee that you'll get your 40 minutes back.

Mr. Saskiw: Sure. I'll keep going for a little bit here.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Continue, then, please.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just going to continue on with breakdowns here. Just referring to the Executive Council expense of \$6 million: can the minister provide the Assembly with a breakdown of whether that's operational or capital expenses and what the proportion is?

Mr. Campbell: Again, Madam Chair, this is money that the departments have brought forward. This is all money that will be debated during the budget. The breakdown will be there, where the member will see exactly what the monies are, what is operational, and what is capital.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: I've concluded. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The next opposition member, from the next party, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair. We have a new designation as the next party, which seems hopeful, looking towards the future somehow. Well, the next party has quite a number of questions, that hopefully will be dealt with expeditiously.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, I think, almost exhausted the most obvious question, which is the \$28 million allocation to the Chief Electoral Officer. To that, I will quote, with apologies, Gertrude Stein, who said that a "rose is a rose is a rose." That an election is an election is an election really is what we are seeing here. We all kind of know that, but it would be nice if people could just say it out loud. I mean, the whole process of going through an election needs to have some certainty around dates because, in fact, people spend a lot of money on these elections, and the preparations are considerable. I think that for the sake of democracy, you know, this sort of game that the government is playing, while eminently readable, like the nose on their collective

faces – the dates, I think, are a responsible thing to disclose to the public for the sake of planning and for good governance and democracy.

Anyway, with that in mind, I just want to go through a couple of ministries that I would like to have a question about. First, Culture and Tourism. I saw that in 2014-15 the total operational budget for Culture and Tourism was \$157.5 million. Almost 46.6 per cent of that budget here is being spent in three months, the way I read it. I'm just curious to know what the money is being spent on there. Why is it such an increase? We should have maybe expected to plan for the budget so that it's comparable to the outlay or the budget expenditures from last year. It just seemed as though there was a big surge in the Culture and Tourism budget there towards the end that required this interim supply addition.

Okay. Maybe I can just start with that one.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Well, again, Madam Chair, you know, Culture and Tourism has put in their request for what they need for the first little part of the budget to make sure that our services are being provided. I would suggest, you know, that Culture and Tourism is one of the departments that looks after grants, and a lot of those grants come due and have to be paid out. I would suggest that some of those monies would be for year-end because I think that April 1 is actually the first-quarter end. I think that on March 31, actually, the cheques go out or something like that. So all that's got to be looked after, and then they run a regular business.

3:50

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Certainly, I'll forward that to the culture minister as well just because it seemed to be more of an expenditure or an outlay than the budget from last year.

In regard to Energy we were just identifying a 2014-15 budget item. The ministry budgeted zero for financial transactions and then this year were putting in an interim supply for \$33.6 million on this line item just in three months. I'm curious to know what that is. I really don't know, but if someone could point us in the right direction, that would be great. [interjections] What I'll do is that maybe I'll group a couple together, and then, you know, we can work through that way.

In regard to Environment and Sustainable Resource Development the capital investment for this department in the interim supply is \$44.8 million, which, as far as we can see, represents three-quarters of all capital spending in the department for 2014-2015. I'm curious to know what explains this considerable increase in funding for capital projects in these first three months in Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. If I can put that one onto the record, please.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Madam Chair, under the Energy piece, on the financial transactions all I can say is that some of that money would probably be for buying leases back. When you look at the lower Athabasca plan, in the areas where we put in conservation areas, we have to buy back the leases from those companies, and that's not without payment. So I will suggest that some of that is that.

When I'm looking at Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, I would suggest that with the capital investment, the majority of that would be around flood mitigation. So you're looking at the work that's being done on Springbank, the Ghost River reservoir, the Highwood and the work being done around the diversion down there, and then some of the flood mitigation that's being done around the province, the flood resilience program. Some

of that money would be for that because some of those projects have been approved and are moving forward.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thanks for the answer. I appreciate that.

The next one I have is around Health. We're seeing a \$19.3 million capital investment in the Health budget, and considering the global budget of \$18 billion, I mean, we find this to be very low even by the standards of last year's budget. We know that we've identified through questions and through research – and health professionals have told us clearly – that the capital investment right across the province is inadequate, so we would expect there would be at least 25 per cent of the yearly funding for 2014-15. The funding in the interim supply gives 17 per cent for capital investment, so there's a proportional number, sort of a gap here, that I was just curious about. Again, it's reflecting what we see as a lack of investment in health infrastructure and a proportional lack of investment as reflected in this interim supply bill. I'm curious to know why that would be so.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Campbell: Well, again, Madam Chair, without getting into the real specifics, I can tell you that the capital investment in Health will be quite considerable. Again, this is a portion for the first part of the year that the minister has deemed he needs to get going on some of the projects, but I can say that you'll see that grow as the year continues.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Madam Chair, my next questions are in regard to Infrastructure. In the 2014-15 general estimates the budget for capital spending was \$1.143 billion, but the interim estimates only show \$153 million, or 13.4 per cent of the budget for 2014-15, as being invested in these three months. Again, there's a gap here in proportionality. Considering the three-month period we are dealing with and the overall investment, is this indicative of a considerable reduction in investment in Alberta's infrastructure over this next fiscal year? Is it a precursor or a shadow of the cuts that we can expect? If not, I'm curious to know why so little money is being spent in these three months on capital projects when capital spending is up in so many other departments during these same months. Again, the proportional shortfall in the interim supply is causing me a concern around infrastructure investment. I'm curious if someone could illuminate me and the public on that issue here today.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, again, thank you, Madam Chair. Without getting into the specifics, I can say to the member that we added I think it was \$6.9 billion, budgeted for 2014-15 for Infrastructure. I can say to you that you can add this on top of that. I will suggest that as the member stays tuned for the budget, he will see the full Infrastructure plan unrolled over the next five years, and I think he'll be quite happy with that.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair. My next question is in regard to Innovation and Advanced Education. The \$815.7 million in expenses is, in our estimation, around 30 per cent of the

operational costs of advanced education. But the quarter of the year that we are concerned with here involves two months in which universities and colleges are in their less busy summer months. My question is: why is almost a third of the annual spending required for a quarter, that's coming up, that is considerably less busy than other parts of the year?

As well, the \$195.9 million in capital funding in Innovation and Advanced Education is almost the entire amount budgeted for capital projects for 2014-15. I'm just so curious: so much funding in the first quarter compared to the last fiscal year as well. It just seems to be again considerably out of whack with other spending considering the seasonal requirements of advanced educational institutions. I'm curious to know something about that.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Campbell: Well, again, Madam Chair, as the member is probably aware, we, through the government, actually fund a large part of the universities through our SUCH programming. What we're doing, basically, is playing catch-up. When universities and colleges spend their money, we at the end of the year have to make up that difference, so sometimes we have a little extra that we have to pay. We do that with municipalities and school boards, and actually Health comes out of the SUCH sector.

As far as the capital investment I can suggest that there are projects that are shovel-ready, and the minister would want to get those ongoing as we are entering, you know, the time to put the shovel in the ground and actually get some dirt moved.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Madam Chair. My next question is to the Justice and Solicitor General ministry, of which I see the hon. minister here, which is great. I think it's important for the ministers to actually be here because, I mean, we're talking about sometimes tens or hundreds of millions of dollars here. So I appreciate the Minister of Justice being here to perhaps entertain these questions.

In the 2014-15 general estimates there was \$134 million to be spent on capital projects. These interim supply estimates have less capital spending than would be expected if this figure was to continue into the next year. Does that make sense?

4:00

So my questions are: why is there less than anticipated capital spending in the current estimates, \$28.8 million rather than \$33 million? Does that make sense? I'm just curious to know. Maybe it's due to the fact that there'll be less capital investment in the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General in the upcoming fiscal year. If so, where are we aiming in terms of cutting projects or finished projects that were undertaken last year if there were any?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Yes. I thank the Member for Edmonton-Calder for referencing that I'm here, because I am. He was talking specifically about capital. There is very little capital in Justice and Solicitor General. There hasn't been in the last couple of years. Typically, Madam Chair, what's happened is that we have a major project, which is the Alberta first responder radio communications system, otherwise known as AFRRCs, and that is going to continue over a longer period of time. I don't think I'm divulging any state secret by talking about how we will continue with this particular project. I do not anticipate any other capital projects in the next year, but

it's always been our commitment to get these towers up and get AFRRCs going.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Minister, and thank you, Madam Chair. I'll carry on with my questions. Yeah. I'm curious about this Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. Glad to see the minister of environment is here to ask about the interim supply for his ministry of \$44.8 million. It seems like three-quarters of all the capital investment for 2014-2015. I'm just curious to know why we have this explosion of funding for capital projects in the first three months directed to the environment minister. I'd be curious to know what he had to say about that.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. I'm just looking at what the hon. member is referring to. Just give me one second. Oh, there we go. You're looking at the capital.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, capital. That's right: \$44.8 million.

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah. I think what's highlighted there – a lot of the capital that our department is expending is on the flood mitigation side. There is a lot of work that has been done. If you particularly look at the windows to get flood mitigation done in time, you're looking at very early on in the fiscal year, so that's why you would see a disproportionate amount in the first quarter.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. That's eminently reasonable, of course, the seasonal.

I'm curious to know, then, in regard to – I know this golf course has been a big ball that's been batted around here in the last couple of days, so is there flood mitigation from this capital investment going up into the upper Kananaskis, in the region of the 36-hole Kananaskis golf course? Is any mitigation going on there to your knowledge?

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. There will be flood mitigation improvements made as part of the rebuilding of the course to ensure that there is a level of protection to protect the money, both federal and provincial, that's going into the rebuilding of the golf course.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks a lot. That's awesome.

My next question is in regard to Municipal Affairs. I see a considerable sum, \$1.19 billion, in expenses for Municipal Affairs. I'm just curious to know if that includes the increased promises for the MSI funding that we've seen announced recently. I don't know if there's someone over there that can try that one.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and nice green that you have on today.

My understanding is that it does, but it goes only for the period in which this would cover. However, I will undertake to contact the Minister of Municipal Affairs for you, and we will get some further particulars for you.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. That's great. Thank you so much.

My next question is in the Department of Transportation. In the 2014-2015 estimates the \$1.8 billion throughout the whole year was meant to be invested in capital. In the interim supply estimates, that we see here before us, that we're debating, \$730 million is to be spent within a short period that we're debating here today. So I am finding that to be a very significant investment during a relatively short period of time, and I just would like some, perhaps, information. I think all Albertans would like to know why we would be spending, you know, more than half of the whole year's estimates on capital on Transportation in a three-month period.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Madam Chair, I'm a little confused because we're not suppose to be debating the budget till next week, when it's presented, but I know where this money is being spent, mostly because there's one large payment there if we have to purchase that land for the Calgary ring road to the Tsuu T'ina Nation, and it's there. Hopefully, the feds will transfer that land in June. But I'm not sure if we're supposed to be talking about all of these details and debating the budget right now. So I know where the money is going, and I'll leave it at that for now.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, when we do interim debates, I am going to ask where the money is going, for sure, right? That's a very important development for not just the city of Calgary but for the whole region.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. That's your 20 minutes.

Mr. Eggen: What?

The Deputy Chair: Yes, it is.

So we're moving on to the next 20 minute segment. It looks like we're moving on to the private members of the government caucus. Are there any members?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Chair: The question is being called. Are there any other members who have any other questions?

Seeing none. . .

Mr. Eggen: Sorry. The rotation, just for clarification, Madam Chair, goes: government, then anybody else. I'm not quite finished all my questions yet. [interjections] What? Sure I can. Now I know what Grant Notley felt like.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you do have five minutes.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, there you go. Perfect. Yeah, I just have five minutes more of questions anyway, so it's perfect.

Okay. So I've got a question in regard to Treasury Board and Finance. For 2014-15 the general estimates state that \$15.2 million was expected to be spent on financial transactions. In the interim supply estimates it estimates \$256 million is to be spent on financial transactions. I'm just so curious to know what that is being used for, these financial transactions, and why would they increase not just dramatically but, you know, I would say exponentially from the 2014 fiscal year, please.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Sure. Just to get clarification from the hon. member, the first number that you're referencing was from the, I guess, current year budget?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, that's right.

Mr. Fawcett: Okay. You know, I'm not sure what that is, and I can ask the Minister of Finance to get back to you on that.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you very much. I mean, again, this whole issue around interim supply is something that we need every year, I suppose, in some way. But the scale and the scope of interim supply this year has been exacerbated considerably by this fog of election time, right? So we would be dealing with far fewer numbers here and, really, probably better accounting for each of the budgets and how they make it into the financial year, and interim financing would be much more modest and much more rational if we weren't dealing with this sort of looming fog of an election.

4:10

I think that the idea of having an election season, at the very least, really does end up being a much more prudent way for us to spend money in the areas that we are responsible for but also for Albertans to see how that money is being spent. To have giant interim supply bills, I think, speaks to another layer of confusion for how Albertans can see how we are spending these public funds, which are becoming more scarce all the time. If we just could, you know, have a sense of when an election is going to take place, then it's much easier for each ministry to plan, and it's much easier for the public to see what's going on, and we would all be better for that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak?

Seeing none, then I shall put the following questions.

Vote on Interim Supply Estimates 2015-16 General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund

Agreed to:

Support to the Legislative Assembly \$20,460,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:

Office of the Auditor General \$6,670,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:

Office of the Ombudsman \$821,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Chief Electoral Officer \$28,000,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Ethics Commissioner \$250,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner \$1,711,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Child and Youth Advocate \$3,242,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Public Interest Commissioner \$313,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Aboriginal Relations
Expense \$51,883,000
Capital Investment \$6,000
Financial Transactions \$19,268,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Agriculture and Rural Development
Expense \$179,467,000
Capital Investment \$940,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Culture and Tourism
Expense \$73,535,000
Capital Investment \$250,000
Financial Transactions \$400,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Education
Expense \$956,600,000
Capital Investment \$128,900,000
Financial Transactions \$5,300,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Energy
Expense \$96,000,000
Capital Investment \$1,500,000
Financial Transactions \$33,641,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Environment and Sustainable Resource Development
Expense \$167,557,000
Capital Investment \$44,801,000
Financial Transactions \$353,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Executive Council
Expense \$6,385,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Health
Expense \$4,690,537,000
Capital Investment \$19,341,000
Financial Transactions \$8,700,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:	
Human Services	
Expense	\$1,185,482,000
Capital Investment	\$1,721,000
Financial Transactions	\$170,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:	
Infrastructure	
Expense	\$147,500,000
Capital Investment	\$153,000,000
Financial Transactions	\$4,900,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:	
Innovation and Advanced Education	
Expense	\$815,725,000
Capital Investment	\$195,900,000
Financial Transactions	\$48,000,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:	
International and Intergovernmental Relations	
Expense	\$12,000,000
Capital Investment	\$6,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:	
Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour	
Expense	\$50,435,000
Capital Investment	\$300,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:	
Justice and Solicitor General	
Expense	\$431,071,000
Capital Investment	\$28,771,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:	
Municipal Affairs	
Expense	\$1,185,555,000
Capital Investment	\$2,526,000
Financial Transactions	\$109,192,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

4:20

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:	
Seniors	
Expense	\$181,693,000
Financial Transactions	\$2,375,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:	
Service Alberta	
Expense	\$81,535,000
Capital Investment	\$10,685,000
Financial Transactions	\$2,500,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:	
Transportation	
Expense	\$258,827,000
Capital Investment	\$729,462,000
Financial Transactions	\$19,531,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:	
Treasury Board and Finance	
Expense	\$42,704,000
Capital Investment	\$681,000
Financial Transactions	\$2,518,000
Transfer from the Lottery Fund	\$386,929,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 61(3), which reads, "Following the Committee of Supply's report on interim or supplementary estimates, the Assembly shall immediately revert to Introduction of Bills for the introduction of the appropriation Bill," I would move that . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, at this time we need you to request that we rise and report.

Mr. Denis: Yes. That's what I was getting to, actually.
I would move that we rise and report, with thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. Government House Leader.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again. The following resolutions relating to the 2015-16 interim supply estimates for the general revenue fund for the fiscal period ending June 30, 2015, have been approved.

Support to the Legislative Assembly, \$20,460,000; office of the Auditor General, \$6,670,000; office of the Ombudsman, \$821,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, \$28,000,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, \$250,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, \$1,711,000; office of Child and Youth Advocate, \$3,242,000; office of the Public Interest Commissioner, \$313,000.

Aboriginal Relations: expense, \$51,883,000; capital investment, \$6,000; financial transactions, \$19,268,000.

Agriculture and Rural Development: expense, \$179,467,000; capital investment, \$940,000.

Culture and Tourism: expense, \$73,535,000; capital investment, \$250,000; financial transactions, \$400,000.

Education: expense, \$956,600,000; capital investment, \$128,900,000; financial transactions, \$5,300,000.

Energy: expense, \$96,000,000; capital investment, \$1,500,000; financial transactions, \$33,641,000.

Environment and Sustainable Resource Development: expense, \$167,557,000; capital investment, \$44,801,000; financial transactions, \$353,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$6,385,000.

Health: expense, \$4,690,537,000; capital investment, \$19,341,000; financial transactions, \$8,700,000.

Human Services: expense, \$1,185,482,000; capital investment, \$1,721,000; financial transactions, \$170,000.

Infrastructure: expense, \$147,500,000; capital investment, \$153,000,000; financial transactions, \$4,900,000.

Innovation and Advanced Education: expense, \$815,725,000; capital investment, \$195,900,000; financial transactions, \$48,000,000.

International and Intergovernmental Relations: expense, \$12,000,000; capital investment, \$6,000.

Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: expense, \$50,435,000; capital investment, \$300,000.

Justice and Solicitor General: expense, \$431,071,000; capital investment, \$28,771,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense, \$1,185,555,000; capital investment, \$2,526,000; financial transactions, \$109,192,000.

Seniors: expense, \$181,693,000; financial transactions, \$2,375,000.

Service Alberta: expense, \$81,535,000; capital investment, \$10,685,000; financial transactions, \$2,500,000.

Transportation: expense, \$258,827,000; capital investment, \$729,462,000; financial transactions, \$19,531,000.

Treasury Board and Finance: expense, \$42,704,000; capital investment, \$681,000; financial transactions, \$2,518,000; transfer from the lottery fund, \$386,929,000.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, all those in favour of the report please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed, please say no. That is carried.

I would like to alert the hon. members that Standing Order 61(3) provides that upon the Assembly concurring in the report by the Committee of Supply, the Assembly immediately reverts to Introduction of Bills for introduction of the appropriation bill.

Introduction of Bills

(reversion)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Bill 18

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am rising today on behalf of the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to request leave to introduce Bill 18, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor has been informed of the contents of this bill and recommends the same for acceptance in this Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a first time]

4:30

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 12

Common Business Number Act

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Quest]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Madam Speaker, my understanding was that we were going to debate Bill 12 for a bit subsequent here.

The Acting Speaker: Correct.

Are there any members who wish to speak to Bill 12? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Well, I would rather just adjourn instead of speak to it. [interjection] I cede the floor to the Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Madam Speaker, we've had a lot of progress this afternoon, and as such, with some co-operation from both the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills as well as the Member for Edmonton-Calder, I would move that we adjourn the House until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, we need to have adjournment of the debate on the bill first.

Mr. Denis: I would move to adjourn debate, Madam Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: I would again move that we adjourn the Assembly until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:32 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, March 18, 2015

Issue 22

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Speaker
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Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)
Vacant, Battle River-Wainwright
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 18, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Holy Creator, we seek Your guidance in helping us to fulfill the responsibilities that come with public office. Help us to make the best decisions possible, that those decisions in turn may help those whom we are pledged to serve in this Assembly. Amen.
Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: We have some visitors who will be introduced shortly, but in the meantime shall we proceed with school groups first? Let us do that, then.

Let us begin with Sherwood Park, followed by Red Deer-North.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the students, teachers, and parent volunteers from Woodbridge Farms elementary school. Actually, there are 52 of them, in fact. The teachers are Ms Antonia Triska, Mrs. Carey Cummings, Mr. Tyson Parker, and the parent helpers are Mr. Randy Rosen, Mrs. Karen Dunham, and Mrs. Yvonne Thomas. Located in my constituency of Sherwood Park, Woodbridge Farms is a co-operative community of learners wholeheartedly dedicated to the success of every one of their over 400 students. I would ask that the Woodbridge Farms school group now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Premier has some special visitors.

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a friend and passionate Canadian, the Hon. Bob McLeod, the Premier of the Northwest Territories; in addition, an old friend, the Hon. Michael Miltenberger, who is the Northwest Territories' Minister of Environment and Natural Resources; in addition, Mr. Gary Bohnet, the principal secretary and executive officer of the Territories; and Martin Goldney, who is the Territories' Deputy Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations.

Premier McLeod and Minister Miltenberger are in our capital city to sign an agreement between Alberta and the Northwest Territories that relates to bilateral water management. The agreement really highlights our commitment to work together to manage our water and our aquatic resources, particularly in the Mackenzie River basin. As we all know and as we've discussed in this Chamber, water is a vital resource, and this agreement will ensure that our governments continue to collaborate to develop water management plans that benefit both our communities and the integrity of our diverse and valuable ecosystems. Alberta and the Northwest Territories have a long history. In fact, there was a time when we were part of the Northwest Territories, Mr. Speaker, as you well know.

On behalf of everyone in the Chamber I would like to say welcome to our esteemed guests, and I would ask the people to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome to all of you.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Let us proceed with Red Deer-North. You have a school group to introduce?

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 58 students from Gateway Christian school in my constituency of Red Deer-North. These students are among the brightest and the best that Alberta has to offer, and I know that our future is in good hands. They're accompanied by – you can tell they're well loved; they're well supervised – three teachers and their 11 parent helpers. The teachers are Miss Shelley Wiebe, Mrs. de Koning, and Mr. Kooman, and the parent helpers are Mrs. Noble, Mrs. Winczura, Mrs. Trost, Mrs. Demers, Mrs. Karri-Anne Brewster, Mr. Reza Torabi – sorry about the mispronunciation – Mrs. Karen Mullin, Mr. Dean Stutheit, Mr. Christopher Mah, Mrs. Krystal Kromm, and Mr. Jon Wieler. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school or education groups?

Seeing none, let us move on to Edmonton-Decore, followed by the Minister of Health.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly guests from the Turkish-Canadian Society board of trustees, the Edmonton ANZAC Committee, and the military, who are attending today in remembrance of this year's historic 100th anniversary of the Battle of Gallipoli, to be commemorated on April 25, 2015. The Gallipoli Campaign took place on the Gallipoli peninsula in the Ottoman Empire, known today as Turkey. The commemorations to be held recognize the bravery, courage, huge loss of life, and sacrifices made by the Allied forces and the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, ANZAC.

Mr. Speaker, my guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and remain standing as I mention their names: Ms Dilara Yegani, chair, board of trustees, Turkish-Canadian Society, whose grandfathers fought in the Battle of Gallipoli and the Turkish independence war; Mrs. Sinem Senol, vice-chair, board of trustees, Turkish-Canadian Society; Mrs. Donna Mae Lewis, secretary, board of trustees, Turkish-Canadian Society; Dr. Hakan Ozdemir, treasurer, board of trustees, Turkish-Canadian Society; Mrs. Gigi Talibi, auditor, board of trustees, Turkish-Canadian Society; Mr. Bernhard Baker, chair, Edmonton ANZAC Committee, and former member of the New Zealand Defence Force; representing the commemoration of the ANZAC landings, Lieutenant Jason Pascoe, former member of the Australian army reserves and current serving reservist with the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, and Warrant Officer Matthew Parsons, former member of the New Zealand Defence Force and current serving member of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. I would now ask the Assembly to please join me in giving the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Minister of Health, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this entire Assembly two people here to mark national Dietitians Day. They are Karen Boyd, regional

executive director, Alberta and the Northwest Territories, from Dietitians of Canada, and Doug Cook, registrar of the College of Dietitians of Alberta. March is also Nutrition Month, and these representatives as well as others spent the morning in the rotunda sharing their expertise and educating me and my fellow colleagues on the values that dietitians bring to our health care system. Please join me in recognizing them with the traditional welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my constituent Jan Buterman. Jan is a founding member of TESA, the Trans Equality Society of Alberta, and the current president. TESA's mission is to be a witness to and a voice for matters concerning trans Albertans. Jan is active on issues of equality and accessibility. I wanted to invite him here today to thank him for contributing to the debate on Bill 10, advocating for human rights protecting gender identity and gender expression, and rightfully pointing out that LGBTQ human rights are not only an issue of sexual orientation. I would encourage all members of the Assembly to visit TESA's website, tesaonline.org, to learn about the work that still needs to be done in Alberta for trans equality. I'd ask Jan to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so thrilled to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly four very dedicated and hard-working department staff here today from Municipal Affairs. These individuals I'm introducing represent our legislative projects unit, the MGA Review Team, legislative counsel, and the staff that have been working so very hard on Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015. They are in the House today to watch debate on Bill 20 in second reading. I would ask that Brandy Cox, Melinda Steenbergen, Katie Nault, and Eric Martin rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly one gentleman seated in the members' gallery. He's a national political consultant with clients in seven provinces and at all levels of government, including many here in Alberta. After four years of working on Parliament Hill, he returned to the private sector to provide political consulting and voter contact services to elected officials, candidates, businesses, municipalities, and advocacy and professional organizations across Canada. This gentleman is the fine-dressed Mr. Jim Ross. I'd ask him to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: We have two minutes per person for these. Let us begin with Edmonton-Decore, followed by the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Battle of Gallipoli Centenary

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, in 1915 the shores of Gallipoli in Turkey were the scene of one of the world's most infamous military disasters, a tragedy which epitomized the horrors of the First World War. The narrow Dardanelles Strait, a critical sea route from Europe to Russia controlled by Turkish guns and mines, needed to be secured by British and Allied forces. On March 18, 1915, the main attack by the Allied battleships tried to break through the strait but failed. At dawn on April 25, 1915, the British and the Australian and New Zealand corps, ANZAC, sent ground forces which landed on the shores of Gallipoli. Lack of sufficient intelligence and maps of the contoured terrain along with the trained Turkish soldiers defending the high ground with modern weapons like the machine gun hampered the success of their invasion. After eight months of bitter fighting and heavy battle casualties on both sides, including unsanitary conditions, the campaign ended in failure for the British and ANZAC forces. However, an Ottoman victory resulted, which renewed Turkey's vision for the modern Turkey under the leadership of Commander Atatürk.

The centenary of the Battle of Gallipoli will be remembered and commemorated today and on April 25, 2015, known as ANZAC Day. It is only right that Albertans be encouraged to pause and pay our respects to all the brave soldiers' sacrifice, including the regiment from Newfoundland – extraordinary heroism prevailed and the valour of not only those from the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps but all those who fought and died at the site of the Gallipoli conflict – and also to remember all those who have served and died in all wars, conflicts, and peacekeeping operations since that time.

Mr. Speaker, deepest gratitude to the families of the many descendants, who are vigilant to keep alive the memory of their loved ones as they did not return from the battlefield. Rest eternally in peace.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, followed by Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Government Policies

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's take a trip back to 2007. *Spider-Man* was number one at the box office, Steve Jobs introduced the iPhone, the U.S. housing bubble was set to burst, the Ottawa Senators were fighting for a chance at the Stanley Cup, and on Parliament Hill the federal Industry minister and now our Premier was waving the flag for Alberta's proposed royalty review. Alberta's new royalty regime had a superhero in this Premier. He cheered loudly about how the review strikes the right balance for Alberta and our oil industry. Despite dire warnings from industry the minister and now Premier gave this new royalty regime his unconditional support.

Now let's hop to 2010. Alberta's oil and gas industry is devastated by this foolish review, billions of dollars' worth of investment has picked up and walked away, the members opposite are taking down yet another one of their leaders, and a new political entity is born that stands firmly on the side of our energy industry.

I'm not sure why the Premier's memory is so bad. Either way, this Premier would be wise to remember that he was a critical piece in the creation of Alberta's royalty review. He wasn't the culprit, but he was an accomplice. I don't think his memory is improving either. Just months ago he said that he'd consolidate Alberta's budget. He didn't. He said that he'd balance the budget and keep new taxes off the table. Well? He said that he'd stick to Alberta's

fixed-election law. Well, we know that's not going to happen. He's done everything in his power to wipe out democracy and decimate the opposition. We know this Premier has supported increasing royalties once. What makes us so sure he won't let it happen again?

One thing is for sure, Mr. Speaker. The Wildrose remains the one and only party standing between this Premier and his foolish plans to devastate this province one more time.

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

Rural Health Services Review

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today the Minister of Health and I were very pleased to publicly release the final report of the rural health services review. So what's in the report, and more important, what's going to be done about it?

Well, just like every Albertan, rural Albertans expect and deserve high-quality, patient-centred health care. Patient-centred health care means that sometimes sick patients don't travel to healthy doctors; sometimes the healthy doctor travels to the sick patient. As rural Albertans constantly reminded us, the road goes both ways.

Now, the report also talks about the need for a team of health care professionals, not just doctors but nurses, physicians' assistants, nurse practitioners, midwives, pharmacists, dietitians, and paramedics. While we'll continue to need to attract foreign-trained medical and health care workers, we need to do more to grow our own, and it's time that we devoted the same time and effort identifying and nurturing the next generation of healers as we do hockey players.

Now, EMS remains a major concern, and I would like to acknowledge and thank my colleague the Member for Calgary-South East for his valuable counsel in this critical area. Ambulances need to be used for emergencies, not as taxis, and when a rural crew heads into the city, they need to discharge their patient quickly and head back home. Straight home.

We can and we will make better use of underutilized rural health infrastructure. Just ask the local community leaders and health care providers; they'll tell you how we can breathe life back into rooms that have stood empty and dark for too long. While we're at it, let's ask them for some input into health care planning.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't have to cost more; it can cost less. But it's not about money; it's about care. In medicine you assess the patient, you come up with a diagnosis, and you institute treatment. The rural health review has done that. It is supported by the Premier and the minister. Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That last statement would be a lot more compelling if it wasn't all focused on fixing the mistakes of this government.

Health Care Funding

Ms Notley: Now, recently the topic of health care continues to be a major issue for Albertans. We've learned that children and their families are showing up for surgeries at Stollery children's hospital only to discover that their surgery has been cancelled due to overcapacity. We've learned that hospitals in Calgary are so jam packed that they couldn't treat patients in need of dire care 66 times in November alone. We've learned that the government has no problem finding \$2 million for a luxury golf course, yet they can't find \$17,000 to bring elevators at the Sturgeon community hospital

up to safety code or find \$55,000 to buy a lightning rod that the Misericordia needed three years ago. They can't even find \$200,000 that Royal Alex has needed since 2010 for a fire alarm upgrade. It sounds like the PCs need a little help getting their priorities straight.

Today we learned what everybody already knew: that rural Albertans don't have access to the care they need, that small towns across this province have lost their family doctors, that rural Albertans can't rely on EMS services when they need them. The PCs will tell us not to worry, that they've solved the problem once again – nothing to see here – just like they did last year and last decade and the decade before that. Yet the problems still seem to get worse, Mr. Speaker. The PCs have failed to manage Alberta's health care system in the good times. They've failed to invest in crumbling hospitals. They've failed to provide services. They couldn't even fix an elevator, for crying out loud. Now that the price of oil has dropped, now that budgets are tighter, does the Premier really expect Albertans to trust him to fix health care now?

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

Child and Youth Mental Health

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Calgary-Varsity we receive a lot of questions from people supporting a loved one who's suffering from mental illness. To deepen and widen our outreach on these queries, we hosted a town hall in our constituency last month, inviting a panel of local experts to guide us. Our constituency has been a long-standing champion for dementia care, a disease suffered primarily by seniors in our communities. Of course, dementia remains a priority, but what we realized through this recent outreach was the critical need for child, youth, and student mental health research.

1:50

Here are some of the facts. About 50 per cent of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14 and 90 per cent by the age of 25. Psychiatric illnesses – schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, and anxiety – are the major chronic diseases of young people. Adolescents with psychiatric illness are at an enormously increased risk of suicide.

The province, our postsecondary institutions, and K to 12 educators have been collaborating to support youth and student mental health services and research, but the historical gap between the need for and the availability of both researchers and clinicians is great. This fact was reinforced this week in meetings with student leaders from CAUS and ASEC.

Research needs to be deepened and widened to all levels of investigation from understanding, for example, how cannabis use affects the brain, through the best strategies to identify youth who are becoming unwell, through health system research to make the services for youth more efficient. While there has been investment and action, many believe this commitment is not commensurate with the magnitude of the problem or with the long-term cost to society of not addressing the problems of mental health in our most valuable resource, Mr. Speaker, our youth.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, you are reminded you have 35 seconds to pose a question, 35 seconds to bring forward a response, and at that point I'll have to cut you off if you exceed that. I hope

the clock is working today. We've had troubles with it for the past few days, but it should be okay today.

Let us start with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Government Policies

Mrs. Forsyth: On a day many are calling Bloody Tuesday, about 500 people lost their jobs at Nexen and Talisman Energy. It's the worst possible news for those laid off and their families. I feel for them, Mr. Speaker, and we wish them all well. The question they now face is: how will they manage their family finances with massive tax increases looming on the horizon? Premier, raising taxes on these Albertans is not fair, it's not right, and it's not necessary. Why do you insist on doing that?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, the loss of any job is one too many, and we're all saddened by what we're seeing, particularly in the energy economy, with additional job losses announced today. This is something the government is very sensitive to. It speaks to why we need to manage our finances carefully as a province. It speaks to why we need to ensure that we diversify our economy. As a government we will continue to work with any Albertan that has lost their job, to try to get them back into meaningful employment using every method we can. This is of concern to the government and should be to all Albertans.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. It's clear that the government's priorities are completely out of whack. The CBE, U of A, and AHS have all given their former presidents half-a-million-dollar severances within the last year. On the same day that the Wildrose released information about severances at the AGLC, with one executive receiving a payout worth three times their annual salary, thousands of Albertans find themselves unemployed. Premier, you've refused to take action on severances at agencies, boards, and commissions. What are Albertans to think as they face unemployment and punishing tax hikes?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It seems to me that this member is receiving a \$627,000 severance herself when she retires from this Chamber. Which way is up?

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Golf courses, golden handshakes, and corporate payouts: these are all PC priorities while Albertans are hurting. Massive severance payouts across hundreds of agencies, boards, and commissions; a bloated bureaucracy; and the most expensive government in Canada: these are the priorities this Premier wants Albertans to pay for with the largest tax increase in Alberta's history just when they're hurting most. Premier, nothing could hurt the economy more than more tax increases. Will you commit to fixing this mess in your own backyard without taxing Albertans?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, \$627,000 is what this member is receiving as a severance when she retires from here. Perhaps, maybe, she'd like to elaborate on that.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition question. The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Provincial Elections

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier laughed off questions when asked if the government handing out \$28 million to the Chief Electoral Officer meant that an early, unnecessary, and illegal election is on the horizon. Albertans are losing their jobs, worried about higher taxes and making ends meet. They didn't think that was funny. In the real world Albertans aren't talking about election games or asking their government to break their own law. Premier, can you just stop it with the political games and tell Albertans if you're breaking your own law, and if so, what is the election date?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the week ahead the Minister of Finance will rise in this Chamber, and he will introduce a budget that amounts not just to a budget for the next year but a 10-year fiscal plan for the government of Alberta. This responds to the circumstances that we face as a province. It will be fair. It will be balanced. It will be a measured response to what this province needs in the circumstances that we're in. No one in this Chamber is responsible for the collapse of oil prices and the government revenues, but this government will deal responsibly with these.

Mr. Saskiw: Mr. Speaker, he didn't answer the question. That answer isn't credible. Albertans aren't stupid. They know that \$30 million for the Chief Electoral Officer means an election is coming. Here are the facts. That money could help keep the largest tax increase in Alberta's history off our backs. It could help pay off the debt or support core government services. I'll ask again: Premier, are you breaking your own promise to keep Alberta's fixed election law? Can you stop the games and tell Albertans when the election date will be? Just answer the question, Premier.

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, there will of course be an election in due course, but the real question Albertans have relates to the policies of the member opposite and his party, policies such as blocking and stopping the Keystone pipeline, commencing a royalty review, and, most recently, a suggestion that they will, in order to generate revenue for the government, issue some sort of funny bonds that don't have to be repaid. These are the kinds of economic policies that Albertans can expect from the opposition.

Mr. Saskiw: Point of order.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Opposition House Leader, your point of order has been noted at 1:57 during this last exchange. Let's go on to the last supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I realize that the Premier, when he was running for the leadership of the PC Party, promised free tuition for everyone. There are all sorts of promises that he's made. There's no question there's a cost to democracy, but there's a cost to breaking the law and not keeping your promises. Fixed election laws are designed to be a contract between voters and their government. The PC MLA for Highwood once said that we need fixed election dates so that elections are, and I quote, not held at the convenience of the governing party. End quote. Premier, do you agree with your colleague? If not, can you tell Albertans what the election date will be? Which one is it?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We dealt with this in estimates yesterday. I think if you turn to *Hansard*, which is dated

Friday, December 5, 2014, in which the Chief Electoral Officer approached Legislative Offices about his increases for the next fiscal year, he talked about needing new electoral boundaries, he talked about having to put more balloting in place, he talked about the fact that he wanted to look at electronic voting, and he talked about the investigations he has going on. If you look back in the history of this province, it's always been the emphasis of Legislative Offices to look at what the electoral officer has asked for two years in advance.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Investigation into Release of Information

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the PC government was rocked by allegations that a cabinet minister leaked a \$20,000 phone bill from the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, who was then running against the current Premier for the PC leadership. To make matters worse, a citizen's privacy was allegedly violated through the fraudulent use of his name to send that leaked phone bill to the media. The Premier at the time was so outraged that he ordered an internal investigation into this very serious matter six months ago. Can the Premier update the Assembly on the status of this internal investigation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This matter is very serious, and we take it very seriously. As a matter of fact, the office of the Privacy Commissioner has taken over the investigation. As we know, the office operates independently and will conduct its own investigation, and I'm looking forward to seeing what the results will be when she's finished her investigation.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary Police Service also began its own criminal investigation into alleged violations of the Criminal Code for fraudulent impersonation of a Calgarian's identity in order to leak the phone bill to the media on the day of the PC leadership debate. Shortly after the PC leadership race ended and before any results were made public, the Calgary Police Service shut down the investigation. Another question to the Premier: did the Premier or any member of his government have any discussion with the police about this investigation, and can he tell us why it suddenly went cold?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

2:00

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Matters dealing with law enforcement, of course, operate fully independently of government. I would suggest that this member, if he has any further questions, contact the appropriate law enforcement authorities.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, last year the Premier showed he is capable of striking secret deals with his opponents when he convinced the former Leader of the Official Opposition to cross the floor. We've learned his preference is to bring potential political issues into his caucus and out of the public eye. Can the Premier assure Albertans that there was no deal with anyone at Calgary Police Service to make this investigation go away?

Mr. Denis: Again, Mr. Speaker, the same answer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, leader of the ND opposition.

Rural Health Care

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three years ago the Health Quality Council of Alberta reported that constant reorganization of our health care system causes chaos for patients and front-line workers and recommended stability. Hmm. We've had boards, then we had regions, then we had bigger regions, then we had one big region, then we had a central board, then they fired the board, then they had a deputy minister, then a CEO, and now they're hiring the board again, and now they're redecentralizing the government's centralized health care system. My question is to the Premier. Why should anyone trust your government on yet another health care reorganization?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. All we're doing is setting up an organizational structure to allow Alberta Health Services to operate more effectively. This is not as much a reorganization as an operating model which will allow them to operate more effectively, deliver services to rural areas in a more efficient manner, and deal better with the residents of our province.

Ms Notley: Sounds to me like a redisorganization, Mr. Speaker.

Today's report on rural health care makes it clear that health care in rural areas isn't serving the interests of Albertans. It's unacceptable for people to have to drive 600 kilometres for a five-minute consultation. It's unacceptable that people are dying because dialysis is too far away. It's unacceptable that rural communities are losing people and business because they can't keep a family doctor. Again to the Premier: will you admit that your government's original centralization was and is an abject failure for the people of this province?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say that in this country many jurisdictions are looking to go to a centralized health care system, but centralization doesn't mean just one particular entity; it means finding a best operating model, which is what we're putting in place. We're trying to make sure we relate to our communities to give them the kinds of health services they all desire, and that's what we'll be doing.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this report outlines hardship and dangerously low or completely absent basic health care services outside of Edmonton and Calgary. Whether it's obstetric care, mental health, dialysis, seniors' care, in almost every way this government has let down rural Alberta. The problem is this: almost every meaningful recommendation in that report costs more money. So how can Albertans trust this government to provide safe health care in a time of fiscal restraint when they neglected and abandoned rural Alberta health care when times were good?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We believe a new, more decentralized system will allow it to be a better system, less costly, with greater care. We think the new system we're putting in place will give Albertans a better opportunity to have access to care, and we'll continue to do that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The majority of scientists around the world are in broad agreement about the occurrences, causes, and consequences of climate change. Supposedly AEMERA, Alberta's environmental monitoring service, is created on this foundation of broad scientific agreement, yet on Monday the Minister of Finance stood in this Assembly and defended the burning of coal and justified greenhouse gas emissions. To the Premier: do you accept the scientific majority findings that the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere poses the greatest risk of irreversible climate change?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We take climate change very seriously in this province, and the work that is done by AEMERA, with the arm's-length agency, is very important work for us, and that is why we implemented that arm's-length environmental monitoring agency. I can tell you that we've worked with the federal government on our coal regulations, and as we work to phase out the coal regulations and bring more cleaner energy into the province, that's very important. The minister spoke about that, and he spoke about the phase-out of coal.

Mr. Anglin: Yeah. But you took 11 climate change deniers. I needed to know.

Given that this government claimed credit for reducing greenhouse gases by 146,000 tonnes from a Bonavista gas plant in 2012 and given that this same gas plant's records reveal that it only produces 50,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases annually, how can this government claim to save 146,000 tonnes when there are only 50,000 tonnes to begin with? Is somebody falsifying documents?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a great deal of examples on the climate change file where we've met our commitments. We set targets in 2010, and we've met those. We're working on our renewed climate change strategy, and we will make sure that we have that shortly. This government, this Premier take very deep concerns with regard to the work we're doing with climate change, and we will continue to move that file forward.

Mr. Anglin: Boy, do we gotta get back to basic math.

Given the reputable audit firm of KPMG has failed greenhouse gas reduction projects because there is no verifiable proof of any reduction and given the Minister of ESRD has overruled more than one KPMG audit without explanation and taken credit for reductions, how can the international markets have any confidence in Alberta's carbon offset system when it appears that the ministry is just fabricating our greenhouse gas reduction numbers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have 34 offset protocols with ESRD with the climate change strategy. We're seeing reductions on the targets that we set. We're meeting those reductions. We have a number of ways that you can pay into a fund. You can use offset credits. This government is working very hard on the climate change file, and we will continue to move that file forward.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's curtail our preambles from this point onward when it comes to supplementary questions. Let's start with Calgary-Mountain View, and then Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Investigation into Release of Information (continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner also launched her own investigation into Service Alberta about how the release of the \$20,000 phone bill of the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs may have violated the FOIP Act. Conveniently, the minister who was then responsible for Service Alberta was also the Premier's leadership co-chair. He was also the person the media reported was allegedly involved in shopping the same phone bill to opposition parties. To the Minister of Service Alberta: can the minister update the Assembly on the status of the Privacy Commissioner's investigation into his ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for the question. The office of the Privacy Commissioner is an independent office. They are currently investigating this case. I've spoken with the commissioner and given her the assurance that she has our full co-operation in this case.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, to the Minister of Infrastructure. Can he tell us if he's had any discussion with the Privacy Commissioner about this investigation, or has this case gone cold, too?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly. I would suggest that members opposite and all members in this House respect the autonomy of institutions like independent officers of the Legislative Assembly, institutions like our police services, respect their autonomy, allow them to do their job. That's what we believe in here, the rule of law.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I think there's a real danger here that Albertans won't get to see the results of any of these investigations before the next election. Will the Minister of Service Alberta commit to a public disclosure of all information about this investigation before the election?

Mr. Khan: Again, I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. I'll remind the hon. member that the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner is an independent office. I believe it would be inappropriate for me to influence the investigation. We'll co-operate, as I said, with the investigation, but the timeline is in her hands.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Livingstone-Macleod.

Rural Health Services Review

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the rural health report was released, and I'm so happy to hear that the recommendations will improve health care in rural Alberta. The report contains recommendations that Alberta Health Services be split into eight to 10 organizational districts. Although these districts seem like a good idea, I have some concerns with their implementation. To the Minister of Health: with the recommendations of implementing new organizational districts, is the Minister of Health admitting that the centralization of health services in Alberta isn't working and that we are returning to regions?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, and thanks for the question. Absolutely not. We are keeping a centralized system, but the operating model of that will be the nine districts, eight districts, 10 districts as they go through the system of evaluating what we need to do. I can assure the member that we'll be able to do more and better service at the local level under the system. Alberta Health Services is committed to making sure this works and delegating the kind of authority to the districts to make the system very effective.

2:10

Mrs. Leskiw: Given that we have gone through organizational changes in the past, can the Minister of Health confirm that these districts will have real authority, or is it just another letterhead exercise?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whoa, letterhead exercise. Anyway, yes. Alberta Health Services will be delegating budgets. They'll be setting up facilities' plans. They'll be having the patient-first model. They'll be setting up their advisory councils. This will all be done at the district level under the supervision of Alberta Health Services. This will be meaningful delivery of service, and responsibility and accountability by these districts for this service will be done in a very efficient manner.

Mrs. Leskiw: Given that, ultimately, this review needs to benefit Albertans, how can the minister be sure that the recommendation in this report will actually have a positive impact on patient care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're taking steps. We're putting new operating districts in place, the new EMS delivery model system, new local advisory committees, limiting the time that EMS vehicles can spend when they're in urban areas, and enhancing mental health services by expanding telephone programs. I can assure the member that we will be more effectively delivering health care in rural Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Little-Bow.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the last set of questions, by the way. Ever since this PC government tried centralizing health care seven years ago, our rural health care system has been struggling to provide timely, quality care for Albertans, as we've known. Now this government is finally recommending 10 operational districts to improve regional access. So to the minister: that being the case, how exactly and precisely

with today's announcement will you change the authority and centralization of powers that still exist in AHS?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we've said before, this will be a delegation of authority to these districts as an operating model. They will be able to implement different programs. They will set up facility programs, modelling for their advisory councils, et cetera. This will be a very effective model, which we believe will help encourage better health delivery in rural Alberta, and we hope to have it operational by July 1.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Well, thanks again, Mr. Speaker. To the minister. This rural health care review recommends relaunching AHS but this time with standards and expectations, I understand. I know the numbers are bad, but do standards and expectations really not exist under your government's current framework? Really? Precisely which ones are going to be addressed as the very first, immediate priorities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a delegation of authority. This is an operating model. Standards will be across the board the highest in Canada. Alberta Health Services will ensure that all Albertans will get the best health care possible in this country.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Well, thanks again, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister. With respect to rural EMS we've been raising these issues for two years to see meaningful changes in ambulances. Now that the government has again admitted that we need to address transportation issues in the ambulance system, how exactly and precisely are you going to implement changes, at what cost, and when exactly will we see these overdue nonemergency transfer units in place that I've been talking about for two years?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll be putting in place protocols to make sure that ambulances coming out of rural Alberta that go into major urban centres with particular patients will be able to off-load their patients and then go back to their communities as soon as possible. We'll also be putting in place programs in which local areas can begin to move people through nonambulance facilities in order to make them move smoother, so not using up our paramedics and ambulances for that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let us move on to Little Bow, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Rural Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years rural Alberta has voiced their concern with ambulance services. Many Albertans feel centralized on the dispatch of the ambulance service to our local rural areas. The undue stress to our health care providers, our hospitals: our rural Albertans have had enough of it. With today's release of the rural health care report, I feel it's time to ask the minister some of the same questions that he's been asked already.

One of the issues facing emergency medical services is that ambulances are being used to shuttle nonemergency patients. How is the minister going to end this absurd practice from happening for the emergency personnel in emergency situations?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With this specific situation Alberta Health Services is increasing its ability to use nonambulance transfer vehicles such as wheelchair-equipped vans for basic transfers that don't require heavily trained paramedics, to help free up rural ambulances for emergency response. When the rural health group went out and talked to Albertans, they were concerned about their ability to control their ambulance service. We need to work with people in rural Alberta to make sure that they feel comfortable with what we're doing, and we will do that.

Mr. Donovan: To the same minister: given that we have a limited number of ambulances and staff and that their time is best spent responding and delivering patients to hospital yet they're stuck in emergency rooms for up to hours waiting for their patients to be admitted, how is this minister going to make sure emergency personnel are back in the field, where they belong?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll be putting protocols in place to ensure that once an ambulance goes into an urban area, it must return as soon as possible to its home base. This will make sure that there's safety and security in the rural community.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. member has one final supplemental.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that rural ambulances belong in rural areas yet when they finish a call in major centres such as Edmonton, they're tasked to do shuttling services around the city instead of returning to their base, what is this minister doing to make sure that ambulances return to the communities where they're needed the most?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will put in place, again, a protocol to ensure that once the ambulances come into the cities, whether it's Edmonton or Calgary or Red Deer, they will have to return immediately to their communities. They will not be allowed to be reassigned to local duties. They have to be able to support their own communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Childhood Immunization

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health can't seem to get his story straight. First he told the Assembly that he's not going to make vaccines in schools mandatory. Then he said that he needs to consult with someone about them somewhere at some time. The government also uses the excuse that mandatory vaccines infringe on the rights of parents and school boards. To the Minister of Health: are you saying no to mandatory vaccinations, or are you still consulting? Which is it?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, across our province we have a program in place to encourage families to vaccinate their children, and my

personal belief is that people should vaccinate their children. We have not mandated that, and we will have to evaluate whether that should be done or not.

Dr. Swann: Given that almost every health expert, doctor, and even his own ministry agree that vaccines save lives, who exactly does the Minister of Health need to consult with before taking the necessary next steps to protect the health and safety of schoolchildren?

Mr. Mandel: Maybe Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member. Final supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that last week this government proved that parental and school board rights do not trump the safety and protection of our children – that's the GSA bill you just passed – does the Minister of Health not see that his own government has already debunked this consultation argument when it comes to GSAs? So why is he still using it? To protect the health and safety of children requires this in potentially life-threatening situations.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah, Mr. Speaker, we've had information come in to us that there are jurisdictions that make it mandatory, but their coverage and their vaccination, immunization is much lower than ours. So there are different ways we can look at it and different ways in which we can ensure that our communities, our children are safe. It isn't as simple as the hon. member would like to think.

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

Food Processing Development Centre

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With an uncertain resource-based economy Alberta has been diversifying for decades and in 1984 opened the Food Processing Development Centre in my constituency of Leduc-Beaumont, the only facility of its kind in Canada. The food and beverage industry is now Alberta's largest secondary manufacturer, generating in excess of \$10 billion in annual shipments. My question is to the newly minted associate minister of agriculture. For his maiden question: what is the government doing to support and leverage state-of-the-art facilities like the Food Processing Development Centre to help grow our economy?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. The development centre that we have in Leduc is an extremely exciting centre that does culinary work all over Alberta. In fact, six development associations have graduated already and invested \$50 million in capital across Alberta.

2:20

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one final supplemental for that same minister. Mr. Minister, with the current revenue shortfalls are you planning any initiatives in the near term to use this facility to boost value-added opportunities for Alberta's agricultural sector and, by extension, contribute to Alberta's economic future?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, again. Well, obviously, this facility has been expanded twice already, in 2002 and again in 2007. It's already 140,000 square feet. We're always looking for opportunities, we're always looking for ideas, and we welcome all comers.

Thank you.

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

Deaths of Children in Care

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday the Premier said that the death of every child in care or receiving services is investigated. We know that that is simply not true. For example, a one-page coroner report with a signature is not a proper investigation into the death of a child. To the Minister of Human Services: will the minister admit that the Premier misspoke and that this PC government is in fact not investigating the deaths of all children in care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The death of a child in care is one too many. Every critical incident, as I said the other day, or death is examined internally and externally depending on the situation, internally through the department as well as externally through the good work of the Child and Youth Advocate, the council of quality assurance, the Family Violence Death Review Committee, the medical examiner, and the fatality inquiry when necessary. [interjection]

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that a round-table concluded last January that investigations into children's deaths in care should be standardized and that more than a year later we still see no progress on this, to the Minister of Human Services again: why does this minister not take the obvious solution to this problem, which is to fund the office of the Child and Youth Advocate properly and allow them to investigate the deaths of children in care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that the investigations the Child and Youth Advocate does with his staff – he does excellent work as well. He does have the capacity to do that and, of course, work with Human Services to make those investigations. [interjections] At the end of the day for me, if we lived in a perfect world, there'd be no children in care, no children hurt, no accidental deaths or medical deaths. It's up to the Ministry of Human Services to ensure those deaths are looked into, and we will continue to be transparent.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, do your best to yield the floor to whoever has been given it.

Let's hear your final question.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government has laid down so many layers of bureaucracy in Human Services that both the minister and the Premier can't even get their story straight on what constitutes an actual investigation into the death of a child, to the minister again: why doesn't this PC government stop the empty rhetoric, reverse their nonsensical cuts to the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, and let the professionals do the job of helping children at risk?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that the work of the oversight committee, led by Tim Richter, and the good work that he has done, including all the other work that goes on in Human Services – all of this work is continuing. All children who die in care will be investigated. Again, it goes back to: if we lived in a perfect world. We wish these things wouldn't happen, but they are going to happen. At Human Services we will continue to investigate and be transparent and open in that regard.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Medicine Hat, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Medicine Hat Addiction Treatment Facility

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency the Medicine Hat detoxification and residential treatment centre is an innovative facility that is being built to serve all residents through southeastern Alberta. It is unlike any other detox centre available to these Albertans and will offer an aftercare program to each of its patients. My constituents have expressed concern that due to government budget pressures this facility may not open as scheduled. My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. Given the current fiscal pressures can you confirm that this centre will be built as originally planned?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for the question. Addiction is a very serious issue in our society. I can confirm to the member that that is a project that is going ahead. The construction has actually commenced. It's a very important project for his particular region, and we intend to ensure that it is completed.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given every detox centre requires highly trained professionals in order to properly run their programs, does the Minister of Health plan on replacing the necessary qualified staff with less-experienced staff so that AHS doesn't have to pay them as much?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are no plans to reduce recovery services at the detox facility. The detox facility fills an important need in Medicine Hat, and its services are critical for helping people recover from drug and alcohol addictions. You know, staff continue to care for patients in a temporary eight-bed facility. We'll continue to do that after the 18-bed facility opens this year. Once the permanent facility opens, existing staff will move over, and we anticipate the number of staff will have to be increased as well with the increase in the size of the facility.

I'd also like to recognize the member for his community's great efforts on homelessness.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for recognizing their awesome work.

Again to the Minister of Health: in planning for this new, permanent facility, will there be any cuts to the original number of staff members with the aftercare program, which would undermine this innovative facility?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The temporary detox facility has six detox beds and two additional beds for people attending the day treatment program in Medicine Hat. The facility is currently staffed with two supervisors, six nursing staff, four addictions counsellors, eight client-care assistants, and one recreational therapist. Once a permanent recovery centre opens in Medicine Hat later this year, it will continue to offer the existing eight beds, and it will add 10 more beds for residential treatment. Again, we expect an increased number of staff working at the facility and existing staff to remain employed. Additional staff will be brought in to work in this facility. This is a very important addition to this community.

We thank the member for his question.

Early Childhood Development

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, late last year we learned that this PC government cancelled the five-year, \$16 million early childhood mapping project, which provided vital data about the development of our children. The project's final report shows some stunning results. Less than half of the 70,000 kids included in the study are developing appropriately physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. To the Minister of Human Services: how can Alberta have a bright future when your government is so clearly failing the children of this province?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The mandate that the Premier has given me focuses on early childhood development. The early childhood mapping project is incredibly important information. That's why it was continued until December 2015. It's important to note that the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health are currently working on this together, and we will continue to work in the area of early childhood development.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, given that the ECD mapping project helped to pinpoint the areas where Alberta's kids have the highest needs and given that these studies estimate that for every dollar spent on early childhood education and development programs, \$8 is returned to individuals and to society later in life, will the Minister of Human Services commit to increasing investment in early childhood development, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad the hon. member agrees with me on how important early childhood development is in helping our children. We need to get to the root cause. We need to help children. We know that there's great work going on with the Norlien Foundation with brain development. My concern is getting at children from zero to 5, before they get to kindergarten, so we can help them get out of poverty, have proper nutrition, and give family supports when they're needed at home.

Mr. Bilous: My concern is your lack of answer.

Mr. Speaker, given that the ECD mapping project paints a particularly troubling picture for children who are in underprivileged socioeconomic environments and given that the childhood poverty rate has barely changed in the last 25 years in this province, with almost 150,000 kids living in poverty, to the same minister: why won't this government make good on the 2012 promise to end child poverty that you were elected on?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It might be perceived as a lack of a question.

I think it's important to note the good work of the seven cities across Alberta, the good work we're doing with Mayor Iveson on the task to end poverty, that I've been privileged to be able to be a part of. Ending poverty is a work for all of us. We also want to support families with the primary care networks, that are now open in the evenings so that families can get medical attention they need. There are a whole number of areas, including parent link centres, including all of the supports that we provide for families.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

2:30

Home-care Services

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I have been contacted by several constituents of my riding of Calgary-East who depend on assistance from home care and Alberta aids to daily living or self-managed care. However, they are concerned with the rising costs of their care and have heard that in Edmonton these services are fully funded. To the hon. Minister of Health: is there an explanation for these perceived funding differences between Edmonton and Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure you that funding levels are set in Edmonton and Calgary and all regions of the province. Putting clients first is always our priority. AADL is funded the same across the province, though the cost to individuals can vary depending on the individual's circumstances. For example, low-income Albertans and those receiving AISH or income support are not required to share the cost of equipment and supplies provided by AADL. There are some differences for home care and self-managed care between Edmonton and Calgary that AHS is working to standardize.

The Speaker: Supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: also, Mr. Minister, I have heard from constituents who suggest that the hourly wage for AHS health care workers is higher in Edmonton than in Calgary. Can you explain these perceived wage differences?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I again want to assure this member and his constituents that the rate paid by AHS for contracted home-care services is exactly the same in Edmonton and Calgary. AHS oversees contract providers to ensure that safe, quality health care is provided but does not determine wages for individual staff members. Alberta Health Services' home-care worker pay follows collective agreements, and the pay scales are identical in both cities. The way in which home-care clients are assessed in Edmonton and Calgary is very similar, though there are some differences that AHS is working to standardize.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also to the same minister: in regard to self-managed care funding, how are funding needs assessed by Alberta Health Services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AHS uses an internationally recognized assessment tool to develop an individualized care plan

for clients accessing home-care programs, including self-managed care. This care plan helps AHS to determine the funding for all home-care clients, including those eligible for self-managed care. Self-managed care rates are comparable between both cities, with Edmonton's set only 3.5 per cent higher than Calgary's. This is an historical difference between the two cities and is a small difference when we look at the actual funding numbers. We understand that some families or individuals who depend on self-managed . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Let's move on to Edmonton-Centre, followed by Lethbridge-West.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Liberal caucus has been meeting with postsecondary students, and they have confirmed our suspicions. Because of this government's chronic underfunding of our institutions, they've been forced to invent new ways to fund what the government doesn't, all this while Alberta has the lowest postsecondary participation rate in the country because we fund the lowest number of seats. Does the Premier believe that having the fewest postsecondary graduates in the country sets the province up for a knowledge-based economy?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we, of course, need skilled workers in Alberta, and our government has no intention of slowing much-needed training, apprenticeship training in particular, in Alberta. We're just going to continue to ensure that we are providing the kinds of services to apprenticeship training applicants, providing our province with skilled workers. That's why we make every effort to ensure that opportunities are available at our technical training and postsecondary institutions to address the very issue the member opposite has just raised.

Ms Blakeman: The minister cannot seriously be trying to tell me that increasing and supporting opportunities for trades apprenticeship and skilled workers is answering my questions about postsecondary education that leads to a creative economy. Are you seriously expecting me to believe that?

Mr. Dirks: Goodness me, Mr. Speaker. If anybody thinks that apprentices are not important in our province and they don't contribute to a knowledge economy, I'm shocked. All postsecondary training is important in Alberta. University training, college training, apprenticeship training in our trades institutions: we support all of that. We believe that's very important to the future of our province. We want to see it continue.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you've sent in your point of order at 2:35, during that last exchange. It has been noted.

Ms Blakeman: You didn't answer my question, and you know it.

Back to the Premier again. Since costs to students in postsecondary keep increasing through new approvals for market modifiers and enabling random noninstructional fees, whatever those are, does the government recognize that the tuition cap is effectively gone? There's only one pocket, and it's the student's, and you keep taking out of it.

Mr. Dirks: I thank the member opposite for her question, Mr. Speaker. There are no imminent changes to tuition. Our goal isn't to have the cheapest education; it's to have the best education. Alberta provides one of the highest levels of support to postsecondary institutions. We obtain almost 50 per cent of operating revenue for

these institutions from government funding. This is 5 per cent higher than the national average, 16 per cent higher than Ontario. Tuition from Alberta university students accounts for a lower proportion of operating revenues, 30 per cent, than other provinces such as Ontario and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's move on now to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Seniors' Guaranteed Disposable Income

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are currently 11,000 Albertans who receive the Alberta seniors' benefit and live in publicly funded designated supportive living and long-term care residences. Last year this government made a commitment to those seniors to increase the guaranteed disposable income benefit to \$315 a month. This means that low-income seniors living in care facilities are guaranteed \$315 a month over the cost of housing, food, medical care, and other supplemented costs. I believe our seniors deserve nothing less. My question is to the Minister of Seniors. Has our government implemented the decision this body agreed upon to ensure that all seniors in care can keep \$315 a month?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I thank the member for the question and thank him for the great work that he's done for seniors in his previous role as Minister of Municipal Affairs. I know he did a lot of work on this file in particular. In July 2014 the social housing accommodation regulation was amended to stipulate that all seniors lodge residents must be left with a minimal disposable income of \$315. I can confirm for the member that we have followed through on this promise because we're committed to ensuring that seniors are supported appropriately.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: are there any circumstances in government-subsidized facilities where seniors will not be left with \$315 a month?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, this benefit is designed to ensure that seniors lodge residents have a minimum monthly disposable income. There should not be any circumstances where seniors are left with smaller amounts. If there are cases where this requirement is not being followed, my department would be happy to look into those.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: can any of these facilities request that seniors sign waivers so that they are not left with the \$315?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to confirm for the member that the Alberta Housing Act stipulates that each senior resident must be left with a monthly disposable income of at least \$315. As such, any waivers requesting that seniors be left with a smaller amount would not be valid. The legislation would supersede any waivers that would be put in front of them. If there are any cases where this is happening, I'd like to know about it. As I said, my department will assist the housing management bodies and look into this if they're having any difficulty administering the program appropriately.

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

Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Serious allegations are swirling about the board of the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council. The old minister appointed public members to this board. Dozens of Albertans applied, but two of the minister's old law school buddies and one long-time political volunteer made it through. To the minister: do you really think that filling it up with PC insiders is the way to make this board work?

Mr. Khan: I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question and for his efforts to increase the awareness of consumer protection that Service Alberta performs for Albertans every day. The AMVIC board is comprised of industry stakeholders, as he says. It's also comprised of public members. I think it's completely unfair that the hon. member is taking shots at good, hard-working Albertans . . .

Mr. Saskiw: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Khan: . . . who perform a good service for Albertans. I believe it's really unfair, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier committed to merit-based appointments on boards like this. He said, "Political party affiliation is not a relevant consideration." To the minister: what are you going to do about this board, that is filled with friends of the PCs and is damaging the trust and integrity of the motor vehicle industry?

2:40

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I've met with the AMVIC board just recently. I want to assure this House that the board is filled with Albertans who are dedicating their time and their energy to performing this service on behalf of consumers and on behalf of the Department of Service Alberta. If this hon. member has a specific issue with a person, I think he should have the courage to mention that.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, it's not personal; it's about Albertans. Considering this minister refuses to release a report into what really happened at AMVIC, I'm left to wonder why the reasons for the delay relating to the relationships of board members. Will you do the right thing, quit the stalling, and release this overdue report immediately?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, the member across the aisle refers to a draft report of some issues that we've identified from Service Alberta, from the department, in our efforts to support AMVIC in doing their job, in performing consumer protection for Albertans. This is a draft review. We've talked to the board. We'd like to give the board an opportunity to respond to us. It is my intention to make that draft review public.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we do have another question here. Let's go to Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Energy Industry Update

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With this morning's announcement of oil at \$42 a barrel and of the dollar slipping, I'm wondering if the Minister of Finance can answer: does this slip in

the dollar and the slip in oil match our revenues, or are we going to be short again?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, we're down to \$42.27 a barrel, and the Canadian dollar is down around 77 cents. While the low Canadian dollar helps us, it doesn't make up for the fact that oil is trading as low as it is. It is going to cause us some grief in our budget coming forward on March 26.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. VanderBurg: To the Minister of Energy: now, today with this announcement and the differential that we're having with the price of a barrel of oil, what are you expecting to do in the budget? Is this going to cause you some grief as well?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Finance pointed out, we're headed for challenging times indeed. At \$42 oil we are seeing an additional discount against west Texas intermediate – that will be \$12 or \$13 today – and even west Texas intermediate is discounted off the world price. We are cushioned somewhat by the low dollar but not anywhere near sufficiently. Absolutely, we have challenging times ahead in all of our budgets.

Mr. VanderBurg: Access to tidewater has been an issue for all of us in Alberta and in our industry. Could the Minister of Energy tell us if we're any closer to getting a pipeline to the east coast, to the west coast, to the north coast, to the south coast? Where are we?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the member that we're working very diligently on market access. It is the number one item in my mandate letter. He'll know, as all members do, what the situation is with the Keystone XL and the President's insistence on letting the process go all the way through. We are making great progress on Energy East in talks with Ontario and Quebec and in addressing their concerns there, and we are making progress on talks to access the west coast. It is my number one mandate item. I've got a lot of people working on it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, what an interesting day: 112 questions and responses today. Congratulations. That was well done.

Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, your point of order at 2:39, during the exchange between the Minister of Service Alberta and the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, has been noted.

Thirty seconds from now we shall continue with the final member's statement, and we'll hear from Chestermere-Rocky View.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us hear a member's statement for two minutes from Chestermere-Rocky View.

Chestermere High School Basketball

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to applaud the unprecedented success achieved by the basketball teams at Chestermere high school in the riding of Chestermere-Rocky View. This has been a remarkable year of accomplishments. It really has, and I'll lay it out for you.

The school has four teams, junior boys and girls and senior boys and girls. All four of these teams going into the zone finals tournament ranked number 1 or number 2, the top of the heat, Mr. Speaker. After all was said and done, the junior girls won the zone tournament. There are no provincials for them. If there were, I'm sure they would chase that title down. The junior boys did lose a heartbreaker in the first game of their tournament, but they went on to rebound and win the consolation bracket.

The senior girls and senior boys both played in the zone finals; the boys taking gold, the girls taking silver. Both of these teams, though, are off to provincials this weekend. The boys will be in Fort McMurray. The girls will be playing in Taber. Now, the senior boys' team has been undefeated all year. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this streak extends back to November of 2013, made all the more impressive by the fact that their two star players were hurt for a third of the season, and they still succeeded.

All of these teams have demonstrated the tradition of success at Chestermere high school. Excellence is an expectation at this school. By setting the bar high and putting in the hard work, these four teams continue the tradition of success at Chestermere high. I wish both these teams the best of luck at provincials on the weekend, and I applaud their athletic director, Brian Utley, along with their coaches. There are four of them: Rob Wilson, Erhayat Ozcan, Dan Isbister, and Howie Leong. They have done a tremendous job with this group of kids.

To my colleagues in the Legislature as well I'd like to say: should your teams be playing the Chestermere Lakers at provincials or at any other time, buckle up your chinstraps because we're bringing our A game, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. You have a petition?

Ms L. Johnson: Yes, I do, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to present a petition with over 1,100 signatures. This petition was organized by the Calgary Association of Parents and School Councils. The petitioners are urging the government to consider increased funding for public education.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. I understand you have a bill that wish to present. I invite you to do so.

Bill 208

Alberta Human Rights (Commission Accountability) Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Saskiw: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great privilege to rise today and introduce my last bill as an MLA. As an opposition member this is the only way which I can introduce legislation that is important to my constituents, and it is an indictment of this PC government that they have limited debate in this House so much that it is unlikely this bill will even come close to second reading.

This bill, the Alberta Human Rights (Commission Accountability) Amendment Act, 2015, seeks to restore and protect the right to free speech that all Canadians enjoy. It seeks to hold the Human Rights Commission accountable and put an end to frivolous and vexatious

claims that unfairly target people for their personal beliefs. For example, my constituents believe that their priests should be able to teach freely from the Bible in church on Sundays. They also believe that you are free not to go to church if you don't want to. My constituents believe that everyone has the right to be offended, to voice their opinion, to proudly share their values, and that they should have these rights without the fear of government prosecuting them.

We will never have a society that agrees on everything. This bill recognizes that we are not all going to agree all the time on every issue, and that's a good thing. This bill recognizes that we as Albertans should be able to have free, open, and fair debate in our communities without the fear of persecution or prosecution.

I urge all members to support this bill, and when I am no longer in this House, I urge all members to fight for the freedoms Albertans deserve: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, and freedom of conscience.

In closing, I would like to remind all members of our provincial motto, Strong and Free. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a first time]

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the Government House Leader.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail sent to me by a constituent to raise awareness for Worldwide EndoMarch 2015. March is Endometriosis Awareness Month. Endometriosis affects more patients than asthma, diabetes, and breast cancer combined. We are trying to raise awareness here with EndoMarch and trying to attain nonprofit status for this group and to raise money to assist women who are afflicted with this disease.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of a letter on an article which I referred to yesterday during debates as required. It is an article called Wildrose Leadership Candidates Face Off in Telephone Town Hall, March 16, by James Wood of the *Calgary Herald*. It refers to, among other things, someone who is standing for leadership of that caucus, Linda Osinchuk, who . . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Denis: . . . would like to go forward with opposing the Keystone pipeline and also thinks that it's time that we look at the royalty formula. I'll table five copies with the page.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has raised a point of order at 2:51:30 in response to and during, I assume, the tabling that was being given by the Government House Leader. We'll hear about that shortly.

Let's move on to Edmonton-Centre on behalf of Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've had a number of these sent back, and I apologize. I haven't been tabling these very well on behalf of my colleague the leader of the third party opposition. So here we go.

These all pertain to the questions that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View was asking today. There are copies of articles by the *Edmonton Sun*. The Premier is concerned about the leak of one of our member's roaming bills. Also from the *Edmonton Sun*: Calgary police investigating impersonation following leaked Alberta Tory documents; Alberta PC leadership candidate for Castle Downs racked up bills over cabinet minister's personal dispute; former Service Alberta minister – I'm at a loss here; I'm sorry; that will get filled in; I don't want to say his name in the House – told opposition parties to FOIP the Member for Castle Downs' expenses; staff members say Alberta Liberal leader, the member for Meadowlark, questioned over Castle Downs' wireless leak; opposition want Alberta's Privacy Commissioner called in after the phone leak; Alberta's Privacy Commissioner looking into the leaked phone bill; and, Mr. Speaker, PCs facing questions of fairness after the previous chief of police for the city of Calgary is appointed as the Calgary-Cross nominee.

Did I get through that with all the right names? If you just give me one second, I'll get the name that I was missing. That would be the Minister of Infrastructure, the Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. You have a tabling?

Dr. Starke: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. It's my pleasure today to file the requisite number of copies of the final report of the rural health services review. This effort came about, really, as a result of a team effort, and I do need to thank a number of people. I'd like to, first of all, thank the Premier and the Health minister for giving me this task although there was the odd time where I wasn't quite so thankful. I'd also like to especially give thanks to the six committee members that I was blessed to work with. These are outstanding individuals, very, very dedicated in their own capacities both as nurses, doctors, and health care advocates for rural Alberta. As I said in my member's statement, I'd like to thank my colleague the Member for Calgary-South East. With his experience as a paramedic the advice he gave me on the EMS section of this was invaluable. I'd especially like to thank all rural Albertans that came and met with the committee. Their passion and their caring for the community was palpable, and we appreciated it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Let us move on to points of order. I believe we have four points of order or clarification, whatever the case might be today. Let us begin.

There was a point of order raised at approximately 1:57 during the exchange between Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills and one of the ministers. Let's hear the point of order, please, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Point of Order

Referring to Party Matters

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise according to Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), and it was with respect to a comment made by the Premier regarding royalty review changes and so forth. It provides the opportunity, I think, most of all, to provide a clarification. I guess I should go back to an article that was written on October 30, 2007, which states that the federal Industry minister, the current Premier, "threw [his] support behind Alberta's controversial new oil royalty regime Tuesday, giving Premier Ed Stelmach a much-needed political boost." It goes on to say: "Speaking to reporters in Washington, [the current Premier] said he

believes the Alberta government struck 'the right balance' by sharply raising the province's take of oil revenues."

It's odd, Mr. Speaker, that he's criticizing it now when you consider his straightforward support of it. Actually, I'll quote from him. "I think that the premier" – this is referring to Premier Ed Stelmach at the time – "and his government have worked to strike the right balance in the interests of Albertans as the owner of the resource." The quote goes on. "I know it's been a challenge and a difficult process to arrive at that balance, but I think they have" – get this – "succeeded in doing that." This is in regard to Stelmach's proposed royalty increases.

It goes on to say that the Calgary MP at that time "dismissed as alarmist warnings by some critics that Stelmach's move would bring an end to Alberta's long-running economic boom." He said that by increasing the royalties at the time, Alberta would continue to prosper and do very well.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to point that out, that the Premier is talking about, first off, that the problem is party matters, and he's complaining about some proposed royalty increases, but his comments here are crystal clear. Back in 2007 he fully supported Premier Ed Stelmach's royalty increases. It's plain as record. Maybe that was then. It's now, now, or whatever.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to you that there was a warning yesterday provided to the government that they should not be speaking about party matters. You gave them the warning, yet they continued and persisted in talking about it. So if you're going to give warnings and they don't do anything about it, maybe you should do something about it right now and ask that they retract that statement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With respect, I'm not prepared to withdraw that statement on behalf of the Premier. I know, first off, that my colleague opposite from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills failed to mention any citation in the standing orders or any other of the constating documents of this Chamber. I again state that the document that I have tabled here is exactly what the Premier was referring to, that a leadership candidate for this party, Linda Osinchuk, talked about raising royalties. She talked about how she was against the Keystone pipeline. These are facts. These may be inconvenient truths to this member, but again there simply is no point of order here.

The Speaker: Anyone else on this point?

Mr. Mason: Why not, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, please be brief.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I note that there was no citation as well. I think that it's quite reasonable to put forward information with respect to the position of a leadership candidate in a leadership race. I think that the matter of the royalties under Premier Stelmach has been mischaracterized by the Wildrose. The current slump in world oil prices has nothing to do with the royalty regime that was put in place under Mr. Stelmach unless he's suggesting that Mr. Stelmach sits around the cabinet table in Saudi Arabia. Otherwise, I would suggest that it has absolutely nothing to do with the current drop in oil prices.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I'm looking at the Blues that have been provided here, and if I have the right spot, I'm going to reference it in a moment, then make a ruling on this.

But in the meantime I thought I heard citation 23(h), (i), and (j). Did I hear that? I thought I did. I don't know if the microphone picked it up, but, hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, that's honestly what I thought I heard. If I'm wrong, then correct me.

3:00

Mr. Saskiw: That's correct.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Okay. So let us move on. Citation 23(h), (i), and (j) you already have. We've referenced them many, many times. It's similar to the point of order that was raised yesterday, and I am not going to take a lot of time on this. I would encourage you to read pages 686 and 687 of *Alberta Hansard* from March 17, yesterday, just to become more acquainted with this. It will help shorten up my comments right now. I would also encourage you to look at a couple of sections in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, regarding replies to oral questions.

I won't restate them all here right now. But it is frequently the case that someone says something in the middle of the debate, either as a question or as a response, and then hon. members sometimes react to it and there's a bit of disorder created or a little bit of a hubbub or something like that. In the end what happens in most cases is hon. members are encouraged to stand up and explain and clarify their position. Rarely is it a point of order, and I don't find it to be a point of order here. I think both sides have spoken and clarified on the record what their positions on this are, so we're going to conclude that matter and move on to the next point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

The Speaker: I believe the next point of order was somewhere right around 2:34 or somewhere in there. Anyway, proceed Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During the exchange between myself and the Minister of Education, although I have to admit that I was not able to hear the end of the sentence, certainly the tone and the direction he was moving in and the first part of what I heard him utter would be enough for me to rise on a point of order and point out to him that in – specifically, he was talking about how I or my colleagues did not view apprentices as important.

I will just point out on page 508 of *House of Commons*, under Replies to Oral Questions: "According to practice, replies are to be as brief as possible, to deal with the subject matter raised and to be phrased in language that does not provoke disorder." Now, clearly, when a minister stands up and accuses a member of the opposition of not respecting a certain group or a certain postsecondary institution, it's meant to create disorder. It's meant to get me mad.

I'll also note in *Beauchesne's* 410(4) that "decorum is of importance," and it's expected that in responses to questions, in the replies to questions, that decorum should be respected and disorder should not be raised. In 417 of *Beauchesne's* again it mentions that answers to questions should deal with the issues and "not provoke debate".

Finally, Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 23:

A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if [the member] . . .

(h) makes allegations against another Member, which certainly was what was happening, and

(j) uses abusive or insulting language . . . likely to create disorder.

So I would ask that the member please withdraw his commentary, especially since I'm sure the member knows that most of the members of my family have graduated from apprenticeships in the trades and I would be less likely than many to be disrespecting those particular institutions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Maybe just before I hear from the Government House Leader or somebody on behalf of him, I could just refresh everyone's memory as to what was said. Unless, Government House Leader, you are prepared to do something now.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, this is more of a point of clarification. I appreciate the member's comments. I know she'd never want to create disorder in this Chamber.

The recollection that I have – and I don't have the benefit of the *Hansard* or the Blues – is that the Minister of Education had talked about: if anyone had said. Because he did not impugn another member or a member's caucus or anything, I don't believe that he is offside, making allegations against a member or false or unavowed motives, again, to another member. That's key. I don't believe that he named another member, Mr. Speaker. That was my recollection.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I hope there's no one else on this point. It's very straightforward.

I'll read to you, first of all, the exchange according to the Blues. The Member for Edmonton-Centre rose at approximately 2:34 and said the following:

The minister cannot seriously be trying to tell me that increasing and supporting opportunities for trades apprenticeship and skilled workers is answering my questions about postsecondary education that leads to a creative economy. Are you seriously expecting me to believe that?

The Minister of Education stood in response and said:

Goodness me, Mr. Speaker. If anybody thinks that apprentices are not important in our province and they don't contribute to a knowledge economy, I'm shocked. All postsecondary training is important in Alberta. University training, college training, apprenticeship training in our trades institutions: we support all of that. We believe that's very important to the future of our province. We want to see it continue.

I would agree, on one hand, that the Minister of Education did not directly comment as to who had uttered that feeling. He said: "if anybody thinks." I think that's where the Government House Leader is coming from. However, on the other hand, I think it was fairly clear that the minister was responding to, if not perhaps looking at, the Member for Edmonton-Centre. As you know, in all matters that come to the Speaker's attention, context, tone, all of those environmental things in terms of speech, are taken into account.

So I think there is a point here, hon. Government House Leader, that can be dealt with very easily if we just on behalf of the member do the right thing, and I'll allow you the floor.

Mr. Denis: I'll withdraw the comments on behalf of the Minister of Education.

The Speaker: Thank you.

That is officially withdrawn and dealt with, and that matter is concluded.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

The Speaker: Let us move on to the third point of order. I believe the third point of order was at approximately 2:39 p.m. and that it was Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills who rose during an exchange that involved the Minister of Service Alberta answering a question posed by Drumheller-Stettler. So let's hear the citation and the point of order.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise according to Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically 23(h), and that's a point of order when a member makes an allegation against another member. The background here is that the minister in question stated, and I quote, that the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler was taking shots at an independent board.

Mr. Speaker, that's a serious allegation. The minister has made an allegation against the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler that he was taking shots against an independent board. That is very serious. These independent boards, as the minister had stated, are independent. Members should not be attacking them like that, and I would just simply ask that the hon. minister withdraw the comment, and we can get on with things.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on this point.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think, again, this is more of a point of clarification. To say someone is taking shots, it's just simply taking questions, not making accusations or allegations. That's the spirit of question period. I don't think that the Member for Drumheller-Stettler did anything wrong, but similarly, with respect, neither do I think that the Minister of Service Alberta did.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Service Alberta, you wish to clarify briefly what you intended there? It would help, perhaps.

Mr. Khan: If I may, Mr. Speaker. It happens from time to time in this House that there are people who cannot defend themselves, as you know, in this House, and, as you also mentioned, the context and tone of particular questions also say as much often as the question. I've worked with this board. The board is comprised of quality people who are doing quality work on behalf of Albertans. I felt that the Member for Drumheller-Stettler was being very critical of this particular board, and I felt it was my duty to defend the board.

That was my interpretation of the comments, and I'll leave it at that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Is there anyone else on this? Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, briefly.

Mr. Saskiw: Yeah. I'd like to just quickly respond. I mean, the minister had himself criticized the same board in a letter that was written earlier this week. Of course, the question, if you look at the context, was criticizing the minister's appointment process, not the actual members in question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, this happened less than half an hour ago, and unfortunately we don't have the Blues available to us, so I can't really go into the verbatim exchange. But I'm going to take both

sides at their word here. I listened carefully to what I thought I heard the Member for Drumheller-Stettler saying, and I did not think that he was specifically taking a shot, as it's called, at the particular board in question. He may have been taking a shot at the government. I'm not sure. We'll have to read that. Nonetheless, what he uttered seemed within the rules.

The Minister of Service Alberta, of course, did stand up and say something about shots being taken at the same particular board and I think was trying to defend people who are not here, as he has already stated.

I think that clarifies the matter. We'll all watch our language going on. We know that we've got another week or so before the break. Perhaps we can sharpen up our comments and questions and answers in the next few days ahead. That leaves that point as clarified and now closed.

We will move on to the final point of order for today. I believe it was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. You had a point of order during a tabling.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, unfortunately, I'm unable to obtain a copy of *Beauchesne's* and therefore unable to provide you with a citation, so I don't really have a point of order.

The Speaker: Thank you very much. That concludes that matter. We can move on.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 18

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Finance regarding Bill 18.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 18, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015.

The Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015, will provide funding authority to all the offices of the Legislative Assembly and to the government for the period beginning April 1, 2015. It is anticipated that funding authority for the entire fiscal year ending March 31, 2016, will be tabled in the House before that date. Approval of interim supply estimates is required whenever spending authority is required to bridge the gap between the last fiscal year and passage of a new budget.

I respectfully urge my colleagues in this House to support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 18. You know, when you look at the interim supply in particular, this is dealing with expenditures made from April 1, the day after the fiscal year-end of the government, until the passing of the budget, which typically takes maybe a month, I guess, maybe even a little less.

My question yesterday was with respect to the \$28 million that's being allocated to the Chief Electoral Officer in this interim supply. My question would be: what would occur in that time period, from April 1, 2015, to about the middle of May of 2015, that would require the expenditure of \$28 million by the Chief Electoral

Officer? What could that possibly be? I'm trying to wrack my brain on this. Maybe he's got some – I'm not sure what the Chief Electoral Officer would need all that money for during that period of time given that the President of Treasury Board indicated that the fixed election date is in 2016. It's very difficult. You know, we're debating this. We'd like to know what the response is. Like, why would we need to give the Chief Electoral Officer all this money? What expenditure is he going to make? Are there some capital expenses that he has to make? What would he need that \$28 million for?

You know what? In fact, there's a coincidence, Mr. Speaker. The Chief Electoral Officer said that to run a provincial election, it would be roughly \$28 million. So I'm just wondering if during that time period, that six-week period, whether – what could it be for?

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to suggest that it's for an election. But, unfortunately, the President of Treasury Board said again and again that the fixed election period is a three-month period in 2016. You know, we debate large amounts of money in this Assembly. This bill is no different. In fact, there's a substantial amount of money. The minister should be required to provide details on how that money is going to be spent. The President of the Treasury Board did not do that; he failed in doing that. Mr. Speaker, how are we supposed to vote on a bill when the minister is not willing to provide us with any information?

The minister said that, you know, the Chief Electoral Officer is going to upgrade some electronic voting systems and that kind of thing, but he never gave any estimates on that. I was on the committee that hired the Chief Electoral Officer. He never at any point indicated it would cost \$28 million to upgrade the electronic voting systems and so forth. I think that would be a massive amount of money to do such a project. Of course, if that huge project was going to be done, clearly the President of the Treasury Board would want to tell the Assembly here what roughly \$30 million project the Chief Electoral Officer had in mind in the next month, but he didn't have an answer to that. For us in the opposition to debate on these substantial amounts of money, you would think it would be incumbent upon the minister to provide us with some information on whether we should vote yea or nay. These votes are very important, Mr. Speaker.

In conclusion, there's not enough information here that's been provided by the government for us to make a conclusive decision on this. They never separated the monies between operational and capital and financial in any of the departments. You know, it would be nice, Mr. Speaker, if they gave us an honest answer, in particular, to why that \$30 million is going to the Chief Electoral Officer. Just get it off their chest, and we can breathe a sigh of relief here in the Assembly that we'd finally know what was going to happen during that time period.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those are my comments.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by 29(2)(a).

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have to admit that this gives me great concern. I have never seen an interim supply budget that asked for money in an interim supply act for the entire year. I have seen 19 budgets now and probably 14 or 15 interim supplies, which tells you a lot about the on-time ability of this government to produce a budget and get it passed before the fiscal year-end. It's somewhere close to complete failure. I've seen a lot of these interim supply acts. For people that are following along, this interim is meant to cover the period of time between the 1st of April, when cheques need to be cut – people need to be paid; programs and services, contractors, all of this has to go on. So the

government has to have permission to cut those cheques, to spend that money, and they haven't passed a budget; they don't have the permission. Thus, you have an interim supply act.

What I've seen is that generally they would give themselves about 40 per cent of any department's budget, which I always questioned them on, why they needed 40 per cent for essentially three months. But some departments are certainly front-end loaded; for example, ESRD with firefighting. Their costs tend to come in the summer. There are others with employment programs that tend to come up in the summer. A lot, obviously, of the construction, transportation, infrastructure: that money tends to be spent more in the beginning part of the year than in the latter part of the year. So there's some good standard reasoning behind certain departments but certainly not all departments to have that much money allocated to them for three months' worth of expenditure.

3:20

I've always seen interim supply that ceased. In other words, the permission to be running on an interim supply act ceased at the end of June. So they would give themselves money from the 1st of April through April, May to the end of June. That was the end of it. It was expected they would have a budget by then. This, Mr. Speaker, is giving them permission to spend this money without a budget until the end of the next fiscal year, which is pretty outrageous when you think about it. What it's indicating just on the factual face of it is that we won't get a budget. We may not get a budget at all. There may be no budget debate or any kind of explanation up front about how the government is spending its money because this is it. This is it. No explanation, no votes, no – well, they don't do roll-down votes anymore, anyway. But that's it.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

So you want to know what's being spent in Aboriginal Relations? Well, \$51 million and change for expense and \$6 million for capital investment. Financial transactions: \$19 million. End of discussion. That's it. That's all you get. This is deeply troubling, and I'm quite concerned that this is a trick, and it's a bad one. It's a trick being played on all Albertans that the government would come forward with an interim supply bill that says: we're going to have interim money, between now and then money, for the whole year, until the end of March 2016. Twelve months' worth of expenditure, and this is the explanation. Just let me help you here. That's it, folks. That's it. That's it.

So why has this changed? I'd like to hear from the Minister of Finance on this. Why has this changed? Why have we now gone to an interim supply that gives the government permission to run on this till the end of March, March 31, 2016, an entire fiscal year? Now, I had enough problems with the government giving itself permission to spend money between the 1st of March and the end of June. But from the 1st of March, 2015, to the 31st of March, 2016, on this? Based on this? This is a mockery of this entire Assembly. It's a mockery of every financial officer that works for the public service. It's a mockery of every Albertan out there that expects there to be accountability and integrity in the way this government goes about producing a budget.

Mr. Mason: Oh, I don't think there are many left.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Well, my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood believes there aren't many left, and nobody is meeting my eyes. That's always really interesting when that doesn't happen, Mr. Speaker.

This is bad enough. This is serious. I want to hear from the Finance minister why this is being done because this is unusual.

Why is the government giving themselves permission to go without a budget, without any kind of explanation or understanding except for a four-page document that – sorry, six pages. My mistake. A six-page document. And just in case anybody has forgotten, there's this really, truly bizarre way of explaining budgets now in which they give a budget amount for the Legislative Assembly, but here are the real goods. There is from general revenue an operational budget that is shown as section 2. Section 3 is capital investments. That's a separate line. Section 4 is financial transactions. God help us, what does this mean, Mr. Speaker? And section 5 is lottery fund payments. So you'd better have your calculator with you because you have to add all of these up in order to understand what's actually being spent in any given department because it doesn't tell you that. It doesn't give you the bottom line. It says: here are all the four different ways that they now allocate spending without actually telling us what the total is.

The note that I'd made to myself when I was thinking about interim supply was how angry I am with this government and how I'm angry and I'm disappointed because there's so much potential in this province. There is so much innovation going on out there in the private sector. There are so many people ready to do amazing things, and this government is lazy. Lazy. You have too much money, and all you do is dump money on something to solve the problem. It's lazy. You've done that for years and years and years.

We had a litany of examples that were brought up by my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona during question period today. You know, why does this particular scandal or problem get money dumped on it when we can't get \$500,000 more for the Auditor General, who is actually trying to keep tabs on what's going on here? Over and over and over again she gives you explanations and examples of where the government has decided not to fund health care, children, all kinds of things, but they do find money, a lot of money, to pay for a golf course in Kananaskis. You would think that for all the problems you guys had created for you with that bloody golf course, you would never mention those words again. But then we look in supplementary supply, and there are millions of dollars that are being spend on flood . . .

An Hon. Member: Mitigation.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

. . . mitigation plus extra money to the operators to actually pay them for the nonoperation of the golf course while this mitigation is going on. Unbelievable. We have laziness, throw money at problems, don't spend money on other things, a total lack of imagination, and a lack of rigour, frankly. I am angry with that. There are a lot of good brains over there. There are a lot of committed people on the side opposite, and I just don't understand what makes you all go lockstep with this stuff and line up and mouth these points, when they get little notes that they're supposed to speak from. What's it called? Speaking notes.

Mr. Saskiw: Talking points.

Ms Blakeman: Talking points. Thank you. They line up and defend everything that the government is doing. I mean, okay. So we have these hide-and-seek games that the government spends, and it's, you know, it's serious game playing. We have a public release of somebody's phone records, of one of the member's phone records. Then the Premier calls for an internal investigation, but then it drifts off into somewhere else, and everybody goes: not my responsibility, not my problem. That's hide-and-seek. It is hide-and-seek.

I have personally, finally, yesterday received responses to written questions that were accepted 11 months ago. Eleven months it took this government to answer questions back to me, and, of course, I

didn't even really get the answers. You know, how can you have a straight face when you do stuff like this? Question: "What progress has been made on the formal commitment to develop the big-city charter, announced by the Minister of Municipal Affairs in a government news release on June 18, 2012?" And I get a response that lists things starting in October. It lists nothing between June 18, 2012, and October 7, 2014.

The Deputy Speaker: You're still on the bill, hon. member?

Ms Blakeman: I am talking about interim supply, Mr. Speaker. It's about the process, it's about how much money is being expended, and it's about how well this government works in giving out any kind of information. You would think the opposition would be the first ones that would be getting information, not the last ones. How do we trust when we have an interim supply that's six pages long and gives us no information and then other examples of getting information 11 months later? Come on. That's not about providing information; that's about playing a game of hide-and-seek. It's meant to be insulting, it's meant to make my life difficult, and it's childish. Embarrassing.

What other little games do we have? Oh, yeah. We've got no information in the budgets anymore. They're starting to look like this. I mean, we used to get a few lines of roll-up where you could tell what programs were actually being funded. Increasingly we're looking at budgets where it's one or two numbers. That's it. You can't even tell what programs they fund anymore because they're not listed.

We have ongoing disrespect to opposition members where an opposition member asks a question and their personal finances are brought up as a way of answering the question. Now, how disrespectful is that, Mr. Speaker? Pretty disrespectful. That's going to be, you know, a reasonable answer to a question. Unbelievable.

Let's look at the money that's coming out here. I'm wondering if under the Health budget, in which we have an expense of \$4,690,537,000 and a capital investment of \$19,341,000 – okay, so this is a budget for a year, an interim supply for a year. You're putting more money in – I don't know – maybe less money. Are we actually going to get better health care out of this? What are the metrics? So far you haven't even been able to track what your timing is, and where you have tracked it, you've stopped telling us because you did so poorly on the metrics. Every time we get you to actually give us some way of judging and measuring how well you're doing, if you do badly, you just take the metrics away. It really is anger-making, so I have a right to be angry with this.

3:30

Mental health strategies. We all recognize that if you invest money into community-based mental health care strategies, it's going to save you money. Really? Is it in here? Where is it? No idea. How about the mental health care strategies for children? Is it in here? No idea. How are we supposed to know? When are we going to know? No idea. You know what this says? You'll get to know at the end, the 31st of March 2016, once the year has gone by. If this is under new management, I would say that this is real close to criminal, and I mean that. This is wrong on a lot of different levels.

In the last number of budgets we've noticed that the government has admitted that the number of roadways and bridges that are going to be in less repair, less quality – they budget more of our roads and bridges to go down in the quality of what they're doing there. Is that going to continue in this budget? Are we going to see any kind of additional help for what's going on? You see, the other thing that's not in here is any kind of budget comparison, so I can't tell if it's

more money or less money. I can't tell what programs have been cut or that the government plans on cutting over the next year, because there's no explanation here.

I know that all the groups from Culture have been hauled in and told with a very sad face by the minister: too bad, so sad; you've been cut off. This is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I'll recognize the hon. Minister of Energy. Is that under 29(2)(a), hon. Minister of Energy?

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it's always been my observation in life and certainly since I was elected to this Chamber that there are far too many people in the world upon whom the entire point of the story of Chicken Little and Henny Penny is completely lost. That member might be one of them.

Mr. Speaker, the rules of this Chamber are absolutely clear. They're crafted by an all-party committee, and they're accepted by this Chamber. If the member alleges that somehow we have violated those rules of order, then she's perfectly capable, I would think, of calling a point of order. She has not done so. I believe we're fully in compliance with the rules of this Chamber.

Furthermore, the legislation governing the tabling of budgets and interim supply and supplementary estimates and all those things is absolutely clear. We table them in accordance with such legislation, and we provide for the appropriate times of debate and everything else. If she is of any belief that we're in violation of legislation, she should probably say so. She has not said so.

Mr. Speaker, from time to time governments table interim supply, which allows for interim spending while we're awaiting a budget that's not likely to be passed before the end of the year. The member knows full well that we're going to table a budget on March 26, and obviously subsequent debate on said budget will take us past the end of the year, so we're required to table interim supply, which will keep our employees, our civil servants, and the services that we provide to Albertans flowing. Without that, obviously, the government would come to a grinding halt, and I suspect nobody would be more upset than that hon. member. Clearly, we're not going to do that.

I'm sorry – and I'll apologize to the hon. member – if she finds it difficult to add three numbers, but the fact of the matter is that the format of the interim supply is absolutely in accordance with the legislation and in accordance with every other interim supply we've tabled in this House as long as I've been here.

You know, Mr. Speaker . . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: You have a point of order?

Point of Order

Question-and-Comment Period

Mr. Mason: The rules require the five minutes that are allocated for questions and answers to be shared, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, to be clear, the five minutes – and it's been applied liberally by this chair and other chairs – are usually questions and answers or, in many cases, comments. We've never cut a member off, be it the asker or the replier. Unless you expect some other rule to be changed, hon. member, that is what's been applied by this chair and other chairs in this Assembly.

Mr. Mason: With due respect, there is a subrule that has been enforced – and I don't know if it's been removed – that requires a fixed amount of time for question and answer per person.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, if you can cite me something that I'm not aware of, I will apply it, but if not, then we will proceed, and I'll let the hon. minister carry on.

Ms Blakeman: Excuse me.

The Deputy Speaker: Clarification, hon. member?

Ms Blakeman: Well, sure. You can call it whatever you want.

The Deputy Speaker: You have a citation?

Ms Blakeman: Standing Order 29(2)(a) does allow for the five minutes, but it goes on to say: "to allow Members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses to each Member's questions and comments." Therefore, I'm assuming that the speaker has allowed time for me to comment back, because it does specifically say "responses."

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I'm going to respond that in my time in the chair I've seen it go both ways, where one individual has taken most of the time or the other has. This chair has never called on an individual to stop, and I haven't observed other chairs as well. Until we change the rules, I'm going to keep applying the rule as it has been.

I'll allow the hon. member to continue, and I would hope that he would pause and allow you to answer some of his questions, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: And if he doesn't, then you've not allowed me to respond.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I've got the floor.

Hon. members, the rule allows for five minutes of questions or comments, and until there is a change in that rule, I'm going to apply it as such. If the time is taken by one member for comments, so be it. If it's for a question, then so be it. But in the absence of any other rule, I'm going to apply the consistency that this chair has applied in my time in the chair and the time that I've observed other chairs that I've been here. Hon. member, I think we're killing time here.

I would invite the hon. minister to continue and, hopefully, allow the Member for Edmonton-Centre some time to respond to your points, sir. Thank you. Please proceed.

Debate Continued

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, the interim supply numbers we presented here are consistent with the legislation, the rules of this House, and any other interim supply that we've tabled. Now, the hon. member knows quite well, actually, that the interim supply numbers are, of course, to provide spending for the government in the interim period, hence the name "interim," between the tabling and the passing of a budget which goes into the new budget year. It allows for the operation of the government. It's absolutely normal practice. It's in full compliance with the rules of this House and with the legislation. It's, actually, in fulfillment of the legislation. So that's why the government has done that.

It's normal practice, as it is – and the member knows – for the Chief Electoral Officer to request some money. The \$28 million in this budget is requested by the Chief Electoral Officer. It's quite often, in the event of interim supply within two years of an election, that the Chief Electoral Officer . . . [interjection] That hon. member wouldn't know because he hasn't been here for re-election. He's not going to be here for another one.

Mr. Speaker, within two years of an election it's quite common for the Chief Electoral Officer to request money in the event that an election might be held, and it is absolutely consistent, again in full compliance with the rules of this House and the legislation, that the legislation grants the Chief Electoral Officer that money. Hon. members opposite also know that in the event that the said event doesn't happen, the money lapses, as does all of the interim supply that's identified in the interim supply request, hence the name "interim."

The hon. member doth protest too much, so I am going to ask her a question. The next time interim supply estimates are tabled in this House, assuming that at some point interim supply estimates will be tabled to provide for interim supply in the event that a budget isn't passed before the year-end, could she change her speech from the last time that she protested about interim supply? You know, it's nice to refresh every once in a while, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you have 23 seconds to reply.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. The majority of members that are on any of these committees that make the decisions and rules are members of the Tories. You may be fully in compliance, but you have certainly put forward an abnormal interim supply budget. The member has failed to explain why it is for March 31 a year from now rather than three months from now, absolutely failed to explain that, and there are many examples of the Premier changing his mind, including on budget date.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to make a few comments with regard to the interim supply. I did want to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre about her assertion that this was for the full fiscal year coming up. I know that the bill does talk about: "to defray . . ." — that is the term that's used — "... charges and expenses of . . . the Public Service of Alberta not otherwise provided for during the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016." But if you look at the numbers and compare them to the amounts for certain departments in previous budgets or the total budget for the province of Alberta in previous years, the funds that are allocated in this budget are clearly insufficient to run a government for a full year. That was really what my question was to the hon. member.

It looks to me like it would be about four months' worth, just doing some ballparking in my head around the Health budget: about \$18 billion last year, and in this particular year it's about \$5 billion, presuming that it's going to go to \$20 billion given the change of mood, the lightening mood over on the other side, moving away from doom and gloom now to this rosy, pre-election outlook, this pill that they've taken that has improved their mood so much. I think the doom and gloom will quickly return following the election, Mr. Speaker, if they are fortunate enough to be given another term by the people of Alberta.

The point I really wanted to make is that it doesn't look, to me, like a full year's budget. It looks to me like about four months' worth of spending. It's an awful lot of money, though, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is absolutely correct. This is a very, very minuscule amount of information that is provided to the House, to the Assembly, in order to make the decision that is required. We certainly have no objection, you know, to voting interim supply for the government provided that a budget is brought forward relatively quickly and, hopefully, debated before the House is dissolved. That would be our view, that that budget needs to be

brought forward and debated and voted on before this House would be adjourned. That, unfortunately, is between the Premier and the Lieutenant Governor, and we'll see how it shakes out.

Now, that brings me to the point that was raised by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills about funding in the election. Since it is here, since there is money for the election in this interim supply, I think it's perfectly in order to make some comments with respect to the election. Now, I also believe that the legislation was passed by this House to set a three-month period for an election, being March, April, and May of 2016, which is next year. The intent of the Assembly and the intent of the government as expressed at the time was to provide some certainty to all parties and to the public about when an election would be held.

Now, it's clear that the Constitution of Canada would override any legislation that said that the head of the government can't go to the representative of the Crown and ask for the House to be dissolved and an election to be called. That's constitutional. The act includes that and anticipates that, so the question, really, put to me is: would an election now be illegal? The answer is no because the legislation does permit this to happen, but it was never the intent that we should continue to have elections at the whim of the governing party or every three years. It's expensive when governments have large majorities. Then there really is no reason other than their particular partisan advantage to have elections every three years.

Since I've been here, we've had elections more often at three or three and a half years than we have had at four, Mr. Speaker. It's a very common practice, and I think we have too frequent elections because the government can secure its own advantage. When I talk to constituents about this issue, to explain it I use an analogy. I say: it would be like a number of people running in a foot race, and one person gets to yell "go" when he's ready regardless of whether or not the other people in the race are ready. That is the system that this government is perpetuating. So, clearly, if they do go ahead with an election this spring, they're very much violating the intent of the law that was passed, that was introduced by them and supported by them, and, I think, being unfair.

Now, it brings me to the next point. I know, listening to the House leader for the Wildrose Party, that there's some anxiety on their part about having an election right now. I don't think they're ready, and I noted with interest the Premier's comments with respect to that. He said that it was up to the opposition to be ready for an election more or less at any time. Now, I just want to say, Mr. Speaker, that we are ready, and we're expecting an election. We'll be running in all the constituencies. We have our candidates. We have the election machine that we need in place, and, you know, we're not afraid of an election.

But it is an incredible amount of gall for a Premier who just spent a great deal of time and effort wrecking the Wildrose Party, blowing it up almost, to then blame them for not being ready for an election two or three months later. I mean, I can't imagine the arrogance and the gall that it would take to say: well, you know, it's their fault that they're not ready. No. That was a calculated, deliberate attempt to destroy the Official Opposition of this province to obtain a temporary political advantage, which he will now take advantage of by calling an election that is clearly not intended under the legislation that all the parties supported at the time.

Those are my comments with regard to the funding in this budget for the election. I think that the cynicism of this Premier is record-breaking in its scope and depth, Mr. Speaker.

I don't know how much we can guess about the direction of the full budget, that'll be introduced, as mentioned, on the 26th, from the interim supply, but I think there are some interesting things to say. There is an increase in Culture and Tourism in the interim

supply. Now, I don't know if that will then be reflected in the actual budget, but it's interesting.

There's less capital investment in Health, Mr. Speaker. We have released a great deal of information in the last few months on the state of Alberta hospitals and the need for more hospital beds because of our growing province. We released documents that showed that only nine months into the 2014-15 fiscal year 1,376 surgeries had been cancelled across the province because of capacity issues, so I'm surprised that the capital spending for Health is not a higher priority in the interim supply. Carrying on with that subject, the number of surgeries postponed at the Stollery children's hospital has almost doubled over last year, and based on the previous year's numbers, all zones are likely to exceed last year's cancellation numbers.

3:50

There is also the question of overcapacity, the overcapacity protocol, how many times that's been activated. The highest risk overcapacity protocol was triggered 43 times in September 2014 in Calgary emergency rooms alone, and on the 24th of September, 2014, every single one of Calgary's ERs reported triggering high-risk overcapacity protocol. In the Edmonton emergency rooms in October 2014 overcapacity triggers were activated 344 times. We've released documents on the need to expand the maternal and the child unit at Northern Lights regional hospital. We showed that this is already insufficient to deal with the current population of Fort McMurray, let alone the population increases that may be expected. Those are just a couple of examples.

I think that we've looked at AHS preservation lists, which show the projects that need to be completed to ensure that our hospitals continue to function. These lists show 37 incomplete projects, totalling \$10 million, at Chinook regional hospital, 16 overdue projects at St. Michael's health centre. In Calgary the hospital lists outline a hundred million dollars' worth of overdue infrastructure maintenance projects in three major hospitals.

On the 17th of March, which was yesterday, we released documents about deferred maintenance at Edmonton-area hospitals. They outline \$225 million needed for critical infrastructure projects, which included 10 fire safety upgrades, including sprinklers, fire alarms, and long-awaited lightning rods; 11 unfunded asbestos abatements at the Royal Alexandra hospital alone; multiple elevator replacements and upgrades, a mould abatement at the Misericordia hospital.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's pretty clear that we need to be investing more in health infrastructure and not less. We've, I think, indicated that patient care is at risk and is suffering as a result of this neglect.

We've also released a document that outlines \$850 million in deferred maintenance in schools across the province.

The AAMD and C estimate that \$70 million a year for 10 years is needed for bridges alone. I have met with them several times, and they've talked about the bridges that are under their area of responsibility – these are not provincial bridges but those maintained by municipal districts and counties – and the fact that a number of bridges have to be closed more or less permanently because they are no longer safe. That's an important issue that I think needs to be addressed as well.

Mr. Speaker, we've talked a little bit about the need to support the officers of the Legislature. That's been a matter of some controversy. Conservative members of the committee dealing with the budgets of the officers, the Leg. Offices Committee, of course, had voted to provide an increase for the Auditor General. The Premier thundered from on high that there was no more money and directed the committee members to go back and reverse the decision, which they dutifully did. But it was a bad decision because

the Auditor General is our first line of defence against waste and ensures that government programs are working as they are supposed to. The government used the argument that our Auditor General has a bigger budget than Auditors General in other provinces, but it's important to note that our Auditor General has additional responsibilities as the Auditor of record for government commissions and bodies, which is outside the scope of other Auditors General in other provinces, so it's an artful dodge of the facts.

And then, of course, there's the children's advocate. We've seen ... [Mr. Mason's speaking time expired] Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Before I recognize the first speaker, if there is one, might I remind you of the spirit of the previous discussion we had, with no hard-and-fast rule. Standing Order 29(2)(a), any takers?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker. The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking to the interim supply bill, it's somewhat comical. I suppose if it looks like a skunk and it smells like a skunk, you can draw any conclusion you want, but when you have a law that says that an election is supposed to take place in 2016 – we're supposed to believe that the Chief Electoral Officer is supposed to be ready for an election call at any time, that we have an interim supply that, you know, authorizes the significant amount of money to carry on an election. At this point in time we have a Premier who has now basically overruled a committee and said, "Go back. We don't have the money. We're going to be very prudent on what we're going to authorize for expenditures," which is kind of ironic in a way, I suppose. Put that together with some – I'm leaving the Legislature speeches, and, lo and behold, we're down to guessing exactly what day the writ is going to be dropped.

The question is this: is that all in good faith, realistically? We're talking about an election that affects all Albertans. Clearly, the government is calling an election, and it's playing a game, saying that it's not calling an election or it could call an election, but the reality is that we are now approving this authorization between now and June 30, and roughly between now and April 13 we're going to probably see the writ for an election call. It's hard to say. It's all a guessing game, and maybe we can play a drinking game with it. But the fact is that it's irresponsible when we're in a position of being prudent or claiming to be prudent and responsible with the taxpayers' dollars.

So I'll offer up some expenditures that could take place roughly this spring, that are significant. If the government wants to hold an election, clearly they probably want people to get to the polls, and there are a lot of rural bridges that need to be fixed. The only thing is that I don't know which members of which parties need to get across those bridges to get to the polls. Maybe the government should look into that before they actually hold the election. A lot of those bridges can be fixed for the sum of roughly \$28 million, and there are many other areas where we could apply the money. I think that's the key. I know it was brought up at the AAMD and C today.

With the austerity budget that everyone is expecting – and why shouldn't we expect that? The government told us that we should expect it. So if we're expecting cutbacks and cuts in services, clearly the Premier has told government employees: you need to come back to the table; you need to think about what you're planning on giving up. I mean, the message is absolutely clear. You can frame it any way you like, but the message is absolutely clear.

Now is not the time to actually hold an unnecessary election, when we passed a law that says that we're going to hold one next year. Someone said: well, you gotta spend the money anyway, and you're going to have to have an election. Well, if you have an election every three years versus every four years, you're spending a heck of a lot more money. The math is there. I mean, if it's going to cost you 20-plus million dollars – in this case we're looking at a proposed budget of \$28 million – doing that every three years versus every four years is an unnecessary cost.

4:00

It goes back to the whole issue of a good-faith promise. This Premier during his leadership campaign made that promise, that there will be an election in 2016. He made that promise. I suppose it goes down on record as the first promise broken. It probably won't be the last. But the public took him in good faith at his word, and now what we're seeing here is clearly the budget for an election call and the game playing and the gamesmanship of not even admitting it or not even telling the public when that election will be called. That's unfortunate. In my view, that shows bad faith.

I think this current government has an interesting case in front of it because it's all about opportunism. I mean, they decimated the Queen's Loyal Opposition or, depending on who you're looking at in the House, disloyal opposition. The idea of going into an election bodes very well for the government in power. It bodes extremely well, and that's the opportunism that they're confronted with. Clearly, they are going to take that, but that's not what the public has asked for. What the public has asked for is for them to abide by the law. What the public has said is: what we will allow you to do is to be prudent with our taxpayers' dollars, and we think you should be prudent and frugal with our taxpayers' dollars, and having an election every three years is not responsible.

With that, I think we've made that point. Regardless, I suppose we'll be going into an election in a few weeks, and people can make their farewell speeches over the next few days and into next week before the writ is dropped.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker. Are there other speakers to the bill?

I'll recognize the hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Oberle: Call the question, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a second time]

Bill 20

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move second reading of Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015.

The Municipal Government Act, or MGA, is one of Alberta's largest acts and creates the framework in which municipalities operate. Our government is committed to supporting communities. A key part of that is reviewing the MGA so that Alberta's municipalities have a strong foundation upon which to grow and thrive. Mr. Speaker, we worked closely with our municipal partners and stakeholders to develop the best updates possible for the act that will serve Albertans and their municipalities well into the future.

We're introducing this amendment bill to address 11 issues that found support from municipal partners and stakeholders. In addition, we are addressing some emerging issues and making some housekeeping amendments. A second amendment will be introduced in the fall based on solutions to more complex issues, with the ultimate goal of having a revised MGA by the end of 2016. Over the past year we hosted 77 meetings in 11 communities to hear from Albertans about how the MGA can best support municipalities.

We also received written input from more than 1,200 individuals, businesses, and organizations. After hearing from the public, we held extensive discussions with municipal partners and key business and industry leaders. The changes before you today have broad support from the municipal associations, the cities of Calgary and Edmonton, and key business and industry associations. Our goal is for the MGA to support municipalities in operating in an accountable, equitable, effective, and transparent manner. To further improve municipal accountability and transparency: a mandatory code of conduct for councillors to hold their elected officials to a higher standard.

Municipalities will adopt a public participation policy that considers participation of the public: their residents, business partners, and industry. Amendments for open council meetings will reinforce existing municipal transparency by clarifying when meetings must be held in public and when private meetings may occur, empowering municipalities to make the petition process easier for citizens through measures such as accepting online petitions, extending timelines for collecting signatures, and improving validation processes. Municipalities will be able to determine their own public notification methods, allowing them to save money and find methods best suited to the municipality and its people, including new and future technologies of communication.

These amendments will increase flexibility for municipalities to establish appropriate administrative roles, functions, and oversight while maintaining current separation between council to govern an administration to implement policy. To enhance municipal viability, these amendments will require municipalities to establish three-year operating plans and minimum five-year capital plans, to be updated annually. This raises the bar for municipalities to evaluate the full impact of present-day financial decisions against longer term municipal goals.

Bill 20 will introduce regulation-making authority for a new, streamlined process for municipalities that voluntarily wish to amalgamate and encourage a co-operative approach to amalgamation. Recent annexations have been highly controversial and received a great deal of media attention. Changes will enable the minister to make a regulation respecting existing annexation principles, processes, and procedures.

To strengthen municipal and intermunicipal planning, Bill 20 will identify the hierarchy and relationship of statutory plans so that each plan will be consistent with the plan above it. The amendments for subdivision and development appeal boards will require mandatory training for board members and clerks.

I appreciate the consideration and collaboration of our municipal partners and stakeholders in identifying these 11 issues as consensus items to move forward this spring, and I'm proud to support the recommendation for the MGA.

As I mentioned at the outset, Bill 20 will address some emerging issues. It will also enable the creation of charters as an important step towards realizing our shared commitment for the development of charters for the cities of Calgary and Edmonton.

The amendments related to off-site levies are proposed to allow municipalities to collect levies for one or more different types of infrastructure at different times over the course of development rather than requiring the developer to pay all the levies up front.

Bill 20 will also find a legislative home in the MGA for regulations under section 603 to ensure the important policies contained in these regulations will be maintained in the appropriate legislative framework. As well, these amendments address several housekeeping items to support consistency, clarity, and readability. The housekeeping changes also reflect recommendations and feedback received during public consultations, particularly from many Albertans who use the MGA regularly to guide municipal activities.

The MGA impacts every Albertan, the private sector, and every ministry within government in one form or another. We all live in municipalities, and we want the best for our communities. Updating the MGA to reflect changes in technology, new economic realities, and evolving municipal roles and relationships will give municipalities new tools to serve their communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests? Is anyone opposed?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some of the members of the MD of Taber, which is partly in my riding now. They've been up here for the AAMD and C convention, and I'd just ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

4:10 Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 20

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015

(continued)

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and speak to Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015. This, obviously, is very important legislation, and my understanding is that there was an extensive amount of consultation with the provincial bodies AUMA and AAMDC.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, I must say that this legislation falls far, far short in the sense that there has been no real massive, substantial reform in this legislation. What the government has done is picked out most of the changes that were readily agreed upon by almost all parties right at the outset. They've apparently spent a lot of tax dollars doing a lot of different meetings and so forth, but the reforms that are made in here I think most people on the face of it would readily agree to. The government has fallen far short of any real reform. There were a lot of recommendations that were provided, and the government apparently ignored those or didn't have the courage to put them forward here in the Legislature today.

Mr. Speaker, my understanding as well is that the legislation allows for the provision of city charters. What I will say here today is that I do not support increasing or providing for new taxation powers via city charters. It will be interesting to see whether or not

that's actually in the legislation, and in the Committee of the Whole we will be putting forward amendments on that to guarantee that that's the case.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The previous member is correct in that this version of the MGA was written in '95. I remember debating it quite a bit because there were a number of changes that it became immediately apparent needed to be addressed in the drafting of that.

This is one of our largest acts. It's got 18 sections, I think, and 650 different pieces to it. And because of the Canadian Constitution, of course, the province has the ability to set all the rules for the municipalities. That is set out in the Constitution. That becomes a strain when you have very large cities that, in fact, in some cases are larger than everywhere else in the province combined. They are their own economic driver, and they have particular needs that should be addressed separately that make them unique.

That is part of the strain that is happening right now in Alberta, in that all municipalities, every single one of them – Ryley, Tofield, Camrose, Peace River, Lethbridge, the city of Calgary, the summer village of Baptiste Lake – are treated exactly the same under this legislation. That's a problem because we have two very large cities which combined are two-thirds of the population of the entire province. To have them under the same constraints and limitations as a summer village or a small town is undoable in this day and age. I'll come back to that, but I think that's one of the most important pieces that's not been done.

I understand that these 11 changes are based on a consensus that came about as a result of numerous meetings, and I just want to go quickly through some of them. I'm a tiny bit amused – no, I'm really amused, not a tiny bit – at the requirement that municipalities adopt a code of conduct. Now, this is mostly around administrative procedures and not allowing a council to fire a councillor. But, in fact, this body does not have a code of conduct. We have a financial Conflicts of Interest Act. We have no code of conduct. There is nothing that tells MLAs that they're expected to have a constituency office or meet with constituents or have hours when they're available, nothing that says that they have to help their constituents, nothing that says what hours we have to work or how many days of holidays we're entitled to and whether there's any kind of an expected number of hours a week we put in or any kind of, you know, double time off if you put in more than X number of hours. Nothing. There is no code of conduct for us.

There is a Conflicts of Interest Act, which deals exclusively with financial conflicts of interest. It doesn't deal with integrity or ethics or anything else. If you review the last Ethics Commissioner report, she lays that out pretty clearly in dealing with the last matter that was brought before her. In fact, she does step out and recognize that the act is insufficient to comment wholly on the integrity of the individual. She does comment that it was a strained belief, that this wasn't going to help him in his election campaign when he'd already been appointed as the Minister of Education and was promising schools in the electoral division in which he was elected, but that wasn't a specific financial breach of conflict of interest according to the act. So I'm really interested to see that this group, that doesn't have a code of conduct, is implementing a code of conduct or requiring municipalities to develop a code of conduct.

There are a number of things that are very useful: clarifying when something is a meeting and when it's in private and how often that should happen, the issues around petitions and public notifications.

Clarifications around keeping council and administration separate should be maintained. This is perfectly appropriate and I agree with it, that municipalities should be required to adopt at a minimum three-year operating plans and five-year capital plans. Absolutely. I wish this place still did that. We did have that once upon a time ago. By the time you got to the third year, it was sort of fantasy, and then when we returned to the second year of the three-year plan, we found out that they had changed all of the performance measurements, so you couldn't actually match anything. Same thing happened.

The other problem here is how often the government is very late in actually detailing the amount of money that would be flowing through to these municipalities. So they're expected to make a budget without knowing what their revenue would be. Perhaps if the government could be a bit faster on their side, it would be more helpful.

I have questions about the hierarchy of plans, where the relationship of statutory plans will be sort of stacked. I'd liked to do some more investigation on that. Maybe the minister wishes to address it, or I'll come back in Committee of the Whole to do a bit more work on that because I'm interested in whether he's specifically relating the statutory plans to the land-use frameworks and also the different layers of plans that cities themselves have. For example, in my fabulous constituency there are mature neighbourhood overlays, which are plans that are expected to be adhered to, but they may also fall into an improvement area, or they might be under a zoning development. So what's being anticipated to be covered with this statutory hierarchy?

Of course, the biggest piece of this is the city charters, much anticipated by yours truly. But when I look at this from the start, it says, "on request by a city, the Lieutenant Governor in Council," which is, of course, cabinet, "may, by regulation, establish a charter for that city." By regulation. So that means that it doesn't come back in front of this Assembly. It gets done behind those big doors that I see closing opposite me, and there would be no opportunity for other public input and for opposition members to comment. I don't know if non cabinet members get to comment on that kind of thing, but "by regulation" means that it's not coming here, and I think it should. This is our second go at it because there is the 2005 charter for the city of Lloydminster, that was established. They don't seem to have put that one in regs.

Also, in viewing the specifics that are appearing under elements of the charter, under section 141.4(1) essentially everything is by regulation. Of course, when it's by regulation, the government can give, and the government can take away. So we have a set-up here where the city of Edmonton, for example, could request a charter. By regulation it could be set up. But, you know, if the city of Edmonton doesn't please the government, perhaps doesn't elect enough of a certain kind of MLA, they can have their charter taken away just as easily as it was put there because it's by regulation. It's not by legislation which would become a statute that is produced by this Assembly. The government gives, and the government takes away.

4:20

The second thing that's very odd in here – and perhaps the sponsoring member can clarify this. Under 141.4(3)(c): "authorize the charter city to modify or replace a provision of this Act, or any other enactment, by bylaw." That reads as though a city bylaw under the charter can change a statute put forward by the government. I must be reading this wrong, but please explain to me how I'm reading this wrong because it sure looks to me like that's what can happen, and I'm sure that's not what is intended.

The way this is reading to me is that it's a plan about having a plan about establishing a charter, and I'm concerned about that. The first time I raised city charters was in the election in 2008, which is now seven years ago, and my caucus and I – it's part of our platform – have continued to raise it. The first time I think it was raised here was quite a ways in. For certain it was mentioned by the previous Premier by two, who used it in her leadership race, I think, and talked about it, and that was in 2012. Since then there really hasn't been anything concrete move forward, and I don't see it being concrete in what's set out before us in the provisions.

There was a memorandum of understanding to work on it, which expired. A few months ago everybody tripped down to Calgary in their best suits and sat in line, and the Premier got up and announced with great solemnity and happy, expectant faces on the mayors of Edmonton and Calgary that they were going to have another memorandum of understanding, at which point I'm pretty sure I saw the faces of those two mayors settle into a grimace because that was not what they were hoping for. We still have no idea when we might be actually expecting a charter to be implemented, and I'm very concerned that this was being done by regulation. That definitely needs to come out and be done as a separate act, not because I think any of us particularly wants to fiddle with it or change anything or amend it, but this is serious, and I don't want to see this meddled with behind closed doors.

The other examples that I could find of city charters – and the obvious one is Toronto, for example, or Vancouver. I'm embarrassed to tell you that even Manitoba has a City of Winnipeg Act, so that kind of puts us to shame, that they managed to beat us on that one. Those are all stand-alone legislation, so they have their own act that is its own statute, and that's not what's being anticipated here.

I am looking for clarification. I honestly have not had a chance to talk to anybody on city council or in their administration about whether they agreed to this, but I'm finding it very hard to believe that they did because as far as I can tell, based on what I read that the mayor of Edmonton says or the mayor of Calgary, what they're asking for isn't here. This is another possibility of moving towards something eventually. So I do have concerns about it. There's a retroactive operation. There's no effect on the status. I just really have questions about how this is being put together. I don't think it's what people were anticipating.

There are a couple of sections here in the act that are obviously catch-up sections because they're things that have been going on for quite a while. A lot of it is utilities, municipal finance clarification, local improvement road tax bylaw, that kind of thing. One of the things that I'm not seeing in here is any understanding of the severe limitations that municipalities operate under, particularly the large municipalities, the limitations that they operate under financially. The property tax does not address growth, never has, never will. It doesn't help the cities to pay for things that are in response to growth, and, yes, the people that move here bring their taxes, but the cities are the one level of government that doesn't get a piece of that income tax. Federal government gets it, provincial government gets it, but the municipalities don't get any piece of income tax.

Long ago I brought forward a bill in this House – I think it was 204 – that asked that a transfer fund be set up so that a portion of income tax could be put into it and transferred to the cities to allow them to provide all the things that we expect out of cities now. I think what I'm hearing and certainly what I hear a lot of at the doors is that people feel that the municipalities, the cities, don't have the money to provide what people are expecting, like snow removal.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand to speak to Bill 20. I understand that Bill 20 is a result of consultation with municipalities, the two largest cities, with the AUMA, and with AAMD and C. I understand that a consensus has been achieved on the items contained in this bill and that there are many other issues where no consensus has been reached and that may or may not be the subject of further legislation after the election. I think the government has brought forward, you know, an incomplete bill, but it does represent those matters upon which agreement has been reached.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, I do have some thoughts with respect to some of the elements in this. One of the things that we didn't hear from the member who introduced this bill is what a code of conduct is intended to cover. What does the government have in mind in terms of the code of conduct? The Member for Edmonton-Centre has indicated that there's not one for MLAs. Nevertheless, I think that elected officials do have to adhere to high standards.

But I am cautious when I consider what possibilities might be for municipal councils to impose codes of conduct on their members. Having been a member of a municipal council for many years and at times at odds with the majority of my colleagues on certain matters, including secrecy, for example, I am worried about the ability of municipal councils to restrict the legitimate political activities of city councillors to bring to light matters that they think the public should be aware of. That is my serious reservation, so I will be very interested in hearing from the minister on this, hopefully in second reading but if not, in committee, because I have a number of questions with respect to the intent here.

I know that under the bill the minister is given the authority to make regulations that will help define what is and is not in a code of conduct, and that is something, I think, we need to look closely at. Once again, the framework legislation model that the government prefers, to allow the meat of any act to be put into regulation, to be determined by the cabinet at its discretion as opposed to being put out in the legislation for the whole Assembly to see and to debate, is a real concern with respect to this.

4:30

The question of the city charters is an interesting one, and as has been noted, this does not limit the provision of charters to Edmonton and Calgary. Now, the main impetus for this has come from those two cities, particularly from the city of Calgary. I would be very interested in knowing, again, a lot more about what the longer term goal is for the legislation. I think that the case can be made that the two largest cities are of a sufficient size that they may require additional authorities that other municipalities do not have and additional capacities to meet those obligations that may not apply to smaller cities or to towns and villages.

I did have the honour during my municipal career of serving on the board of directors of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities for a number of years, and I chaired a committee on the future status of municipalities. We had established at that time the position on behalf of the FCM that there should be certain things recognized in municipal legislation that were fundamental principles. There were three of them, that I recall, that were very significant.

First of all, the municipalities should be given clearly defined roles and responsibilities, things that they're responsible for, and they should be allowed to discharge those responsibilities without

undue interference from other orders of government. That was the first thing.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, they had to have access to the financial resources in order to fulfill those responsibilities and not be dependent on other orders of government to fund those things. That could either be through a taxing power or through some designated, specific funding that was allowed for in the legislation, that would allow them to conduct those responsibilities.

Finally, the third principle was that municipal officials should be accountable to their own voters for the discharge of those responsibilities and the taxes or other charges that they may or may not set and not to another order of government.

I think those principles are very important, and I would hope that future legislation following up on Bill 20 would recognize those three principles. I particularly think that it's important that those principles be enshrined in any charters that might be considered.

I think that it's useful to have good, clear guidelines on the protection of personal information.

I have been in the past a strong believer in the right of citizens at the municipal level to petition their municipal government for specific things – specific bylaws, for example – and to have the right, if enough people signed the petition, to place matters on a municipal ballot. I think that that's a very important piece as well.

The act continues the long-standing principle of municipalities not running deficits. I don't see any reason to change that particular position at all.

I think that increasing transparency and accountability is important, and the act goes some way in those areas.

The other issue that I think is important is the issue of council secrecy, and I know that the previous municipal act outlawed private decision-making and required council to come into the open. It can certainly discuss matters behind closed doors but must make any decisions in public. I think that it must be continued.

One of the councils of the four that I served on decided that it was going to make decisions behind closed doors. There were all of these special meetings that were happening that the public didn't know about, and major decisions were being made. This was clearly not allowed. One of the things that happened is that at a certain point in the development of the long-term plan for the city – this is the city of Edmonton – they were making decisions behind closed doors. The administration then came forward with a report, which included a timeline of decisions that included those decisions at those meetings.

So what I did was to go to a council meeting and make an inquiry about how those decisions had been made. Well, no sooner had I gotten back to my office than I had the general manager of planning and development with his lawyers in tow show up in my office. The administration didn't like what was going on either, to be very honest with you, Mr. Speaker. But at some point, when they had to report on the progress of the development of the master plan for the city, they had to include the fact that key decisions had been made behind closed doors, which was illegal. So it blew the whole thing up. The mayor wouldn't speak to me for a month, but in actual fact it ended the practice of secret meetings.

I think that it's absolutely important that we maintain those kinds of requirements in the Municipal Government Act. It is the order of government that is most close to the people. It deals with issues that are very concrete in most cases. They deal with roads and fire protection and municipal facilities and so on. There's no reason why a high level of transparency cannot be maintained at the municipal level, and I think that, by and large, it has been. It certainly is a shining example for this government about how transparency can operate in government. You can get good government, and the public involvement that flows from an open

process, I think, is very valuable, Mr. Speaker. So that's a really important consideration, in my view.

4:40

I think that if we maintain the principle that municipal government does not run deficits, that it has an open and transparent process, and that its elected members are responsible to their voters rather than to other orders of government for their actions, we'll be continuing on the right track.

Alberta actually was a leader, back when I was first on council, with the new Municipal Government Act, giving first-person powers to municipalities. I know, Mr. Speaker, that you and I were both involved in municipal politics at that time, and this was a very progressive step forward.

I think we need to continue that progressive direction of allowing municipalities more and more authority, treating them as an equal order of government rather than as the child of the province, which is, I think, one of the flaws in our 1867 Constitution. It sees municipalities as junior partners or children of the provinces. I think we need to move away from that. We can't change the Constitution readily, as I found out in the FCM, but we can adopt an adult relationship with our municipalities through our legislation and treat them as equal partners, and I think that the Municipal Government Act needs to do that and adopt that as a fundamental principle.

Those are my comments with regard to this act, Mr. Speaker. We will be supporting this piece of legislation, but clearly the real difficult decisions are going to perhaps come forward in the next iteration of the Municipal Government Act. I would just point out that many of these decisions have been delayed and delayed and delayed, put off until the next election and then put off until the election after that. An example would be the charter in this respect.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to participate in second reading debate on Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015, on behalf of Minister McQueen. Alberta municipalities need a solid legislative foundation to support the strong local and regional decision-making required for municipalities to thrive. On January 22 the Premier and the Minister of Municipal Affairs made a commitment to complete the MGA review by working together with our municipal partners. The MGA review framework memorandum of understanding agreement was signed by the Premier, the minister, and presidents of the municipal associations and supported by the mayors of Calgary and Edmonton. This bill is a major milestone towards fulfilling that commitment.

I know that the minister is very proud of the collaborative process that produced this bill and that continues to produce consensus and strategic direction for additional amendments that will come forward this fall. Many hours of fruitful discussions with President Helen Rice of the AUMA, President Al Kemmere of the AAMD and C, Mayor Nenshi, and Mayor Iveson were spent to identify where the MGA should shift to best support municipalities into the future. This round-table met with representatives of key economic sectors in Alberta to see where consensus could be found on the issues to move forward this spring. Bill 20 is a result of those discussions.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 20 is a result of working together to serve Albertans at the municipal, provincial, and business levels

throughout the province. These proposed amendments to the MGA contain municipal-driven solutions to address 11 issues that found broad support from municipal partners and stakeholders.

Our goals for the MGA are to support municipalities in operating in an accountable, equitable, effective, and transparent manner. To enhance municipal accountability and transparency, a mandatory code of conduct for councillors will provide municipalities with a tool to hold their elected officials to a higher standard. Municipalities will adopt a public participation policy that considers participation of the public – the residents, business and industry, and other relevant stakeholders – in order to enhance transparency in consultation processes with their communities. As well, amendments for open council meetings will reinforce existing municipal transparency by clarifying when meetings must be held in public and when public meetings may occur.

Bill 20 will empower municipalities to make the petition process easier for citizens through various changes that our stakeholders have asked for. This shift will make it easier for the public to successfully petition a municipality and will provide greater flexibility for municipalities by bylaw to vary requirements for petitions to municipal councils.

To enable more efficient municipal operations, Bill 20 will empower municipalities to determine their own public notification methods. This shift modernizes the way municipalities communicate to the public, enabling cost saving and accessibility by allowing for current and future technologies to be used for public notification purposes. These amendments will allow for municipalities to be more flexible in being able to establish appropriate administration roles while maintaining status quo separation between the council to govern and the administration to implement policy.

Municipal viability will see amendments that require municipalities to establish a three-year financial plan and a minimum five-year capital plan. These will be updated on an annual basis. This will empower municipalities to consider the full impact of present-day financial decisions against longer term municipal goals and create a more transparent process for the community to better understand the workings of their municipal governments.

Regulation-making authority will be granted for a new, streamlined process for all municipalities who want to voluntarily enter the amalgamation process. This change is being made to increase efficiencies and encourage co-operation. Bill 20 also presents changes that will enable the minister to make regulations respecting existing annexation principles, processes, and procedures.

Bill 20 will also address municipal planning by identifying the hierarchy and relationship of statutory plans so that each plan will be consistent with the plans above it. This is something that has been missing in the Municipal Government Act and will be certainly welcomed by all municipalities.

The amendments for the subdivision and development appeal boards address concerns over training. Mandatory training for board members and clerks will be required going forward. It will also create a placeholder in the Municipal Government Act to enable the creation of charters for Edmonton and Calgary, a commitment publicly announced last fall.

The amendments related to off-site levies are proposed for collection over the duration of a development project as opposed to all at once at the beginning of the project. These levies would be collected for one or more different types of infrastructure, and this is certainly something that will enable the development industry to better finance and get their projects off the ground.

Bill 20 also addresses the various regulations under section 603 to encapsulate some pieces of legislation while others will have regulatory authority enabled. Bill 20 is also addressing various housekeeping amendments. These reflect recommendations and

feedback received during public consultation, particularly from the many Albertans who use the Municipal Government Act regularly to guide municipal activities.

As one of the largest pieces of legislation in the province of Alberta the MGA impacts a significant number of stakeholders and Albertans. We hope to update the legislation to reflect the realities Albertans face today, be it our current economic times, evolving roles of the municipality, or reflecting current technology. We endeavour to create the best conditions for our municipalities, and I'm confident that this bill addresses changes needed for that. Albeit this is the first step in a very long process of amending the entire act, it is one that has been reached by a collaborative process. It has brought the many stakeholders together at the table around a consensus base, and moving forward on the more difficult issues will be all that much easier because of the relationships established over the last year with the many stakeholders involved in this process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this bill.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, are there other speakers?

I'd invite the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West to close debate.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you very much. I appreciate the comments on all sides of the House, and I would ask that we call the question on second reading of Bill 20, please.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 16 Statutes Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 16, Statutes Amendment Act, 2015. This is an omnibus bill that has rectified a whole bunch of little issues in different departments. The Wildrose Official Opposition will be supporting this legislation.

Mr. Chair, besides some really, really minor housekeeping issues, there is an amendment that would provide for there to be two Associate Chief Justices rather than one in this province. I think this is peculiar to Alberta and Quebec, which have a two-city dynamic. You know, I think the hon. Member for Little Bow did a great job explaining why that would be necessary in this province.

The second change has to do with the Land Titles Act and allows for electronic filings for land title documents as well as e-signatures. I think that's simply catching up with other provinces in that respect. Most other provinces do that. Then there's also a very minor issue where they close a loophole in the insurance portion of that particular legislation, which we have no objections to.

The amendments to the Post-secondary Learning Act: they are simply correcting mistakes with respect to the status of the board of governors of Medicine Hat College as well as the board of SAIT. They weren't discovered till recently. It appears this amendment clarifies that with respect to two orders in council, the 1970 order

on Medicine Hat and the 1982 order with respect to SAIT, neither was rescinded. In fact, the board of governors of both institutions, according to this amendment, would have been operating lawfully throughout that whole, entire time, and I don't think anyone would disagree with that. I don't think it's retroactive legislation but just simply clarifying that they were operating legally. It's probably a good thing that they weren't operating outside their bounds for the last few decades.

The Provincial Court Act introduces the concept of binding judicial dispute resolution proceedings. This would occur pretrial. Right now the situation is prior to the Provincial Court hearing. You'd have a judge that would talk with both parties, get an explanation of what witnesses they would call and what evidence each side would present. The judge would then provide both parties with an explanation of what he or she would decide if that case was heard before them. What this would do is that it would go one step further. It would be binding in advance, so both parties would be subject to that decision. I think this would provide more flexibility within the court system. It would be interesting to see how this works. I think a lot of parties, especially with smaller claims, would rather just have a quick trial, without the expense of getting a lawyer, although lawyers could still be involved in these cases, especially with the increase in the small-business claims amount.

Also, there are 11 sections of the act relating to civil claims that are being removed from the act and put into regulation, and this would allow more flexibility on a go-forward basis. Without having to come to the Legislature to make an amendment, the minister could simply adjust that. The most obvious one is the level for the small claims amount. You know, I think the limit right now is 50 grand, which is still pretty low, especially with a lot of the litigation that's going on right now and could go on even more so if the economy keeps on its current trajectory.

Mr. Chair, we support this piece of legislation, and we do not have any proposed amendments in this regard. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 16, Statutes Amendment Act, 2015. I know the Minister of Energy will be awaiting the usual statements that I make on my concern about rolling together a number of acts which, to my eye, are completely unrelated here. This is the sleight of hand that the government performed when they moved from miscellaneous statutes to calling these just a statutes amendment act, which means that the opposition is no longer consulted on which pieces they feel are significant enough and have a significant enough change in its originating act to be pulled out and debated separately.

My biggest concern when I looked at this act was particularly based on the moves that the Justice minister has been talking about but also implementing around the traffic court – it would now move to having the hearings not presided over by a judge, there would be no appeal, and the police officer that laid the charges wouldn't be in court; it would be based on their notes – and a number of other concerns there, where I really thought that people were not going to get their day in court and wouldn't get their appeal if they felt there was something truly wrong. So I looked at these justice statutes with some dismay.

However, my concerns about the traffic court are not reflected in the amendments that I'm seeing here, or at least not to the level that I've been able to investigate them given the time that we've had. The judicial changes, the Court of Queen's Bench Act amendments: that's obviously about that our population has increased but the number of judges and courts that we have to hear everything has

not increased, and it's put the backlog of cases to quite a timeline, that's moved far beyond where it should have. I think this is an attempt to shorten up the timelines there.

The number of sections that are being moved to regulation always makes me nervous, but most of what is being moved there are the civil claims. They really don't like being called this, but I think that for most people they understand it as small claims court. But we should learn to be calling it civil claims because there's nothing small about it anymore, and that does not understand and give respect to the people that are working in those courts.

Under civil claims we've got sections on issuance of civil claims, dispute notes, notice of hearing, change of hearing, service of documents, service of counterclaims, notice to attend, proof of service, payment into court, adjournment, parties confined to particulars, and admission of liability, so all of those sections, which are really the sections in the act between, I think, sections 25 and 35. Then we also have sections 38 and 40 to 44, which are conclusion of a claim and processing of judgment to the court. That's including withdrawal of claims, default judgments, failure to appear, setting aside judgment or dismissal, counterclaim, and costs and interests. Those are all going into regs, which means they don't come back here. They can be changed by an order in council or by ministerial order. I think all of that is fine.

5:00

The Ministry of Innovation and Advanced Education. Now, when I first asked about this, I thought perhaps it was the moving of Mount Royal and MacEwan universities from a level 2, which is, really, larger undergraduate universities, and that they're very much interested in moving up to a level 1, which is the comprehensive research and intensive undergraduate and graduate studies. But, no. In fact, this was fixing mistakes that the government made some time ago, where they accidentally rescinded some powers of the board. So they are moving that back.

The land titles amendment is great. Thank you for that, and a big sigh of relief that they didn't privatize the Land Titles Act, because that's what everybody was worried about. But, no. In fact, this is allowing for electronic signatures.

I am curious, and I haven't had time to do a very good stakeholder loop with the changes that are coming under Culture and Tourism. What's being done here is that the foundation that gets the money has been changed into the sport connection. Originally this was Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife, which is the second of the big lottery foundations which received money from the lotteries and disbursed it to enhance quality of life. So you have the Alberta Foundation for the Arts; Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife; and then we had Wild Rose, which was deleted or repealed some years ago.

I was concerned that the recreation, wildlife, and parks portion was being dumped. It's not. It's being transferred to the department, but I am concerned that this could be signalling less interest by the government in those areas in that the sports get special recognition and get to keep the foundation, and there's also land that was donated to it specifically, which the foundation is now going to be allowed to sell off. I do wonder if this is a degradation or a signalling of less support for those areas of recreation. Things like orienteering, anything that's sort of active lifestyle but not sport directed, would have been included in that recreation.

Wildlife, of course, is covering groups like the Wilderness Association, the World Wildlife Fund, a number of those organizations that do absolutely amazing work on pinched pennies, especially given the direction this government likes to go on very strange decisions around animal habitat. I'm a little worried about that one, so I'm withholding my judgment on that.

The remaining sections, I think, were all fine. Yeah. I just have the concern about moving that much regulation, but it appears to be for a good reason. I will support that although it shouldn't be made precedent or taken as precedent for any reason.

The Police Act is retroactive, I think. It's to make sure that any decisions that have been made are still legit if they had a previous police officer or a retired judge that was running the hearing. The Alberta, Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation Act; the Land Titles Act; the Post-secondary Learning Act: I've covered everything there.

I have reservations, and I'll try to get my homework done before – oh, this is Committee of the Whole. Okay. I'll try to get the rest of that work done before we're in third reading so that I can better articulate my concerns around that, or maybe they will have been relieved by that point.

So thank you for the opportunity. I am still interested in why Mount Royal University and MacEwan University cannot fulfill whatever the government is looking for to elevate them to a level 1, because they're certainly interested in doing that. But I'll leave that for the time being.

The Liberal caucus is in favour of supporting this bill. We just really don't like the use of the Statutes Amendment Act to roll everything together. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the next speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Is there a minister present that we can, you know, direct questions to? In committee sometimes you can get answers from ministers with respect to the legislation at committee stage.

The Chair: We have the bill's sponsor here.

Mr. Mason: Oh, boy. They're letting you do something. Okay. Good luck.

Okay. Well, I want to begin, Mr. Chairman, by echoing the comments of my colleague from Edmonton-Centre, and this is something that we've said ever since this change was brought in, that we do not like the fact that in some cases more substantive amendments are included in an omnibus bill. It used to be that items were agreed to in advance by consensus, housekeeping types of changes and so on, but the government in recent years has adopted the practice of putting in things, not always really dramatically important things but more substantive things and things in which there's not a consensus amongst the parties in the House. That changes things. We used to be able to give it unanimous consent without debate. Now, of course, it's debatable, and it takes time. So I just want to indicate that, by and large, despite that reservation, we do not have any basic problems with the various components of this act.

First of all, the Provincial Court Act. It changes the maximum for civil matters that the cabinet can allow from \$50,000 to \$100,000 and updates the resolution mechanisms to allow for more flexibility. The Court of Queen's Bench Act adds a second Associate Chief Justice, and that will, we understand, assist in the progress through the courts and allow the Chief Justice to give direction on what the masters can hear and what they cannot. I'd like a little bit of clarification on why that is an important piece of this legislation. So if the hon. member can help me with that, I would be very grateful.

Mr. Donovan: I just got a note on that one. Can you just give me a brief...

The Chair: Through the chair.

Mr. Mason: Do you want me to go on to something else?

Mr. Donovan: No, no. Just ask your question again. I was just reading another part. I'm sorry.

Mr. Mason: Sure. Yeah. One of the changes under the amendment that amends the Court of Queen's Bench Act will allow the Chief Justice to give directions on what masters can hear and what they cannot. Why is that change important?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you for the question. The amendment on the Chief Justice, the powers directed on the masters side: that allows the preliminary hearing on civil matters for applications involving bankruptcies. They can also hear certain applications under the Maintenance Enforcement Act. I think we're just trying to free up some time in the courts, allowing the masters to deal with some of those.

The Chair: Thank you, and for the record that was the Member for Little-Bow. I think I called him something else.

I'll go back to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

5:10

Mr. Mason: Yes. I've called him something else, too, before, Mr. Chairman.

I just have this question. My notes say that the Post-secondary Learning Act is being changed in Bill 16 to correct a mistake that occurred with orders in council, which accidentally abolished the boards of SAIT and Medicine Hat College. Did that really happen? Did you really do that? Were they mad?

Mr. Donovan: I think it was a clerical error at some point. The order in council established the college board in 1970 for Medicine Hat, and SAIT was done in 1982. Going through there, there were some errors discovered, and the information was requested to respect one of the institutions, and that's when it was identified. So we're just trying to clarify and fix the problem that was identified.

The Chair: Back to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Raising the civil claims to be heard in Provincial Court to \$100,000 may be a positive, but it will also have an impact on the work of the court. I think there's a legitimate concern as to whether or not the capacity is there and whether or not enough funding is going to be provided by the province in order to allow them to handle those additional cases.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The goal of this was to make the civil justice system more effective. Now, the amendment from cabinet will increase it to \$100,000 from \$50,000. However, it should be noted, hon. member, that the current maximum limit for the civil court matters will remain at \$50,000, which was set in 2014. The proposed amendment gives the government the option to raise the limit to \$100,000 at a later date if required without amending the legislation, just so it's easier to be able to go through and do that.

The Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to ask about section 6(9), that deals with hearing procedures, which will allow the court to direct some of the hearing procedures like the amount of hearing time, the number of witnesses, the amount and type of testimony and evidence as well. I'd really like to know what the purpose of that change is and how we can protect individuals' fundamental rights to access justice and a fair trial if this greater scope is given.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm just trying to dig up 6(9) myself. I was hoping he was going to go for 13(1) of the regulations, but I didn't have that luxury.

Mr. Mason: It's easier to ask questions than answer them.

Mr. Donovan: That's why I truly appreciated being in the opposition also at one time in life. Sometimes you have to make the decisions rather than just look at them.

I'm going to have to get back to the member on that. I'll have to dig through that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. members, before I go back to the next speaker, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the hon. members of this Assembly a councillor from Mackenzie county, Eric Jorgensen, who's here at the AAMD and C convention and has stepped into the House this afternoon to watch the proceedings. I'd ask Eric to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Bill 16

Statutes Amendment Act, 2015

(continued)

The Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, did you want to speak again, or are you satisfied?

Ms Blakeman: No. I have to do more work.

The Chair: Okay. Then back to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: That concludes my questions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Okay. Are there other speakers at this time?
Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 16 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

**Bill 15
Securities Amendment Act, 2015**

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak very briefly to Bill 15 in Committee of the Whole. I think the Securities Amendment Act, 2015, really takes us back to the lead-up to the 2008 global financial collapse because at that time the market for over-the-counter derivatives was mostly unregulated. So there was a whole – well, who knows? – countless number of transactions that occurred that were completely invisible to any kind of securities oversight or regulation or monitoring or compliance. I think it's generally agreed by a number of people that watch this sort of thing that that was a bad idea.

There's been quite a bit of work done since then to put in place some regulatory reform of over-the-counter derivatives around the world. So we're catching up and we're harmonizing, which is essentially what's happening here. There are enforcement-related amendments here and then a harmonization, all of which needs to happen.

I just find the funniest part of this, if I'm allowed to do that, is that they've had to change the definition of "associate" so that they can pick up the one-night stands for exchange of information.

Mr. Saskiw: Whoa. Language. Language.

Ms Blakeman: One-night stand is language?

Well, because it was relying on the definition of adult interdependent partner, which was the invention of my beloved colleagues opposite as a way of trying to get around not recognizing same-sex marriages. So they invented this whole other grouping of people, which, of course, included everybody that wasn't a male and female that were married. But in that, it's all about long-term relationships. It's about two years plus, and they don't kick in until you've gone two years unless there's a child or unless people signed a contract. That was how that was set up. So if you actually had a shorter term relationship – in other words, anything from a one-night stand to a one-year-and-363-days stand – you would not be captured under the current definition of "associate," and you could have all the pillow talk on over-the-counter derivatives that you wanted to without coming under any kind of prohibition.

In the delicate wording that you always find with this, it's meant to capture persons cohabiting in a conjugal relationship who are sharing material information for the purpose of insider trading. They're trying to ensure that they're capturing people that are not covered under that. It's a very serious matter, Mr. Chair, but I just knew that definition was going to bite this government in the behind a number of times, and that's one of those times.

Given that, our Liberal caucus is in favour of what's been proposed here. We have duly slogged our way through all of the different sections. This is one of these bills that take a lot of time to find out not a heck of a lot, but we appreciate the work that's been done, particularly around regulation on this one.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there other speakers on the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 15 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

5:20

**Bill 13
Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015**

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise here today to speak to Bill 13, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015. I just have a few questions regarding this particular act. What this act is doing is that it is making mandatory the inspection of boats entering our borders. I'm just wondering whether or not someone can answer some questions about where exactly these monitoring stations are going to be and whether the government is going to have to purchase land in order to create these monitoring stations. Right now my understanding is that boats are inspected on a voluntary basis and that there are a little less than half, like 40 per cent or so, of individuals that voluntarily allow their boats to be inspected upon coming into the province of Alberta. My question is whether or not the government is proposing to purchase land for these sites. Is there anybody on the other side that's speaking to this?

The Chair: Hon. member, I'll recognize the sponsor of the bill, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Do I do my amendment first?

The Chair: Well, you could answer that question and then . . .

Mrs. Leskiw: Okay. Those details haven't been worked out, but right now the inspections are going to take place at the various places that we have already like the weigh scales, and so on. But purchasing land and any of that, hon. member, hasn't even been brought up for discussion.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you to the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

The Chair: Hon. member, I'm going to recognize the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake again. I believe she has an amendment, so I think we should get that on the floor.

Hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, you have an amendment? I believe you've sent me the original. Would you give your copies to the page to be distributed?

Mrs. Leskiw: The minister was supposed to have them.

The Chair: Oh, they're at the table here. Okay.

Mrs. Leskiw: Are they? Okay.

The Chair: Okay. Would you introduce the amendment and move it, hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Chair, I would now like to move an amendment to Bill 13. This amendment has been tabled and is prepared for circulation to all members.

The Chair: If you could pause, we'll have the pages distribute those, and then I'll come back to you in a brief moment.

For the record, hon. members, this will be amendment A1.

Hon. member, you may speak to the amendment at this time, please.

Mrs. Leskiw: Since the recent Legislative Review Committee deliberation, edits to Bill 13, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015, have been recommended by the constitutional law section of Justice and Solicitor General's legal services division. To enhance the potential success of the enforcement provision of the amending act being upheld if challenged in the courts, we are seeking a small amendment to Bill 13 as recommended by legal counsel.

The bill is amended as follows. Section 19 is amended in the proposed section 22(1) by striking out "A" and substituting "Except as prescribed, a". It will now read:

Except as prescribed, a fishery officer, for the purpose of ensuring compliance with this Act or while lawfully engaged in the exercise of powers or the performance of duties under this Act or any other applicable law, may signal or otherwise order an individual . . .

This amendment enables the development of future regulations which may be required to support section 22 of the Fisheries (Alberta) Act. Legislative Counsel has advised that these changes can be considered editorial in nature. Making the changes now will help to avoid having to open up the act in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Is there anyone speaking to the amendment?

Mr. Mason: I'm just trying to follow, Mr. Chair. Sometimes these acts are written and numbered in a strange way. I'm on page 12.

19 Sections 22 to 27 are repealed and the following is substituted:

Power to stop and order movement of conveyances
22(1) . . .

And this says, "striking out 'A,'" "a fishery officer," and then it will say – okay. That's where the "A" is. I was wondering which "A" it was. And then "Except as prescribed." So who prescribes?

The Chair: I'll go to the sponsor, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, if you have an answer.

Mrs. Leskiw: I don't quite understand your question, sir.

Mr. Mason: Well, it says that except as prescribed, the fishery officer can make you stop, right? If it's prescribed, he can't. So who prescribes, and what is the prescription? I'm just not following this. I'm sorry.

Mrs. Leskiw: Okay. I'm going to have to get back to you on that one, sir.

Mr. Mason: Okay.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Just to assist the member, it looks like if you look at page 3 in the explanatory notes, it has things like "prescribed waters." It basically means waters prescribed by regulations, so I'm assuming it would be the minister that would prescribe in the regulations.

It looks like if you look at page 4 of the bill, it has the definition of "prescribed" under subsection (1.5), and it defines "prescribed" to mean

- (i) . . . "prescribed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council" means prescribed or otherwise provided for by regulations made by the Lieutenant Governor . . . and

- (ii) otherwise, means prescribed or otherwise provided for by regulations . . .

So it means regulations or whatever the Lieutenant Governor provides by regulations.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. So my understanding, then, is that this just allows, with regulation, to put limits on when the fishery officer can make you stop your boat. So he just can't sort of show up in your pond and pull you over.

Ms Blakeman: In your koi pond?

Mr. Mason: Yeah. Whatever. Okay. Good. Thank you very much for that clarification.

The Chair: The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: I want to thank the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills for assisting in answering that from a lawyer's perspective.

The Chair: Are there other speakers on amendment A1?
Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: We're now back to the bill as amended. Speakers on the bill as amended? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess the one question that we have when reading this act is that it appears that a fishery officer may without a warrant enter a place to which a licensee applies, yada, yada, yada. So I guess my question is: should there be some protections to landowners or individuals? You know, if this fishery officer can just come into your place without a warrant, would the hon. member think that there should be some type of reasonable and probable grounds to kind of come onto your land and check for these mussels and stuff?

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Leskiw: I can answer this one. First of all, let me answer some of the questions that some of the members had posed yesterday. The Member for Drumheller-Stettler had a few questions regarding Bill 13 that I would be pleased to address. The member had questions about mitigating concerns regarding the new inspection powers under sections 25 and 26 of the bill. Inspection powers under 25 and 26 do not apply to any private dwellings. This is clearly outlined in the proposed section 28.02. In fact, if you look on page 15 or 17 of the bill, it definitely explains what they can and cannot do.

5:30

I would also point out that under section 26(2), an official may only inspect places if the official has reasonable grounds to suspect that the place or conveyance may be carrying an invasive organism. These reasonable grounds are clearly outlined in section 27(1) under the heading Power to Search. Overall, inspection authorities will be similar to other enforcement powers. There will be no nonlegislated people with authority.

There were also quite a few questions regarding the inspection program and the implementation, which I would be happy to touch

on. The member had questions regarding station locations, something that one of the other members had asked. Where possible, inspection stations will be located in existing Alberta facilities; for example, commercial vehicle scales.

The member also questioned about specialized equipment. The inspectors themselves require basic equipment for carrying out inspections, and the decontamination of watercraft can be performed at a weigh station.

Members had questions about how the inspection stations will be staffed and costs. There's a commitment to ensure that this program is successful, so I understand that there will be seasonal staff at 11 stationary inspection station sites as well as three roving crews.

The member had questions about minimizing the impact to traffic. Inspection stations are located along major highways throughout the province, which will allow boat traffic to move off the highway and not impede the traffic.

As for the member's question around the use of organic treatments, those are not available at this time, which contributes to the large concern that aquatic invasive species pose, specifically zebra and quagga mussels.

The member's final question was regarding the funding that will be allocated to enforcement. I understand that along the funding through existing budgets, creative sentencing options are in place within the Fisheries (Alberta) Act and would allow fines to be directed to the aquatic invasive species program.

So I just wanted to answer some of the questions that various members in the opposition had posed yesterday.

Again, thank you to the member for his assistance in the last question.

The Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Saskiw: Thanks. That does answer my question regarding the enforcement provisions, that it would just be going after a boat or a vehicle rather than being able to enter a dwelling or something like that.

Just generally speaking, I'm curious about where the biggest threat comes from. Is it from the U.S., or is it the mussels coming from the east to the west, or from B.C., the other way? If you have some comments on that.

Mrs. Leskiw: Well, right now in Canada: Manitoba, from Lake Winnipeg, would be a threat. But also they found them in B.C. and in Saskatchewan, so we have boats travelling back and forth. It's important for us to safeguard our waters.

Ms Blakeman: I'm going to apologize to the sponsoring member, because I have a cold, and it's possible that my ears are plugged and that I didn't hear her correctly. But when I look at section 25, it talks about rights of entry and passing over land without a warrant. It reads:

A fishery officer or fishery guardian may, without a warrant, enter on and pass over land for any purpose involved in

- (a) ensuring compliance with, administering or enforcing this Act or any other applicable law, or
- (b) ascertaining the presence of any invasive organisms.

That says that they can go on your land.

Powers of entry with inspection, under 26, 26(2) specifically says:

An official may, without a warrant, for any purpose involved in ensuring compliance with, administering or enforcing, or any other blah, blah, blah,

... enter and inspect any place or conveyance.

Conveyance is mostly on wheels – that's a boat, trailer, car, motorhome, whatever – but any place: that would include going into your cabin, walking over your land, looking in the garden shed. So I don't understand. I think I heard the member say that they wouldn't be able to go on private land or to inspect private buildings, and she gave that in answer to someone else's question. Did I not hear her correctly, or am I missing something when I read this?

When you go further into section 27, which she was specifically noting, you end up with the same thing, which is power to search. So you've got rights of entry, powers of entry with inspection, and power to search. Power to search in section 27 says, "subject to the conditions in a warrant or without a warrant," if they believe on reasonable grounds that there might be something that's a "danger to human life or safety or a threat to Alberta's ecology," and it's not practical to get a warrant, they can go on if

- (a) there is anything
 - (i) by means of or in relation to which this Act has been contravened, or
 - (ii) that will afford evidence of a contravention,

or any activity or any invasive organisms. That to me reads like: yahoo, go crazy. They can enter onto, they can inspect, and they can search, which seems to pretty much cover from (a) to (c).

So if I can get a clarification of that, I would appreciate it, and then I have some additional questions.

Mrs. Leskiw: If you take a look on page 17, 28.02, places and conveyances limited under section 28, no private dwellings. Stop. So it cannot. Then if you go back to section 25, you're talking about fishery officers and fishery guardians may without warrant. It would be just like having a checkstop and requiring the police to have to get a warrant for every car that they search while they were at a checkstop, which doesn't happen.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: This is one of these little family arguments that you get into, like gun registries and laws on guns. So it's kind of an uncomfortable place for me to be. My father calls them the Fish Feds. I suspect he's not going to be happy about this, but I don't know how not happy he's going to be. And he really follows the law. So I'll have to check that out and get back to you in third reading.

I am appreciative of the list that is attached in the back of the bill, on pages 32 and 33, which actually lists all of the invasive species. For most of them the conditions to actually bring them in are that they have to be dead or dead and eviscerated. That's pretty clear. It does list some 25 different species, including the tubenose goby and the ruffe and the western mosquitofish. It also talks about freshwater dwelling invasive plants, and wouldn't you know it? The one plant I've managed to get to grow would be the yellow flag iris, which is now on the prohibited list. So I guess I'll be getting a shovel out on that one. Fair enough. If they're the ones that – you know, invasive species are always the ones that sort of grow exponentially, and they tend to take out everything else that's usually part of the ecology. But just dang. Wouldn't you know it?

So I will make sure that I talk to my father about what his concerns might be with this act – it'll be a long discussion – and I will get back to the sponsoring member in third reading. But other than that, my colleagues are supportive of this. Yeah, really supportive of it. You know, you can't fool with Mother Nature because this is what happens: she'll get you.

Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

5:40

Mr. Mason: Thanks. Just one question. In the section that was just amended, it gives the fishery officer the power to basically stop any conveyance, move it to a particular location and stop it. I looked at the definition of “conveyance,” and that is in (c.2), on page 2 of the act. “‘Conveyance’ means a vehicle, being a device in, on or by which an individual or thing may be transported or drawn, and includes” trailers, aircraft that are not in flight, watercraft, docks and wharves, and railway cars. So this would seem to indicate that the fisheries officer can stop trains and move them around. I wonder if this is in conflict with the federal railways act.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, do you have a comment?

Mrs. Leskiw: I’ll have to look into that. I’m not sure, sir.

The Chair: Other questions?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on the bill as amended?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 13 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: I wonder if I might move, Mr. Chair, that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 16 and Bill 15. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 13. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading (continued)

Bill 12 Common Business Number Act

[Adjourned debate March 17: Mr. Denis]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: I move second reading of Bill 12, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: It’s been moved.

The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park has already spoken. You had some time left. Did you wish to continue, or are you finished your comments?

Mr. Quest: No. Mr. Speaker, I’ve moved second reading. Unless there are any questions, I have nothing more to say.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. I’ll look for other speakers. Are there other speakers at second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Just to indicate that there is support from the Liberal caucus and without amendments. Yippee. Yahoo. This is going to help our small and medium-sized businesses with some of the red tape. The Common Business Number Act, I’m sure, will be very welcome by that community, which is the community that generates and hires the most people in the country, contrary to what most people think.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other speakers? The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think it’s a good thing because we support the development of customer-oriented services for businesses in Alberta, and that includes developing a system of common business numbers between the federal and provincial governments.

Mr. Speaker, with this bill we see that the government is finally catching up to something many other provinces already have, most notably Manitoba. Manitoba’s NDP government brought in a similar system a number of years ago. Again, the pattern is repeating itself, the PCs in Alberta just being a few years behind the NDP in Manitoba. That seems to be a real theme here. If we were to be elected in the next election, we wouldn’t have to wait several years. We’d just, like, get it done and get on with things. I note that the text of this bill is almost word for word the same as an equivalent bill that was passed in Saskatchewan in 2013, and I guess the Saskatchewan Party follows the NDP in Manitoba, too. It’s a shame, I think, that it took so long, but fortunately the government has at long last decided to get on with it.

While it’s important to modernize government operations to support businesses in Alberta, privacy, convenience, and flexibility must be respected every step of the way. In section 2, for example, the minister can enter into an agreement with the government of Canada to establish a system of common business numbers. It’s rather vague like much of the act. It’s important that the government should be up front with Alberta’s businesses about how the system will be implemented. Specifically, will the common business numbers be the same as those used by the Canada Revenue Agency? I think that’s something that should be clarified for businesses in this province.

There’s a similar lack of clarity in section 4, which, for the purpose of establishing a system of common business numbers, enables any public entity to share business information with any agency of the government of Canada. So my question is: why is such broad permission required if communication is really only needed between the province and the Canada Revenue Agency?

Section 4 also enables a public entity to require information from a business entity in order to assign a common business number. It then also allows the public entity to provide this information to the

government of Canada or to one of its agencies. The public entity may also use the information currently in its possession for this purpose. Given the extent of the information sharing there must be adequate systems or regulations in place to ensure that business information is used only for the purpose of assigning a common business number.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, section 4 creates the sanction that any public entity may refuse to act on information provided to it by a business entity should the business fail to provide the information necessary for the system of common numbering. So if a business does have legitimate concerns about the privacy implications of this information sharing, why shouldn't it be able to opt out, then, without a penalty?

Section 4(3) requires that business information be provided "in any form or format that the public entity considers appropriate." Whatever that format is, it must not place an additional burden on the business. Preferably, businesses should have the option of providing information in different formats depending on what's best suited to their needs.

Section 4(5) and section 5(4) require that the business information received by public entities be provided to the minister. There are no restrictions on the use of this information or direct justification for this clause with respect to establishing a system of common business numbers. If public entities may provide business information to the government of Canada themselves as per section 4, why must the minister receive the information as well? The role of the minister in implementing the system should be clarified.

Section 6 pertains to the creation of an information system for the common business numbers. As per 6(2)(d) the information may hold "any other prescribed information" about the business. This needs clarification. Who will make the prescription? What limitations will be placed on it? Will the information system be expanded or be capable of storing information other than the information set out in section 6? If so, how will the scope of the information system be expanded?

Section 6 also fails to identify where the information held in the information system will be stored and who will be responsible for controlling access to the information other than the minister. We must ensure that these things are clear in the regulations and that such information remains secure.

5:50

Section 7(1)(a)(ii) enables the minister to disclose the information system to a public entity for the purposes of law enforcement. However, given the murky scope of the information to be held by the system, it is disconcerting that it may be used for law enforcement purposes. Businesses must know what information will be held in the information system before being forced to comply with the legislation.

Lastly, section 11 pertains to regulations. Here 11(a) sparks the most concern because it enables the Lieutenant Governor in Council, that is to say the cabinet, to define, enlarge, or restrict "the meaning of any term or expression used in this Act but not defined in this Act." In other words, the government may significantly alter the implications of the legislation without ever having formally to

amend it. Mr. Speaker, one would only have to read *Brave New World* to understand the importance of language in government.

We want to make sure that Alberta's businesses benefit from this bill as opposed to simply handing over more information to the government with less oversight. So with regard to those questions we will be looking very closely at the regulations, and I hope that the comments that I've made will be taken into account. We know that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business indicated that it does support this as it will make life easier for their members.

I guess those are more or less my comments. I certainly think that when we get to committee, I would like the government to be prepared to answer some of those concerns and also to answer questions about the potential costs of this program. Otherwise, I expect that there will be broad-based support for the bill, Mr. Speaker, and that includes the NDP.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 12. I'll be very brief, just noting that we support the general intent of the bill on second reading and look forward to digging into the details in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

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

Seeing none, are there other speakers?

If not, then I'll invite the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park to close debate if he so desires.

Mr. Quest: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll take everybody's comments under advisement. The intent of the bill was not to collect any more or less information than is being collected today. It's not to be shared. It's more like a key.

Really, as has been stated, it's supported by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. This is a very, very good bill for small businesses. As a former small-business owner I have a pretty good understanding of some of the complexities of navigating and getting information and so on from government. This will make things a lot easier for our small-business people.

I'll close debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Yes. Mr. Speaker, in light of the hour I would suggest that we might call it 6 o'clock and adjourn till 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:54 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Subscriptions
Legislative Assembly Office
1001 Legislature Annex
9718 – 107 St.
EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E4
Telephone: 780.427.1302

Other inquiries:

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



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, March 19, 2015

Issue 23

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 19, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Gracious God and Holy Creator, as we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we ask for renewed energy to help us continue our work back home at the local level with the people in our constituencies. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, I believe you have a visitor in the gallery.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mrs. Cecilia Villanueva Bracho, consul of the United Mexican States in Calgary. Thank you for being here with us. Cecilia is accompanied by Ms Lilia del Carmen Morales, deputy consul from the consulate of the United Mexican States in Calgary, and Mr. Pérez, liaison officer for the seasonal workers agriculture program with the consulate of Mexico.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and Mexico benefit from a long-standing relationship, including significant trade between our two jurisdictions. In fact, Alberta opened its office in Mexico more than a decade ago, and since then our relationship has flourished. Over the years Mexico has grown to become Alberta's third-largest trading partner, with two-way trade between our jurisdictions totalling close to \$2.4 billion.

Today it is my pleasure to ask our guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it is my special honour and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly two very remarkable Albertans seated in your gallery.

It is my pleasure to recognize Mr. Laurie Hawn, Member of Parliament for Edmonton-Centre. He was first elected in 2006 and will be retiring from politics at the next federal election. He served as a parliamentary secretary to the Minister of National Defence from 2007 to 2011. Mr. Hawn had a distinguished career with the Canadian armed forces, rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel.

In 2010 Prime Minister Stephen Harper appointed Mr. Hawn to the Queen's Privy Council of Canada, and in 2011 he was appointed to the Treasury Board subcommittee on the strategic and operating review. Mr. Hawn was also selected as a Canadian representative and co-chair of the Canada-United States Permanent Joint Board of Defence. In 2012 he was appointed to serve on the Treasury Board cabinet committee, and in 2013 the Prime Minister appointed him to the Treasury Board Sub-Committee on Government Administration.

Mr. Hawn is a servant of the people. His leadership is principled in approach, coupled with an unwavering commitment to the constituents of Edmonton-Centre. He is a true friend of mine and supporter of many individuals and groups within Edmonton and area communities.

Laurie is accompanied this afternoon by his lovely wife, Mrs. Judy Hawn. Mr. Speaker, heartfelt, sincere thanks to Judy, a dynamic spouse, mother, and grandmother. She embodies the ideals we cherish as Albertans: strength, loyalty, and commitment. She has given selflessly and made tremendous sacrifices, all in support of her hero, Laurie, the person she loves dearly.

To both Laurie and Judy, on behalf of all Albertans, our debt of gratitude for your immeasurable contribution and service to our great country, province, and city. May your life's journey continue to be filled with an abundance of blessings. I would now ask the Assembly to please join me in providing the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, and congratulations. Thank you on behalf of all.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, you have a group to introduce?

Mr. Denis: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm also very happy to see Laurie and Judy coming to join us today.

I'm also privileged today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 11 individuals from the Department of Justice and Solicitor General who are here today for question period. These are all individuals who work hard every day to help keep our communities safe, put our victims first, and provide access to justice for all of us. I'd ask them each to stand, one by one, as I call their names: Morgan Peachey-Dupon, Kiernan Adams, Nikki Thompson, Carrie Coburn, Lisa Goldrup, Paula Vo, Janet Hughes, Gayln MacIsaac, Barb Hermans, Andrea Muller, and Marcus Smith. I ask that you please give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Let us move on with other important guests, starting with school groups.

Strathmore-Brooks, I believe you have a guest to introduce.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature on behalf of my colleague from Airdrie 101 visitors from C.W. Perry school here today to watch our proceedings. I would like to introduce the teachers and group leaders and parents with them: Miss Stephanie Wilson, Miss Jolie Nelson, Mr. Curtis Fong, Mr. Brian Jackson, Mrs. Jolene Roberge, and Mrs. Laura Hudson. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school or education groups?

Seeing none, let us proceed with the Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce two residents of my fantastic constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. Marlene and Richard Hauser have come to the House to watch the proceedings and catch a glimpse of their wonderful granddaughter Lindsay in action as one of our hard-working pages. I thank them for coming this afternoon. I would ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the Minister of Seniors.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly

Vasant Chotai, who is the president, and Susan Morrissey, who's the executive director of the Edmonton Social Planning Council. Now, the Edmonton Social Planning Council is celebrating its 75th anniversary of serving Edmonton and area with very high-quality research. In fact, later I'll be profiling their most recent document, *A Profile of Poverty in Edmonton*. I would ask them to please rise and accept our congratulations on their 75th anniversary, and please welcome these two to our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors, followed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you some very special constituents that I have here today. Seated in the members' gallery, Herb Holgate is a second-generation farmer from Thorhild county. He and his wife, Rose, have been married for 56 years and worked the same farm his family first homesteaded in 1914. They're accompanied by their daughters: a very good friend of mine, Deb Hamilton; Cindy Wietzel; and Bonnie Ollikka.

Alberta's greatness is borne on the backs of determined, hard-working families like the Holgates. Like families before them, they've dedicated their lives to enhancing the resources our province is naturally blessed with and leaving our communities better than we found them. They're certainly doing that. The Holgates made the journey to Edmonton today to receive the Alberta Century farm and ranch award in recognition of their ongoing contribution to Alberta's proud agricultural and cultural heritage. It's truly an honour for me to be their MLA.

I'd like to ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you 19 interns who began their local government careers in the municipal intern program in May 2014. This program provides an opportunity to gain real-life experience within our departments as we support towns, villages, counties, municipal districts, and cities across this province. This group will join more than 200 interns who have participated in this valuable program since 2002. I would ask them to rise as I say their names: Ryan Westerson, Kaylee Galipeau, Nicola Wood, Stefanie Drozda, Carl Kurppa, Jason Lussier, Darlene Bezeau, Logan Robicheau, Jeff Chipley, Léanne Labossière, Tyler Andreasen, Jenelle Braun, Karl Mielke, Matthew Siddons, Reed DesRoches, Dustin Bisson, Kate Churchill, Jaiden Henry, and Anna Lim. The Municipal Affairs staff with the program: Wendy Peters, Melanie Wood, Chelsea Williamson, and Erin Hambleton. Let's give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Thank you. Your second introduction, please.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to introduce to you Brian Alford, president and chief executive officer of the Safety Codes Council, and his colleagues Tyler Wightman and Erin Stroud. These folks are in the House today for the introduction of Bill 21, the Safety Codes Amendment Act, 2015. Also seated in the public gallery are my staff from the public safety division of Municipal Affairs: Bruce McDonald, James Orr, Colin Robertson, Asha Clarke, Karen Pottruff, and Alex Morrison, who

have been hard at work on Bill 21. Thank you for your outstanding work. If you could rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you three individuals. First, a social work practicum student, Kelsey Ackerman originally comes from Lethbridge and pursued studies at Lethbridge College, Bow Valley College, and Vancouver Island University, and now she is at Grant MacEwan in the social work program. She is planning to work with youth at risk, and she is a very, very excellent prospect, I think, in that regard. The second person I would like to introduce is a first-year social work student working in the office of Friends of Medicare, Robyn Bryant. She is working toward her diploma as well at Grant MacEwan and comes from St. Albert originally. The third person I'd like to introduce is Sandra Azocar, who is the executive director of Friends of Medicare. The three of them came here together today. I'd ask the three of them to rise and receive a very warm reception from the members.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have two minutes each.

Let us start with the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

International Day of Happiness

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The International Day of Happiness will be celebrated tomorrow in all 193 United Nations member states, who have adopted a resolution calling for happiness to be given a greater priority. Here in Alberta we have so much to be thankful for that every day could be considered a provincial day of happiness. Albertans have built a province in which we are privy to a quality of life that is second to none, and since we're under new management, I have no doubt that we are on course for even better things in the future.

We are blessed with some of the most beautiful scenery and greatest recreational opportunities on the planet: mountains, parks, forests, waterways, and grasslands that are so gorgeous we have to Remember to Breathe.

We create unforgettable memories, cheering on the Stampeders, Flames, Oilers, Eskimos, and our amateur sports teams. We enjoy the Calgary Stampede, West Edmonton Mall, a myriad of festivals and celebrations, and so much more.

We have natural resources in abundance; a young, skilled, productive workforce; a strong commitment to innovation and knowledge-based industries courtesy of a financially responsible government provincially, which has created a highly competitive business environment, built modern and efficient infrastructure and the best tax regime in the country by far. Add to that world-class education, health, and human services, Alberta Get Outdoors, or GO, Weekend, which is celebrated on the second weekend of April every year. This year it's April 10 to 12.

Mr. Speaker, during the International Day of Happiness tomorrow, the first day of spring, and on every day that follows, we would do well to remember the words of our Premier: we cannot win a bigger lottery than living right here in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

Childhood Immunization

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the past several weeks Alberta Liberals have called on this government to take action on a simple question of public safety, mandatory choice on vaccines for school enrolment. When faced with this issue, the PC government has simply offered platitudes about the importance of vaccination but refuses to show real leadership. It says that it needs to consult with school boards and parents to ensure their rights are not infringed upon. Of course, this was the same argument used against gay-straight alliances, which, it was later proved, was inappropriate when it came to protecting the safety of our schoolchildren. That's exactly what vaccines do.

Ensuring our schoolchildren are immunized for these diseases not only protects them but those around them who may not be able to be immunized such as newborn infants, those with allergies, or seniors with immune deficiency. In fact, school immunizations are a great way to protect the whole community, from infected children and the vulnerable to senior citizens. Under our policy Alberta would join four other provinces that require either proof of immunization for students registering in public school or mandatory choice; that is, they would require that a formal decision be made by parents. While exceptions are made for those that cannot be vaccinated or those with religious or other objections, the result is that once given information and faced with a choice, parents often opt to protect their children.

The Minister of Health claimed that provinces with mandatory choice provisions have lower vaccination rates, but that's wrong. Newfoundland has mandatory choice, and its immunization rates are the highest in the country: 95 per cent immunization for mumps, meningitis, measles, and rubella. Alberta is only at 74 per cent. While no one should be forced to take any vaccine, an informed decision should be made. The discomfort of my Conservative colleagues with this issue is obvious, but this issue, a serious public health issue that's growing, needs to be addressed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Albertans' Response to Economic Environment

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here in the Legislature we have had much discussion regarding the impact that \$42 oil prices continue to have on our provincial government and the upcoming Budget 2015. I speak today on behalf of my constituents and the many Albertans that also face uncertainty. Our current economic environment has meant that tough decisions are being made province-wide. The total number of layoffs now reaches into the thousands. I am hearing reports of smaller lineups in the food courts and parkades of downtown Calgary. A constituent who is in corporate computer hardware and IT sales had over \$1 million in sales contracts cancelled in just one day.

Through it all and true to our determination as Albertans, constituents are also informing me of innovative ways by which employers are protecting their employees. This has included reducing payroll and overhead costs by introducing new vacation packages and decreasing top-management salary expenses. These steps ensure that employers are still able to get the job done and meet their operational demands.

Layoffs are always difficult and can be a significant burden on individuals and their families. I remind all Albertans that this downturn will not last, and we will get through it together. Our government will continue to work with employers to offer relevant support services to their employees where needed.

This evening the canvas auction for the 2015 Calgary Stampede will take place. The tarp auction for the chuckwagon race is to many Calgarians an indicator of the health of the local economy. I wish success to the bidders and their wagon teams. A gathering of citizens is good for our city and for its people. Mr. Speaker, we are all in this together, and I hope that Albertans remain confident in knowing that we will persevere through these tough times.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I believe we have time to hear one more. Let's hear from Edmonton-South West, please.

Compassionate Caregivers

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A little over a year ago, on February 1, 2014, Albertans gained the ability to take eight weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave from employment in order to serve as compassionate caregivers for their loved ones. I'm immensely thankful to have had the privilege of spearheading the Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012, and I am proud that Albertans now have this opportunity.

But the story behind this milestone for caregivers goes back to my earliest days as an MLA. Knocking on doors and speaking with families in Edmonton-South West back in 2012, one thing kept coming up over and over again, the importance of healthy, stable, supportive families. I was shocked to learn that so many people were being forced to choose between their jobs on the one hand and caring for palliative family members on the other. Alberta was the only province not to have any legislated supports in place to help these compassionate caregivers or to give them the peace of mind that they would not lose their job should they need to take time to care for a loved one.

Over the 2012-2013 fiscal year alone 573 Albertans accessed the federal compassionate care EI benefits, which was a 16 per cent increase over the previous year. However, the federal EI benefits don't protect the caregivers' jobs. I was deeply disturbed by this, Mr. Speaker. Having consulted with stakeholders and experts such as the Canadian Cancer Society, the Alberta Caregivers Association, and a research team at the University of Alberta, the need for legislation that would protect compassionate caregivers was obvious. The expertise and support of these organizations and individuals played a huge part in ensuring this bill was passed in the House in the spring of 2013.

Now Albertans have had access to job-protected compassionate care leave for a full year thanks to the hard work of these motivated individuals and the families and caregivers who spoke up. No longer will any Albertan have to make the choice between being a caregiver for a loved one or keeping a job. Albertans are better served by it, and I'm proud to have played my part and even more grateful to have been of service to young families in my constituency and across the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, 35 seconds maximum for the question, 35 seconds maximum for the response or reply.

Let us begin with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Health Care Performance Measures

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Five years ago this government made a commitment that by this March we'd have the best health care system in the world. The report was called *Becoming the Best*. It promised that all surgeries would be completed within 14 weeks. So how have we done? Knee surgeries take 49 weeks; hip and back surgeries take 37; stomach surgery, 47 weeks. Minister, I get that this province is growing, and I get that your bureaucracy is growing. After that failed plan, why would Albertans believe that the plan you announced yesterday will be any different?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have the same challenges in health care that I think every Canadian jurisdiction is wrestling with. Five-year plans are important goals, they're important targets, and they're long-term objectives that the government aims to pursue. We will keep working towards them. We'll keep working with the front-line staff, the people that provide that compassionate care, caring for Albertans when they need it. We'll keep working with them, ensuring that there's local decision-making to help ensure that Albertans are always looked after.

Mrs. Forsyth: Minister, you failed every one. Every single one has been a failure.

Health experts have repeatedly told us that the most important measurement of the health care system is the ER benchmark. It's why we held an emergency debate in this Legislature in 2010. Five years ago Albertans were promised that by March of this year 90 per cent of patients would be admitted within eight hours. Here's how we're doing. In Calgary 40 per cent of patients are admitted within eight hours. In Edmonton it is even worse, at about 30. Minister, rejigging isn't helping. What are you going to do about it?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, what we're going to do is ensure that Albertans have a quality health care system that is there for them when they need it. It is a system – let's be very honest – that can use improvement, absolutely. We'll continue to make improvements in the system by working with the front lines to make improvements. There are developments happening. For example, wait time for radiation therapy for cancer was three weeks last year, in March of 2014, whereas it was 5.3 weeks just four years ago. Steps are moving. Things are moving. We are continuing to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, and we'll probably hear more in the next supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Tell that to somebody who's waiting for radiation. Three weeks? Come on, Minister.

Five years ago Albertans were promised that by this March patients needing a specialist would see one within one month of referral. [interjection] It's not funny. Today they wait three months, but in Calgary patients waiting for a spine specialist can't even see one. The U of C is turning people away because they have 1,803 people on a wait-list. This is unacceptable, Minister. Since 2010 we've spent \$75 billion on health care, and today someone can't even get the access that they need to get spine surgery. Minister, what are you . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's let the minister respond.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, Alberta is a vastly growing jurisdiction. We have more and

more people coming to our jurisdiction every single year. Nobody brings a hospital with them. Nobody brings a doctor with them. Nobody brings a specialist with them. That's why we're building infrastructure that's needed for health care. That's why we're working with the front line of health care providers to ensure Albertans are taken care of. That's why when we bring forward our budget next week, it'll be a sound, principled fiscal plan that'll ensure Albertans are getting the core services they need.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Provincial Elections

Mr. Saskiw: It takes a lot of guts, courage, and determination to bring in a fixed election law: that was what the ESRD minister said just three years ago, fawning over his government bringing in a fixed election law. Now, the Premier laughs and shrugs it off, but the reality is that Albertans expect leadership they can trust, not just more of the same broken promises. To the Premier: do you agree with your minister that this law is important to protect the integrity of our democracy?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I think that under our Constitution any election is important to protect our democracy, and as someone who shares my same profession, I'm sure that the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills would agree.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That same ESRD minister spoke about fair play when he rightly noted the unfair manipulation of the election process by former Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. You see, he called an early and unnecessary election just days after Stockwell Day, a former minister of this province, became federal Leader of the Opposition. Sounds familiar. To the minister: do you agree with your colleague that using Liberal tactics and manipulating the date of an election is below the office of the Premier?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These are very challenging times, as you know. We've got challenges where we've got oil sitting at \$40 a barrel or just above that and we've got a \$7 billion hole in our budget. But this is a time, as we prepare our budget, when we go out and we talk to Albertans about what's important to them and hear from them. That's what's important to this government, to hear from Albertans.

Mr. Saskiw: Mr. Speaker, if you called an election when oil and gas went up and down, we'd have elections all the time.

The Premier once asked Albertans to judge him by, and I quote: the integrity we have displayed. Getting some clarity on how he can break the integrity of his promises and the word of his MLAs matters to Albertans. The PC MLA for Calgary-Shaw said that "fixed election dates do work" and that it's important to not leave "the advantage to the government of the day and denying Albertans the certainty of an election." It's not bad advice. If the government is going to break its own laws, will they at the very least give Albertans the certainty of the election date?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very important that we talk with Albertans and we hear from Albertans. These are

challenging times. These are not business-as-usual times. This Premier has a great deal of integrity. We'll be laying out a plan on March 26 with the Finance minister, and then we'll want to make sure that Albertans have an opportunity for input as we move forward in the years to come.

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

Agency and Government Management Compensation

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the Premier is set to pin the blame on Albertans with the largest tax increase in Alberta history, today we found more fat, waste, and mismanagement across government. Travel Alberta rakes in \$50 million every year from taxpayers. According to the public service pension plan Travel Alberta has 50 managers. The total number of their staff: 100. Minister, how can you justify a \$2 billion tax grab when we have one manager for every employee at Travel Alberta?

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

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to tell you that the job that Travel Alberta does is quite amazing. The funds that come to Travel Alberta come from the tourism levy, which is specifically set up to promote tourism and develop tourism.

Thank you.

Mr. Saskiw: Mr. Speaker, to the minister. The fact is that while your PC government has the most bloated, most expensive government in Canada, you're asking average Albertans to take the hit. After the Wildrose exposed excessive waste like \$1,000 dinners and tuxedo rentals, the government ordered a review of management at Travel Alberta. The CEO has been tossed, but records show that there are 50 managers in a 100-employee organization. Minister, how can you expect Albertans to put up with your doom and gloom when you can't even clean up your own house?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The work that Travel Alberta does is incredibly important to the economy of this province. That is how we are diversifying this economy. Money is being brought in by tourists, and we are encouraging Albertans to travel within our province as well.

Mr. Saskiw: Mr. Speaker, golf courses, golden handshakes, corporate handouts, and maintaining perks for their bloated bureaucracy: these are PC priorities. While Albertans everywhere are hurting, managers across government have never seen it so good. Fresh off an 8 per cent pay raise this summer, senior managers will see the taxpayer-funded portion of their pension bumped up by 22 per cent, and while they're going to raise taxes, the Premier and his MLAs are the highest paid in Canada. Minister, when are you going to stop cleaning out Albertans' wallets and clean up this mess?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I think the member knows well, or at least it's been explained enough times in this House, that the pension benefits don't change. The government is moving to ensure that the pension fund is sustainable and solvent, and I think that's a prudent thing to do. That's what a real fiscal conservative would do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Investigation into Release of Information

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the government told us that it halted an internal probe into alleged breaches of cabinet confidentiality and FOIP laws because the Privacy Commissioner is conducting an investigation. We also learned that the Calgary Police Service investigation into the same matter has gone cold. The Minister of Infrastructure has been publicly accused of peddling dirt on his colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs to the opposition and the media. To the Minister of Infrastructure: will he categorically deny his involvement in leaking the phone bill?

2:00

Mr. Khan: I thank the hon. member for the question. As the hon. member alluded to, we've answered this question a number of times, Mr. Speaker. This is an independent investigation led by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. It would be inappropriate for us to try to interfere or to try to rush the report along. We have confidence that in due time the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner will complete her report.

Dr. Swann: So the minister doesn't deny it.

When faced with these allegations, the only answer the government can muster is that it's part of an ongoing, independent investigation. While we respect the independence of these offices, Albertans have a right to know the scope of the investigations, especially if cabinet ministers are involved. To the Minister of Infrastructure again: are you being investigated by the Privacy Commissioner for breaching the FOIP Act and peddling personal information about your caucus colleagues? Yes or no?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, as I identified yesterday to this member – and maybe he wants to check *Hansard*, but for his own edification, the police operate fully independently of any political authority in this country. What's happened, if there is an investigation or not: what I would suggest is that this member simply go and contact the Calgary Police Service and ask them because I'm not about to. I don't interfere in investigations.

The Speaker: Thank you.

A final supplemental, hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the *Metro* news reports today that the PC Party has called in a former Calgary Police Service officer to investigate claims of alleged bribery in an Edmonton nomination race. While that seems odd in itself, what is more surprising is that allegations against one member of the cabinet led to his resignation while he tries to clear his name, while the Minister of Infrastructure remains in the front bench. Why hasn't the Minister of Infrastructure stepped aside while these investigations are going on? Why the double standard, or is he waiting to be told to step down?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader. The matter is under some review, under some investigation.

Mr. Denis: It is under investigation, that he mentioned, part of the matter, that is. But, Mr. Speaker, again, I've answered these questions before, and I have no further comment.

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

Surgery Delays at Stollery Children's Hospital

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday I asked why so many children at the Stollery children's hospital have to suffer the emotional toll of cancelled surgeries. I was told that it was a blip, it was flu season, you know, all the kinds of answers we're used to. Today the interim chief of pediatric surgery at Stollery stood with me and challenged the minister's assertions head-on. He told us that it's not a blip; it's a trend, and it's getting much worse. So again to the Premier: will he explain why Alberta families are seeing 100 per cent more cancelled surgeries at the Stollery hospital this year over last?

Mr. Bhullar: Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, because last year there were 1,643 emergency surgeries, and this year there are 1,931 year to date already. So the fact is that there are 287 more emergency cases that have to be dealt with. Approximately 200 of those emergency cases were dealt with without affecting any other surgeries or cancelling them. About 87 of those emergencies did result in other surgeries having to be cancelled or postponed for the day, but it was because of emergencies.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, our numbers don't include emergency surgeries, so it's completely not relevant to this issue.

Now, the minister told us that a number of cancelled surgeries are only 1 per cent of the total number, but he included in-patient and outpatient surgeries. In fact, the cancelled surgeries for in-patient kids are the most serious, and those are the ones that are being turned away. The chief of pediatric surgery suggested today that sometimes the rate of cancellation of in-patient surgeries is as high as 30 per cent. So again to the Premier: can he explain why we don't have enough beds for the kids who need these surgeries?

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the member's question and the statements before are something that she needs to consider very wisely because she herself said that in-patient surgeries are the ones that have had to be cancelled or postponed. The reason why that happens is quite simply because an emergency comes in the door. When an emergency comes in the door, they have to find a way to fit in that surgery, and sometimes that means delaying the surgery that is not an emergency.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the chief of pediatric surgery says that the information that we're getting from this government is just wrong, and the problem is that we don't have enough beds. In fact, the Stollery is performing four times as many surgeries now as they did 10 years ago, and the number of beds has hardly changed. They simply aren't doing their job providing the health care for Alberta's children. Why? Why is that?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We continue to ensure that Albertans are getting access to timely and effective health care treatments. This is always a continuous effort to ensure that we are bettering the services for Albertans, but sometimes what is needed are suggestions that are constructive to actually make things better. We welcome them from the other side or doctors or anybody else at any time. We're moving forth to ensure that Albertans have the health care they need when they need it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Maintenance Enforcement

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the ways to build for a better future is to crack down on the deadbeat parents so that Martha and Henry's grandchildren are getting the money to which they are entitled, yet according to Stats Canada 65 per cent of maintenance enforcement cases in this province are in arrears, so those kids don't get to play hockey or go on a school trip. To the Justice minister: why are 65 per cent of MEP accounts in Alberta in arrears?

Mr. Denis: Well, first off, Mr. Speaker, I reject the premise of that question. I don't have the statistics in front of me, but I will tell you one other thing, that maintenance enforcement plays a very important role in dealing with child support. I know that this member agrees. But every case also has to be handled on an individual, case-by-case basis. It's a fundamental principle of justice.

Ms Blakeman: Wow. That was a non answer. All right. I don't think he knows.

Back to the Justice minister. Twenty-eight thousand three hundred and seventy-five maintenance enforcement cases have money owing at the end of the last fiscal year, a total of just under half a billion dollars that Alberta kids are not getting for food, for clothing, for recreation, for school fees, whatever. Why has this number not improved at all, almost, over the last decade?

Mr. Denis: Again, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that with more and more people coming to this province, unfortunately, maintenance enforcement does require some more resources, and we have provided more resources. Maintenance enforcement is an incredible part of our child support program. But again I say to this member that every case must be decided on an individual, case-by-case basis.

Ms Blakeman: No. The year before there were 44,000 enrolled, and then there were 43,000 enrolled last year, so, no, not a whole bunch more.

Back to the same minister. Now, despite this minister consistently going over budget on the maintenance enforcement file, we continue to have kids in Alberta going without because the government couldn't collect for them. Why is that, Minister?

Mr. Denis: Again the same answer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Provincial Grant and Loan Guarantee Programs

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has two seasons, winter and construction. Without the latter season our land and buildings would not be able to weather the winter storms, and, as we all know, Alberta is beginning to feel the effects of a very tight budget. Will we expect to see grants from municipalities cut? While there are some things that we can afford to lose or postpone, funding for roads, land, and building construction are not among them. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs. My municipalities are waiting. When can we expect to find out the recipients of the collaborative government initiative grants?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question, a very important question. I thank the member for asking it because this was asked at AAMD and C as well. Our stakeholders and partners, municipalities, want to know this. Our municipal partners can expect by the end of March – we're starting to roll out now. Alberta community partnership program applications have already been under review, and they'll be rolling out. In addition to that is the small communities fund partnership with the federal government. Application deadlines for those are April 2.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. To the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. The Vegreville hospital sits on a flood risk area as it is right next to a large creek. It's only common sense to be able to deal with this issue before it becomes a bigger issue. Can we expect to see some funding from their request to the community resilience program for the Vegreville hospital?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you. Thank you, hon. member. The hospital itself is sited in an area that is above the 1 in 100 years flood level. However, as seen in past flood events, road access can be impacted during significant flood events. There are a number of programs available to help municipalities mitigate the potential risks of flooding to protect Albertans, and I understand from the Minister of ESRD that an application for flood mitigation funding has been submitted by the town of Vegreville under the Alberta community resiliency program. It's a long-term program that will help reduce floods and will be rolling out soon.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. My final question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. The feeder association loan guarantee program has extended the amount that can be borrowed but demands 5 per cent, which is up to \$50,000 of the total value, to be paid before receiving cattle. Can we expect to see this percentage dropped in the future?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In August of last year the minister did change the loan limit from \$500,000 to \$1 million, and that is the first action taken from the rural development action plan. In fact, a comprehensive review of the plan is in process right now, and we look forward to the results.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Allegations of Criminal Wrongdoing

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this government seems intent on investigating itself. Despite allegations of bribery directed at the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and former Associate Minister of Persons with Disabilities, the government insists that it is purely an internal party matter. Now the PCs have hired a former police officer to conduct their internal investigation. What they don't seem to understand is that allegations that would appear to violate sections 119 and 121 of the Criminal Code of Canada need to be investigated by the real police.

So to the Premier: will you do the right thing and forward the sworn statement that is . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice. The time for the question expired, so I have to recognize you.

Mr. Denis: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If this member has any information that he thinks would be of interest to a law enforcement agency, I highly encourage him to go and contact that particular agency. Any further answers have been done on Monday. I would suggest that he check *Hansard*.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. An interesting answer since the information that I am referring to was addressed to the Premier. Would you give the same advice to the Premier that you just gave to me?

Mr. Denis: Again, Mr. Speaker, this has been asked and answered.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While I want to give the government one last chance to do the right thing and, frankly, to do their job, if the government won't appoint a special prosecutor or forward the evidence to the police themselves, then we will. Last chance, Mr. Minister. Will you do the right thing and appoint a special prosecutor or forward the evidence to the police? Yes or no?

Mr. Denis: Again, Mr. Speaker, to appoint a special prosecutor, what we would have to do is actually have a charge laid. To my interest there has been no charge laid. Again, if he has any information, this member should be declaring it directly to the police and taking it out of this Chamber.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month the Canadian Food Inspection Agency confirmed a positive case of BSE in an Alberta cow. Now, the animal did not enter the human food or animal feed systems, and that's vitally important, but, as we all know, when it was first diagnosed in 2003, BSE caused a widespread export ban on Canadian cattle and devastated our beef industry. We've worked hard to reassure both domestic and world-wide customers that our beef is safe and to reopen our export markets. Now this. My question to the associate minister of rural development: what specific action is our government taking to support our beef producers?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The cow was identified through the BSE surveillance program and, as the member said, did not enter the food system, and there were no implications for human health. We continue to work closely with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency as they are the lead on this investigation. Alberta and Canada have a comprehensive animal health food safety system in place to assist the situation and have demonstrated that it does work.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Starke: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the U.S. lobby group R-CALF is using this case to justify the continuing requirement for very damaging mandatory country of origin labelling, that costs our producers millions of dollars, what specific measures is our government taking to refute these spurious and vexatious arguments linking BSE and MCOOL?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. As the member mentioned, there is no legitimate connection between BSE and mandatory country of origin labelling. The World Trade Organization has already ruled three times that the U.S. is failing to meet its trade obligations because of COOL. We are very confident that the WTO will once again rule in Canada's favour, and we expect that report to be released in the spring.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that we export over 1 billion dollars' worth of beef annually and given the vital importance of maintaining open export markets and given that China, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Peru, and Belarus have all placed a ban on imports of our beef, what exactly is our government doing to stop more countries from joining that list?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few countries have temporarily halted their beef imports. Now, the total impact for Alberta is less than 5 per cent. Our major trading partners have indicated that they're confident in the processes that we have in place, and all steps are being taken to ensure comprehensive and effective investigations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Legal Aid Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It is well known that our courts, particularly family courts, are clogged with people self-representing because they can't afford a lawyer but, paradoxically, make too much money for legal aid. Now, this government's negligence on legal aid in effect makes the children of the Marthas and Henrys out there fall through the cracks with repeated delays in our family courts. To the Justice minister: why does the minister feel that it is appropriate to let almost 50 per cent of the children and grandchildren of Martha and Henry languish through family court with no legal aid assistance for parents to hire lawyers?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, the provincial government funds approximately 80 per cent of legal aid already, and through an intersessional deposit we provide an additional 5 and a half million dollars for legal aid. Of course, we have a budget coming next week. I would suggest that this member stay tuned.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister: given that as of the upcoming budget the considerable expense of any court-appointed legal counsel comes from legal aid coffers, thereby further diminishing their funds available for regular legal aid, is the minister committed to covering court-ordered counsel past April out of the department's resources?

Mr. Denis: Again, Mr. Speaker, this member will have to stay tuned for the March 26 budget.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Well, can the minister share with us his reasoning for failing to approve, despite being required to do so, Legal Aid's revised internal budget for 2014-15, which they submitted back before Christmas? How come?

Mr. Denis: Again, Mr. Speaker, we have to act in the best interests of all actors, including taxpayers. Five and a half million dollars will be provided in addition to legal aid this year, and I also raised this at the national meeting of Justice ministers several months ago, about the federal government's lack of funding for this important program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by Livingstone-Macleod.

Postsecondary Education Accessibility

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the low price of oil, layoffs are occurring across many job fields and industries. Often when people are laid off, they choose to go back to school in order to update their skills or train in different fields of study completely. Given these concerns my question is for the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. Does the minister have concrete measures to accommodate the demand of this possible influx in enrolment?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can say that there is capacity across Campus Alberta, and the system is responsive to changes in demand. My department is working very closely with our Campus Alberta partners to determine how both short-term and long-term pressures can be addressed, and this is something that we do on an ongoing basis. Accessibility is extremely important and will be one of the biggest priorities in our postbudget consultation process across Campus Alberta. I look forward to the member's input as we work with all of our Campus Alberta partners to build a system that is focused on accessibility, sustainability, and excellence.

Mr. Xiao: To the same minister: given that students may have to live away from home in order to obtain the skills they require, are financial support systems in place for living arrangements?

2:20

Mr. Scott: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to say that Student Aid Alberta provides funding to help Albertans cover the living costs associated with pursuing a postsecondary education. When a student applies for Student Aid Alberta loans and grants, their living costs are assessed using a standard monthly budget based on their marital status and whether they have dependent children. We will continue to review these costs to ensure Albertans get the funding that they need to pursue their postsecondary education. The member will also be happy to know that outside of student loans, we invest \$234 million in student aid supports. These supports include scholarships, bursaries, grants, and debt management programs.

Mr. Xiao: Again to the same minister: given that the government has promised to rein in spending, how much funding is currently available to assist out-of-work Albertans with their postsecondary education needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right that we will be very fiscally prudent with government spending going forward. We know Alberta is facing a significant fiscal challenge. We will continue to support Albertans who want to further their training and their postsecondary education. In 2013-2014 nearly 61,000 Albertans received a total of \$775 million in combined federal and provincial loans and grants to support their educational goals. In addition, the Alberta government also provided \$74 million in scholarships and other awards. In recent years we made it easier to access student loan funding by streamlining processes.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Flood Recovery Funding

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is grabbing almost \$20 million from taxpayers to rebuild the Kananaskis golf course despite the fact that thousands of Albertans are still waiting for disaster relief claims to be addressed. Minister, you've missed your target deadline to complete 80 per cent of eligible DRP claims by over a year now. How can you possibly justify spending taxpayer money like a drunken sailor on this golf course when a hundred per cent of flood victims are not yet back on their feet?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To start with, I'd like to correct an inaccuracy. Of 10,500 flood claim cases, 80 per cent of those files have been completed, and we've added 15 extra people to ensure that we'll have those completed by June. I want to also say that the estimated cost to rebuild is \$14.6 million, and \$2.3 million has been spent on work to date. The matter is certainly under review, and it is right now. The dollars that were spent, the \$2.3 million to date, for the golf course consists of flood cleanup and salvage.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's two years later, and Albertans from Canmore to Highwood are still waiting for disaster relief. I think Albertans have been patient, but when they see this PC government spending \$16 million, \$14 million on a golf course, whichever it is, when they're still trying to rebuild their lives, they have a right to be concerned, I think. Minister, is rebuilding golf courses really worth more to you than getting people back into their homes?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say that the Premier shares concerns about this matter as well. No further funding will be spent on this, and the matter is under review right now.

Mr. Stier: Okay. Well, that's interesting. That's a new piece of information.

Minister, given that you're back on track to rebuild the golf course by June '16 but missed your target deadline to close eligible DRP claims by one year and counting, can you tell us when you will finally get around, then, to closing a hundred per cent of all

eligible DRP files and getting the money to the people that really need it?

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With all due respect, I'll say it slower. We have said that we've added 15 extra people. We have committed to have the outstanding cases, just under 2,000 cases, completed by June of this year. We've put the staff in place to do that, and we're on target to do that. As I also said in the question before, there is no further funding for the golf course, and it's under review.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Small-business Assistance

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Small businesses have a profound impact here in our province, making up 95 per cent of all businesses in Alberta. In 2012 Alberta small-business GDP per capita was almost \$20,000 while the Canadian average was about \$13,000. Last year I had the privilege of working on creating what became the small-business strategy for Alberta, a strategy to become an action plan that responds to the needs expressed by Alberta small businesses, making it simpler to do business in Alberta. My question is for the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. What's this government's plan in addition to the small-business strategy and the Common Business Number Act, which was introduced on March 11, to ensure the burden on small business is reduced even further, allowing Alberta...

The Speaker: Thank you.

We'll have to hear the answer now. The time for the question has expired.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much. I'd like to thank this member for all his work on the small-business file. Well done.

Alberta is the best place in Canada to do business, and we intend to keep it that way, Mr. Speaker. As a key contributor to the small-business strategy the member knows that small business needs a big voice in government, and that's what we are giving to them. Deliverables from the small-business strategy allow us to have constant feedback from Alberta small-business owners and entrepreneurs. Our new business adviser service is also up and delivering on their goal to get small business the information they need with a hands-off approach, no runarounds, and no red tape.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: in light of the government's diversification economic strategy, what are you doing to ensure that those that work in Alberta's labour industry experience as little negative economic impact as possible during what are becoming very difficult times?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta provides support to help employers and workers through these difficult times, including career counselling and resumé preparation. We are working with underrepresented groups such as youth and aboriginal people to connect them to the workforce and ensure that they have the skills to stay gainfully employed. In January, for example, we joined the federal government and Women Building Futures to announce funding for their online learning initiative to

help train women in construction trades in all corners of this province.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Quest: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what efforts, if any, will be taken to help companies avoid layoffs and to encourage continued labour investment here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Although we are seeing some short-term declines in new job openings across multiple sectors, we expect Alberta's labour market to remain strong in the years ahead. Employers considering layoffs are encouraged to take advantage of the federal work-sharing program, designed to help employers and employees avoid layoffs when business activity decreases. We're also working with employers to educate and train Alberta's workers through programs such as the Canada-Alberta job grant, through which more than 490 Alberta employers and 3,450 employees have been approved for a variety of training programs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The former Minister of Service Alberta expanded the number of public board members at AMVIC and filled it with close friends. The present minister appears to be unaware of this. Take Andy Hayher; this member is clearly close to the former minister. On Twitter they bragged about selling memberships for this Premier. Minister, will you review the appointments at AMVIC and ensure these members are there because of qualifications and not connections?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the question. What I want to assure you is that I have met with the AMVIC board. I want to assure the hon. member that the members of this board add value to AMVIC. The members of this board are passionate Albertans who care deeply about our consumer protection agenda, and we're very lucky to have these members onboard.

Mr. Strankman: Interesting information, Mr. Speaker.

Given that two other board members went to law school with the former minister and considering that they are personal friends, I continue to ask, Minister: are you ready to clean house and make merit-based appointments at AMVIC?

Mr. Khan: As the hon. member alludes to, Mr. Speaker, a number of members of the AMVIC board are lawyers. They're professionals. They care passionately about the consumer protection agenda that we have in Service Alberta. I want to assure the hon. member that all of our members on that board are passionate Albertans who are doing a very good job.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, the minister is clearly not doing his job. He has a job to protect Alberta's consumers, but he is only protecting PC friends. Minister, you keep hiding behind a draft report. This report will tell Albertans everything they need to know about this agency. You know the report is ready. This House knows the report is ready. Will you do the right thing and release this report today?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, again, this member has asked this question a number of times, and my answer remains consistent. We have a draft review. We're working with the board on the draft review. Our intention is to make that report public, and we will in due course.

2:30 Support for Victims of Child Sexual Abuse

Mr. Jeneroux: Mr. Speaker, Edmonton's Zebra Child Protection Centre, which serves a good portion of northern Alberta, is literally bursting at the seams, so much so that they've had to make a public appeal for \$1 million so they are able to expand their space to properly serve the growing numbers of children needing their specialized help. My question is to the Minister of Human Services. What is this government doing to ensure that victims served by centres like Zebra are receiving the services they need and don't have to resort to public appeals?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No child should ever have to suffer sexual abuse or exploitation. The Zebra Child Protection Centre does excellent work, and we provide service to a lot of children and families. Currently we are working on a proposal with the Sheldon Kennedy centre, the Caribou, and the Zebra to develop a provincial practice framework for this, and I can assure you that in this department about \$26 million is spent every year to help these children and families.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General: why is this government not adequately funding Zebra and any other community organizations like them who do the heavy lifting to protect our children?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I echo the comments of the Minister of Human Services. One child being exploited or abused is obviously one too many. That's why our ministry provides a three-year, \$450,000 grant from the victims of crime fund to the Zebra centre. I've toured the Zebra centre. They as well as the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre in Calgary do amazing work, and I think it's a good use of the victims of crime fund.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how are you working with the representatives of the centre to ensure that these victimized children are not further traumatized in our courts?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, both of these centres, particularly the Zebra centre, which the Member for Edmonton-South West talks about, provide very important work, but they also provide wraparound services in the context of the children's age and the circumstances they may have. The Crown prosecution service, the RCMP, the Edmonton police, the victim service providers: they all work together at this one place. It's a one-stop shop. Again, not only is it a good use of our tax dollars; it supports victims first, which is part of Alberta Justice's mission.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The deregulated electricity system in our province has resulted in a number of middlemen profiting off Albertans, causing retail prices to remain among the highest in the country. More than this, we've learned that some customers of Direct Energy have been receiving faulty bills for property they don't even own or for entire apartment complexes. To the Minister of Energy: will you admit that the deregulated system, that your government sponsored, has failed wildly in providing Albertans with affordable electricity?

Mr. Oberle: Not at all, Mr. Speaker, because it just simply isn't true. In the time since deregulation, in which we introduced a private market for generation in this province, Alberta has built an infrastructure build as large as the province of Saskatchewan, all of it without one penny of public debt. British Columbia carries \$20 billion; Ontario, \$44 billion; Quebec, \$54 billion in public debt; Alberta, zero.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm talking about consumer debt.

Given that even the Premier himself admitted last October that we've been paying more than we should for electricity in our province and given that these unnecessary electricity retailers add costs to Albertans' power bills, back to the same minister: will your government take action to save Albertans money on their electricity bills by removing these middlemen?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the Premier said no such thing, as a matter of fact, last fall. What he did say is that he would look into the regulated rate option to determine whether or not fluctuations were impacting consumers. We did exactly that, and we're moving to act on that right now.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, given that customers who have been locked into electricity contracts have not experienced the advantages that come with lower wholesale prices and given that some of the retailers have been investigated in other provinces for forging signatures on household utility contracts, when will this government finally do the right thing, re-regulate electricity in this province, and save Albertans money?

Mr. Oberle: It's just simply not going to happen, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. member, rather than passing innuendo, has any evidence whatsoever of anybody forging signatures, I very highly recommend that he forward that to the police. Otherwise, the innuendo is not a useful part of the debate in this House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

Asia Pacific Trade

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Market access is crucial to the Alberta economy. One of the new initiatives, called the trans-Pacific partnership, or TPP, led by the Prime Minister of Canada, promotes free trade among countries like Canada, China, Australia, Japan, and other Pacific nations. My question is to the hon. Associate Minister of Asia Pacific Relations. How are we working with the federal government to capture this opportunity and advance Albertans' interests?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Opening new markets for Alberta's goods and services is the most pressing issue facing our province. The trans-Pacific partnership holds tremendous opportunity for Alberta, representing a market of 792 million people and a combined GDP of close to 40 per cent of the world's economy. A strong working relationship with our federal counterparts is critical to our success internationally. I'm pleased to inform the member that since Canada entered into the TPP in 2012, Alberta has been invited to participate in 14 negotiating rounds to represent . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's hear the first supplemental.

Mr. Luan: To the same minister: given that China is paramount to Alberta's resources, however China is not part of the table for TPP, how is our government helping to resolve this?

Ms Woo-Paw: Mr. Speaker, China's fast-growing economy holds a lot of opportunity for this province. Our exports to China have more than tripled in the last decade, making it our second-largest trading partner, and 80 per cent of China's investment in Canada, \$54 billion, is in the province of Alberta. Some of the examples of things that we're doing in this area include the Ministry of IIR working with external stakeholders to offer Alberta's SMEs seminars to ensure that they have the competence to tap into this market. Our international offices are helping companies both ways, and we are also opening an office in Guangzhou, China, this year.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Luan: To the same minister: Alberta has the potential to export large quantities of agricultural products to Asia Pacific countries. What is our government doing to promote that?

Ms Woo-Paw: Mr. Speaker, like I said, a strong collaborative working relationship with our federal counterpart is critical. Some of the things that we're doing in this regard include working together to eliminate tariff barriers that impact our agricultural sector and active participation in trade agreement development such as the recently implemented Canada-Korea trade agreement. That all helps to enhance exports and trade to this very dynamic, fast-growing region, in turn creating jobs and creating wealth for Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by Stony Plain.

Utilities Consumer Advocate Advisory Board

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past week was the annual AAMD and C convention. This convention was a great opportunity for the provincial government to connect with our municipal partners. At this convention a number of municipal leaders brought forward concerns that this government is planning to dissolve the advisory board of the Utilities Consumer Advocate. To the Minister of Service Alberta: after our municipal partners have expressed their concern with dissolving the UCA Advisory Board, does this government still intend to take away their only method for stakeholder input into the unregulated utility market?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. He's absolutely correct. We did meet with a number of

stakeholders at the recent conference of the AAMD and C. We met with some partners from AUMA, and we met with some members of the board. Traditionally the UCA Advisory Board has played a role of policy and regulatory advisement. Recently they've developed into more of a stakeholder group working with the UCA, and because of that I'm very happy to say that we will not be dissolving the UCA Advisory Board.

Mr. Casey: To the same minister: if the UCA Advisory Board was established to provide advice to the advocate when the market was deregulated, what will be their role moving forward now that the advocate is established?

Mr. Khan: Again, I'd like to thank the member for the question. That's a very good question. I've recently had a number of discussions with the chair of the UCA Advisory Board as well as members of the board. There's a commitment to work with our department to develop a framework for that stakeholder engagement piece, which we all recognize is very important in the success of the UCA and their office.

2:40

Mr. Casey: To the same minister: if the advisory board is still required to ensure that stakeholders can bring their concerns forward, is the office of the UCA doing an effective job?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure this hon. member and all members of the House that the UCA and his office are doing an outstanding job protecting consumers when it comes to issues around electricity and gas from a consumer perspective. I want to inform the House that last year the UCA received over 28,000 calls and has fielded almost 112,000 hits to their website. They do a remarkable job. We're proud to support that office.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The time for question period has expired. In 30 seconds from now we will continue with Members' Statements, and we'll start with Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Melinda Hunt

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday our family received devastating news. We were shattered, we were broken, and over the weekend we took some time for togetherness. Today I want to tell you the story of Melinda Hunt. Melinda is a vibrant, smart, amazing 18-year-old, who our family loves and adores. She is my niece, and her dad, Ron, was my brother. I felt strongly that I couldn't do her justice today, so I'm going to tell her story in her own words.

Last week my neurologist said: I'm sorry, Melinda; you have juvenile Huntington's disease. Of course, I broke down, and my world shattered. Then he opened the other envelope and said: you have 63 CAG repeats. The juvenile version means that the symptoms of Huntington's start earlier, and they're more intense, and they progress much faster.

I started to realize that I act exactly how my dad did when he was sick. At work it was 10 times harder for me than it should be, my short-term memory was messing with me, and I was having intense troubles counting money, making change, or counting anything. I would stop what I was doing, and I would

break down. My dad had a rare case of Huntington's and had high CAG repeats also. It came with the label that he's going to die young, and he did. My CAG repeats are higher. That means mine is worse than his.

With such a high number of CAG repeats and the term juvenile Huntington's, I'm terrified that my death isn't far into my future. I'll be 19 in three months. I've just learned to live life as best I can. I love it and make the best of it, like my dad. I don't hate my dad for giving me his disease. He's my hero, and he always will be.

However, that doesn't mean my world isn't shattered. I've never felt my heart sink so low into my chest. I haven't cried so much since my dad passed, and I feel sick. Having them look at your face and tell you that you have Huntington's disease and you're going to die is paralyzing.

Mr. Speaker, we have one job, and that is to live an extraordinary life. We share this story with all Albertans to help bring awareness and some compassion to those with such rare diseases as Huntington's.

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

Seniors' Supports

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government knows that Alberta's seniors are an essential part of our communities, who need adequate programs to support their needs. Through their many sacrifices they have enriched our communities. Ensuring that our seniors are well cared for and well looked after is something I am deeply committed to. Seniors make up 7 per cent of my wonderful constituency of Edmonton-McClung.

Like all great societies, we as Albertans are only as good as those who have come before us. Because of all the hard work they have done to help build this great province that we know and love today, it is our obligation, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that seniors across our communities continue to have the support they need to live independent and fulfilling lives and that they are provided with the right care in the right place at the right time.

That is why the government of Alberta has been acting quickly to provide more spaces for seniors and to enhance the safety of seniors' lodges and apartments across the province. Of the more than 26 new spaces almost 400 will be allocated for long-term care throughout the province and more than 300 for restorative care in Edmonton and Calgary. Supportive living provides a homelike setting where residents remain as independent as possible with access to services and care that meets their changing needs.

Mr. Speaker, I'm grateful that we have a government which has made seniors a priority not just through words but by action.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Bill 21

Safety Codes Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 21, the Safety Codes Amendment Act, 2015.

The amendments will strengthen the administration, governance, and enforcement of the safety codes system throughout Alberta. The purpose of Bill 21 is to ensure that Albertans continue to be safe no matter where they live, work, and play. I look forward to

speaking more about the benefits of this legislation, and I'm confident that it will result in enhanced safety for Albertans.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

**Bill 205
Police (Protection of Victims of Sexual Violence)
Amendment Act, 2015**

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise this afternoon to introduce Bill 205, the Police (Protection of Victims of Sexual Violence) Amendment Act, 2015, on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

This bill will allow the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to make regulations governing the procedures and processes for police services to follow in undertaking and managing investigations into sexual assaults. This will complement the work that's being done by the Minister of Human Services and the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. I invite you to join me in debating this important piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Government House Leader, were you trying to catch my eye with respect to Bill 21, as moved by the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane?

Mr. Denis: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me. I would move that Bill 21 be added to Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View or someone on behalf of? Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much. I do have two tablings on behalf of the hon. member. These, of course, are related to the questions that he asked today. The first is a book by Anne Geddes, *Protecting Our Tomorrows: Portraits of*—oh, I'm not going to get through this word properly. It's portraits of children who have suffered from meningitis. I will table that.

The second tabling on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View is the commentary by the C.D. Howe Institute, *A Shot in the Arm: How to Improve Vaccination Policy in Canada*.

May I proceed with my own tablings, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Yes, please.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Earlier I had introduced the president and the chief executive officer of the Edmonton Social Planning Council, who are celebrating their 75th anniversary this year. I'm very honoured to be able to table the appropriate number of copies of their most recent report, which is entitled *A Profile of Poverty in Edmonton*. This is an absolute gold mine of information, and the one on my desk is well thumbed. Just as an example, they talk about how the province and the region are producing a lot of jobs, but we still have over 59 per cent of Albertan children in poverty, living in families where one or both parents worked full-

time for the entire year. There's that and a number of other excellent observations and statistics complete with charts. I recommend that everyone take advantage of this report.

Thank you very much.

2:50

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

Seeing none, permit me, then, to rise and table today the requisite number of copies of the 2013 Legislative Assembly Office annual report, titled *Respecting Our Past, Embracing Our Future*.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Campbell, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Act the Members of the Legislative Assembly pension plan annual report for the year ended March 31, 2014; pursuant to the Insurance Act the Automobile Insurance Rate Board 2014 annual report.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. There are no points of order today. That's a good sign of progress being made in a harmonious fashion. Therefore, let us move on.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Committee Membership Changes

23. Mr. Denis moved:
Be it resolved that the following changes to
- (a) the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services be approved: that Mr. McAllister replace Mr. McDonald;
 - (b) the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future be approved: that Dr. Starke replace Mr. McDonald.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. Does anyone wish to rise? I see no one.

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: The question has been called, so let us ask the Government House Leader if he wishes to close debate or go straight to the vote.

Mr. Denis: I would move that we close debate on this controversial motion.

[Government Motion 23 carried]

**Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

**Bill 18
Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wasn't going to rise to speak to this particular bill at Committee of the Whole previously, but due to some of the responses earlier today in question period I think it's imperative that we do discuss this.

In response to some questions from the Member for Livingstone-Macleod the Minister of Municipal Affairs had indicated that they were not certain that they were going to proceed with the fixing-up of the Kananaskis golf course. So she is now requesting sixteenish million dollars in the appropriation interim supply without knowing whether or not those dollars are going to be used. So my question here, of course, is: are you or are you not going to use these monies? If you're not going to use these monies, let's take it out of this bill. Clearly, it's not a priority. Wouldn't it be the safe thing to do, to just take this out of the bill itself if you're not going to use these?

I mean, Madam Chair, like, there's this massive inconsistency, and I think this is going to be the conclusion of it. I think this issue is not going to go away because Albertans right now, when they're going to hear about doom and gloom and the budget and how terrible everything is, they're going to at the same time say: well, why would you request upwards of tens of millions of dollars to fix a golf course if things are so bad, especially when the minister said that she wasn't certain whether these monies were going to be used? I just want to know whether or not this government is actually going to proceed with that.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. As I said during question period, there are concerns that we have about this. It is under review. If we don't use it, we won't spend it; it'll be left in there. That's very clear: if it's not used, it will not be spent.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any others who wish to comment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to rise again and speak around the issues that are brought to the fore by Bill 18, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015. I did have some time to do some checking. I was saying that previous versions of the interim supply had listed an end date of June. In fact, they hadn't. They've always listed the end of the entire fiscal year that's being addressed. So in this case they are talking about the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016. The outline and promise or plan from the government has always been given orally that the money is to be used and a budget will be passed before the end of June. I, unfortunately, was not able to find in *Hansard* where the government has indicated that this time. So I don't know if it's the end of June. It might be the end of July.

I was also really interested that the Minister of Energy was so taken with my speeches on this particular subject that he wanted to hear more and even different versions. You know, honestly, Madam Chair, I am more than happy to give him a different version if I can have a different government that actually delivers information in a different way, in a way that actually gives information.

I continue to be quite alarmed by the amount of information that this government won't release. It won't give us any kind of adequate information in budget documents. The written questions and motions for return are delivered a year after the fact, after they've agreed to produce the information. For my purposes, receiving something in March 2015 that was agreed to in April 2014, you know, you figure that they sat on it that long deliberately. I mean, the press releases were press releases, for heaven's sake. We could have had the background to this information pretty quickly, but the useful part of that was long past useful to me by the time I got the information.

It's a game that the government plays about what they're doing. I think for the public there is less and less patience for that hoarding of information because with the Internet, in this day and age, lots of people can get access. They can watch the live streaming. They can go back and see what people have said previously and how ministers are deflecting the questions. I think that's a real issue.

Of course, with interim supply, you know, every question we ask, the answer is: wait for the budget. So it's a bit of a frustrating debate because we're not given any information to go on, and then the government gets irritated when we stand up and say: there's no information here. So it's a bit of a mutual-loathing loop, if I could put it that way.

As well, the government has moved to this odd – I was going to say queer, but that's not appropriate – system of the four different categories. No, I don't have a problem with adding them all up. I just find it really interesting that the government itself can't manage to do that in its own documents. They leave it for everyone to whip out their calculators and, I guess, do it while we're standing here.

3:00

An Hon. Member: Where's your calculator?

Ms Blakeman: It's on my computer, but I'll get it for you if you really need it.

Of course, there have been a number of people that have noted the extra amount of money, quite a high amount of money, \$28 million, that is being allocated to the Chief Electoral Officer. I'm less exercised about this than some of my opposition colleagues because I've seen this one come around before. They always have enough money for the full election in the third year of an election cycle, and frankly this is why: if the government goes early. I've had one other election that was called early, by the then Premier Klein, who called one at three and a half years, but the rest of them were all around the four-year mark. It is extraordinary to have an election called almost three years to the day from the last one. I think the 2012 election was April 22. The bookmakers are telling us April 27 this time, so, you know, five days' difference.

We're looking forward to seeing the budget a week from now, and I really encourage the government to share some information. Given the budget process that we now work under, when I talk to people about, you know, why it is important to have opposition, why opposition matters, I talk about holding the government accountable, but I'm also showing how the government has moved the measuring sticks. What are they called in football? There are two guys with chains, one on either end, and they move it along for the downs. Help me. I just don't do the sports metaphors very well.

Ms Pastoor: Linesmen.

Ms Blakeman: Linesmen. Okay. So the linesmen. Thank you very much.

I'd like to see that move forward because we get so little time to debate this and almost no information to debate it with. I just don't think it's serving the government well or anybody else well when

we have to plod our way through: “Okay. Well, what is this covering? How many employees are there? What happened to this program? Is that program still there?” It’s not hard to put that information in, and I don’t think anyone in the public would begrudge a couple of extra pages in the budget documents in order to have that information be made available to not only the opposition but, in fact, the public at large and business and everyone else that uses those books.

It’s just a little cheap, a little churlish of government to continually refuse to do this, and I just loathe that budget process. It is almost a waste of time at this point. We can get so little information, and we’ve got so little time to ask. I mean, honestly, 10 minutes allocated to discuss the budget of Health at \$17 billion: you know, yeah, sure, that’s the worst example, but that’s one of almost every department I can think of where we’re trying to get information out of government ministers that should be easy to get.

Unfortunately, it’s all devolved into a rather tawdry and sad situation now. I hope that we can see some improvement, but you know, Madam Chair, I really don’t think we’re going to until the government gets such a scare that it will smarten up. We did see a bit of a scare when they thought the Wildrose was really going to cream them. All of a sudden there were better manners in the House and a bit more cordial reaction between people, a little bit more willing to co-operate, but after they ate most of the Wildrose, that disappeared, so I really don’t have very high expectations of this government. I’d love to be surprised, but I don’t have very high expectations.

You know, what am I supposed to say to this interim supply? Yeah – whoopee – we’re going to give a blank cheque to the government to spend billions of dollars without any idea about what they’re going to do with it? We, hopefully, are going to get a budget document next Thursday, but then I look at a number of other things that the Premier said were going to happen that didn’t happen, and I think: well, I guess that’s not for sure either because we could get to next Thursday and for whatever reason he’s decided not to put a budget down or lay a budget in front of us. I just hope that those are a few of the promises that the government can keep, and I look forward to actually seeing the numbers that are supposed to be in the documents.

Thanks very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It’s my honour to rise and speak here in Committee of the Whole on Bill 18, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015. I’ve got a few different comments and concerns about this bill. I will be supporting this bill because I do understand the intention and the necessity, so that the government can continue to provide services and meet its obligations from April until June. I do find it interesting, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, that in previous years the interim supply has not been requested by government to go until June, which raises some eyebrows and confirms suspicions about, likely, a looming election.

Some of my concerns with the bill are because the spending is significant in certain areas, that I’m going to highlight momentarily, which causes concern if that is an indicator of the spending that the upcoming budget may look like. I mean, part of my concern – I’ll get right to it, Madam Chair – is the increase in spending in Culture and Tourism. If we look at what’s being requested in this bill, if that was to continue throughout the year, it would amount to a huge budget increase to Culture and Tourism. Now, this budget increase would be positive in the increase to tourism for the province, the

economic impacts. Obviously, we’re well aware that tourism is one of the significant contributors to revenue in the province and has a significant economic benefit to Alberta.

But our hope and my hope, Madam Chair, is that if there is this significant increase, there would be an increase to the funding of arts. We’ve been advocating for increased support to the arts for many years. We know that the arts also have a significant economic impact and value to communities, both directly and indirectly, throughout the province. We have been advocates of increased funding for the Foundation for the Arts, more support for television and film production within the province, and supports for libraries, et cetera. So if investment in culture and in the arts is actually increased in this budget, that’s something that is very positive, in our view.

A concern is that there is less capital investment in Health, Madam Chair. You know, we’ve been releasing and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona especially has been releasing much information in the last few months on the state of Alberta hospitals and the need for more hospitals because of the growth that our province has been experiencing for some time and continues to experience. This week, for example, we released documents that show that only nine months into the 2014-15 fiscal year 1,376 surgeries have been cancelled across the province because of capacity issues. That’s a grave concern to us. The number of surgeries postponed at the Stollery children’s hospital has almost already doubled last year’s numbers, and we’re still in the first quarter.

We released documents highlighting the number of times that the most overcapacity protocols have been activated, which is alarming. The highest risk level overcapacity protocol was triggered 43 times in September of last year in Calgary emergency rooms alone, including September 24, 2014, when every single one of Calgary’s ERs reported triggering high-risk overcapacity protocols. In Edmonton emergency rooms in October 2014 overcapacity triggers were activated 344 times.

We released documents on the need to expand the maternal child unit at the Northern Lights regional hospital, showing that this facility was already insufficient to deal with the current population of Fort McMurray, let alone if the population increases, as is expected.

3:10

It’s also quite alarming, Madam Chair, when you look at the state of and the ability of our facilities to keep up, especially when you look at the growth within the province. I’d draw attention to Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie. As far as the growth rates and their birth rates, Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie are the two fastest growing cities in the country. I mean, these are some examples of the serious need for more hospitals in this province, but from the indication in Bill 18 the capital investments in terms of interim estimates are not likely to reach the investment level that is desperately needed throughout the province.

Now, Madam Chair, our hospitals don’t only have issues with overcapacity, but unfortunately they are in a very pitiful state as far as their integrity and structure. You know, it’s evidenced here, clearly, that the PC government has squandered our resources and failed to invest in hospital infrastructure, which is very alarming. The Alberta NDP has released AHS preservation lists which show the projects that need to be completed to ensure our hospitals can continue to function. These lists show 37 incomplete projects, totalling \$10 million, at the Chinook regional hospital and 16 overdue projects, totalling almost \$5 million, at St. Michael’s health centre. For Calgary hospitals these lists outline \$100 million worth

of overdue infrastructure maintenance projects in three major Calgary hospitals.

On the 17th of March we released documents about the deferred maintenance at Edmonton area hospitals, and they outline \$225 million needed for critical infrastructure projects, which include 10 fire safety upgrades, including sprinklers, fire alarms, and long-awaited lightning rods; 11 unfunded asbestos abatements at the Royal Alex alone; multiple elevator replacements and upgrades; mould abatement at the Misericordia. Clearly, we are in need of more investment in health infrastructure, definitely not less.

Within the capital budget for Infrastructure we have schools, hospitals, among other things. Madam Chair, as I have travelled the province speaking especially with school boards from around the province, they are desperate for dollars for deferred maintenance. You know, they're getting to a point in their deferred maintenance price tag where schools are soon going to be in the category of being unsafe, or it is going to be unaffordable for school boards to do all the major infrastructure upgrades that are necessary just to keep the doors open. We're not even talking about modernizations. Considering there is such a shortage of school spaces, of classrooms, and of new schools, this is just going to exacerbate an already ballooning problem.

Again, to jump back to our hospitals, there's definitely a thread here going through all of our different infrastructure. I mean, I could go on about bridges and roads as well, but when we look at hospitals, they're already bursting at the seams, and there already is a shortage of beds. Again, it's been pointed out by my colleagues that we need a serious investment. We needed it many years ago. If this bill is any indication of the dollars that are going to be injected into our health care system and our education system as far as infrastructure goes, we are really in a lot of trouble here, Madam Chair.

I just wanted to mention that on February 18 the Edmonton Catholic school board reported they were going to be spending \$3.5 million for necessary infrastructure upgrades, money they could have otherwise spent or used directly on educating students. This PC government is forcing school boards to divert money away from the classroom, away from one-on-one instruction, away from educational assistance and supports needed in our schools to ensure that kids get the one-on-one support that they need. They will be forced to divert money away from the classroom to spend on updates and on necessary infrastructure like ceiling repairs because this PC government continues to inadequately fund our education system, our schools, and is neglecting the urgency with which we need to invest in our schools and hospitals.

Madam Chair, we have a document that was released to us through FOIP that outlines an \$850 million deferred maintenance price tag for schools alone across the province. That is significant. That number is going to continue to increase and will balloon. As that number increases and we fail to invest in the critical infrastructure that Albertans deserve and need, that price tag is going to be exacerbated and grow very quickly as things like roof repairs lead to leaks, you know, and water damage within these very buildings and are going to be much more costly to repair than if they had been caught early on.

Our roads and bridges are desperate for investment. The Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, AAMDC, estimates that \$70 million a year for 10 years consistently is needed for bridges and bridge repair alone. I mean, that is again something that is critical for trade and getting goods to market. Many of the roads and bridges throughout the province are used by the oil and gas industry, our forestry industry, our agricultural industry to move products to market. You know, when a bridge is forced to be shut down because of potential issues of safety, that has a huge economic

impact on families and on the Alberta economy. Failing to invest in infrastructure, which this PC government has done year after year, is not the solution and is going to have a very significant negative impact on the Alberta economy and on Alberta families.

Madam Chair, the challenge is that a few years ago we had record-high prices for oil. We've had incredible resource wealth in this province, yet this PC government has managed to squander it all away and failed to invest in critical infrastructure and has left Albertans with a very serious infrastructure deficit.

So those are my concerns with this bill and with the indication that this government has given on how they're going to fund things from our critical infrastructure to our health care system to our schools.

I do want to flag a couple of things, Madam Chair, in my last few seconds here. The \$28 million that is appropriated for the office of the Chief Electoral Officer: I find it quite rich that members opposite had stood up and spoken when the former Premier, three Premiers ago – we seem to be going through them very quickly – stood up and introduced a bill that would provide Albertans with a fixed election season. Now, the opposition pushed for an actual fixed election date. We didn't quite get that far, but we had an election season. Members opposite from the PC caucus stood up and spoke about how this would provide stability, how this would provide the opposition with the ability to plan for an election, that they're not going to use their status as government to make a bunch of election promises prior to an election. Yet this seems to be going completely out the window.

Clearly, this current Premier has no problem with going back on bills, and neither does his cabinet, clearly, who thought that this was a good idea and trumpeted the fact that this bill was being brought forward. You know, I'm curious to hear an actual answer from a minister as far as how and why \$28 million is being allocated right now for Elections Alberta if our election is not supposed to occur for another 12 months.

3:20

As well, I appreciate the fact that earlier today the Minister of Municipal Affairs talked about how the dollars allocated for the golf course would be under review. I think many Albertans find it quite outrageous, you know, that critical infrastructure needs like a cancer institute in Calgary or, again, repairing the massive infrastructure deficit around the province, cutting down on wait times, et cetera, seem to be less important than reconstructing a golf course and getting them up and going. Again, as other members have pointed out, there are still families devastated from the floods from years ago, that are waiting for remuneration, waiting to get back on their feet, yet that seems to be less of a priority than building a golf course.

Madam Chair, we will be supporting this because of our understanding that this is necessary for programs and services to continue, but we do call into question some of the dollars being appropriated and what this means as this bill is a window into the budget for the rest of the 2015-16 fiscal year.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 18?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 18 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.
The Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. At this time I would move that we rise and report.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 18.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.
Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 16 Statutes Amendment Act, 2015

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and move third reading of Bill 16, the Statutes Amendment Act, 2015.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Just to recap, this act will amend the following pieces of legislation: the Provincial Court Act; the Court of Queen's Bench Act; the Police Act; the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation Act; the Land Titles Act; and the Post-secondary Learning Act. These updates will ensure that provincial legislation is clear, consistent, and effective. There will be no more amendments to this bill during Committee of the Whole, and I would like to thank all hon. members in this House for supporting it.

The Provincial Court Act amendments. The three amendments to the Provincial Court Act will improve the civil procedure and other processes for the Provincial Court to clarify its jurisdiction. First, it'll increase the maximum monetary jurisdiction that may be prescribed by the cabinet in civil matters in the Provincial Court from \$50,000 to \$100,000. The second will update the civil matters section of the Provincial Court Act by repealing provisions governing civil procedure. The third provides a procedural foundation for the court to stream disputed civil claims to the resolution track, which will be part of a pilot project in Edmonton and Calgary later this year.

The Court of Queen's Bench Act amendments will create a second Associate Chief Justice position to help the Court of Queen's Bench deal with increasing case files and give the strategic leadership needed to effectively serve Albertans. It also gives the Chief Justice the power to issue directives limited to the jurisdiction

of masters, who are judicial officers appointed to the province, sitting on the Court of Queen's Bench.

The Police Act amendment, the next act, has necessary changes to it for potential inconsistencies between the act and the police service regulation which have been identified. It is in regard to the definition of those who can be designated as presiding officers governing or disciplining the performance of the detail of a police officer in the regulation. This proposed amendment will address a potential inconsistency. In addition, there is another small amendment in the alignment of the legislation to require the police service and the police commissions to notify the director of law enforcement about police complaints and how the complaint was addressed.

Next is the amendment to the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation Act. The foundation was established in 1994 to develop activity partnerships in sports, recreation, active living, parks, and wildlife programs. The amendment to the act officially changes the name of the foundation to the Alberta Sport Connection, which it has been operating under since 2013. It also includes provisions for the transfer of land previously owned by the foundation as it has not been actively engaged in the management of the lands donated to them or purchased since 2013. In the meantime the lands will continue to be managed by Culture and Tourism.

Next, the amendments to the Land Titles Act. The Alberta land titles system and its supporting software are undergoing significant upgrades. A key addition to the system will be the ability for groups of subscribers to submit documents to the land titles registry electronically with unique digital signatures. The amendments to this act are required to enable the use of these digital signatures. In addition, the amendments will prevent title insurance companies from making claims against the titles insurance fund, which is intended to compensate individuals where there's a true loss suffered due to defect in title.

Lastly, the amendment to the Post-secondary Learning Act shall be made. It consists of the legal status of the board of governors for both Medicine Hat College and SAIT. They were established by an order in council in 1970 and 1982 respectively. A number of years later both of these orders were rescinded by new orders in council. In the interim it was a simple rescind, expiring the board appointments and appointing new members. In some cases, due to the drafting errors, the entire order in council was inadvertently rescinded. The errors were discovered, and the information was required in respect to the establishment of one of the institutes. Alberta Justice and Solicitor General has reviewed the file and concluded that rescinding the orders in council left it unclear as to the status of the boards of SAIT and Medicine Hat College. Therefore, to ensure there's no question about the legal establishment of these boards, a retroactive amendment is required. This amendment is a simple, straightforward way to clarify the legal establishment of the boards of the two southern Alberta institutes, and it will resolve unequivocally the peace of mind of the students' facility and the instructors.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Bill 16 was developed with input from a number of stakeholder groups, including the judiciary, Alberta legal communities, and the public and with the support of these amendments among these stakeholders. It reflects the work that we are doing here in government to ensure Alberta laws are clear and consistent and that the provincial legal system is kept up to date for everyone's benefit.

I want to thank everybody in the Legislature for reviewing and considering Bill 16, and I ask for their support in third reading. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I first wanted to thank this member for carrying his first bill in the Chamber.

Secondly, I just wanted to mention a couple of other things. The addition of a second Associate Chief Justice in the Calgary area will have a significant impact on the operations of the Court of Queen's Bench. I've had many meetings with judges in that regard, and I'm sure that they will be pleased that we are taking this step.

I also just wanted to mention, Mr. Speaker, that a lot of the work being done here in the Provincial Court of Alberta is actually groundbreaking in this entire country. We increased the limit of the Provincial Court from \$25,000 to \$50,000 effective August 1, 2014, which gives us the highest limit anywhere in Canada with the exception of Quebec, which has a different legal system, of course. The new limit will allow the minister by way of order in council to go up to \$100,000.

3:30

But perhaps most important, Mr. Speaker, is the bringing in of resolution tracks. What are resolution tracks? Well, I don't believe that anyone should have to have a lawyer to go and settle a small matter. Sixty per cent of the disputes that are in this level of court are small debts. They don't require full trials. With the consent of some of the parties involved, you're going to really speed up their access to justice and their experience with the system. I would fathom to say that more people will have experience with the Provincial Court than any other court in the province, and being able to address their concerns in a timely and efficient manner is going to speed up other levels of the court. It'll improve access to justice. As the Supreme Court of Canada has often said, justice can't simply be done; it must be seen to be done. These people are going to see justice be done and leave with a better experience of our judicial system.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and speak to Bill 16, the Statutes Amendment Act, 2015. I think it's important to point out at the start that, you know, when the PC government brings forward bills like this, there's a real concern. Again, it's often put to us as: this is mostly housekeeping. But really we're talking about omnibus bills that group together significant pieces of legislation that should be given their due course for debate in this Chamber. You know, it definitely provides a real concern and hinders our ability to get into each of these bills as separate issues. I'll try to go through and speak to this.

I believe I did speak to this bill in its second reading, but I'm happy to speak to it again because one of my major concerns with this bill is around the issue of legal aid. Mr. Speaker, access to legal aid is extremely important to ensure that Albertans have access to justice. Now, it's interesting that around 1 in 3 Canadians will experience a legal problem in a three-year period. In British Columbia their legal aid provider found that 83 per cent of B.C. residents with incomes under \$50,000 were likely to have a civil law problem. Of these, 11 per cent retained a lawyer, 44 per cent dealt with it themselves or left it unresolved, and 22 per cent sought nonlegal assistance.

Mr. Speaker, the Court of Queen's Bench Chief Justice Neil Wittmann stated that there's certainly connectivity between the legal aid issue and self-representation. That affects our whole

system. It's a systemic problem that gives rise to more and more time being spent on the cases where there isn't legal representation for all parties. Now, clearly, the dearth of funding for legal aid is having an impact not only on those Albertans who cannot afford legal representation and are being denied legal aid but on the court system as a whole.

This government, I want to point out, Mr. Speaker, has shown considerable failures when it comes to legal aid. In October the government announced that Legal Aid in Alberta was going to receive a one-time payment of \$5.5 million and that there may not be any funding for them in the next budget. We've long been advocates, especially the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, for better access to justice, and we've been critical of this government's failure when it comes to legal aid.

The \$5.5 million we're voting on today is simply not sufficient, Mr. Speaker. Who knows what's going to happen down the road, in the future? You know, Legal Aid predicts that they'll need another \$8 million a year and will have a deficit of \$15 million by 2016-2017. They've had to reduce their services, which means a drop in services. They've cut 35 jobs in regional offices and 12 in Calgary alone as a result increasing obligations in Alberta courts for government-appointed lawyers for individuals denied legal aid. I also want to say that there have been 33,000 more applications made for legal aid services. So this is a significant concern for us, especially, you know, that legal aid is a right, and it needs to be adequately funded for access for all Albertans for justice and access to the courts.

Now, you know, Mr. Speaker, in light of the \$7 billion hole in the province's revenue cuts, legal aid should not be one of them. There are numerous examples, time and time again, of the positive gains that occur when legal aid is adequately and properly invested in. In the U.K., for example, researchers found that the social return on investment on debt and housing cases was over \$9 for every \$1 invested. In the U.S. there's a 2007 study on Nebraska, and they estimated the benefit of legal aid at \$13.5 million whereas the cost was only \$3.4 million. The benefits included benefits awarded to litigants, benefits and cost savings to improve the quality of life, tax savings, and an increased economic opportunity, which is significant.

I'm going to change gears now and talk briefly about the modernization of the Land Titles Act. Now, we recognize the importance of modernizing that act, and most of the changes allow the use of electronic documents in bringing our practice up to speed, up to date, and allowing the streamlining of this process. So for that section of this bill, Mr. Speaker, I'm in favour of these changes and view them as positive. You know, I also understand the need for administrative changes in addressing issues like those that mandated the amendments to the Police Act and the Post-secondary Learning Act. So those two are quite positive, but again the concern is the act's omnibus status, and again that is largely because it doesn't allow each separate piece of legislation to have its own due course through this House and time allocated for each piece.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I said at the beginning of this, I will be supporting this bill in this third reading, but I have tried to highlight some of my concerns and areas where we, the Alberta NDP, have been strong advocates, as I have said, of investing in legal aid and ensuring that all Albertans have access to justice in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I see no one rising under 29(2)(a).

Is there anyone else who wishes to enter the debate?

If not, are you ready to close debate, then, hon. Member for Little Bow?

Mr. Donovan: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'll close debate on that and call for the question.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a third time]

Bill 15 Securities Amendment Act, 2015

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the President of Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance I'm pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 15, the Securities Amendment Act, 2015.

As we heard at second reading, ongoing review of and regular amendments to Alberta's Securities Act are required to keep pace with industry developments and to support the ongoing reform of the Canadian regulatory system. As a quick recap, the proposed amendment relates to four areas: enforcement-related amendments, point-of-sale related amendments, amendments that support the continued harmonization of derivatives regulation, and house-keeping amendments of a technical nature.

The proposed enforcement-related amendments are designed to improve the Alberta Securities Commission's enforcement capacity.

The proposed point-of-sale amendments will facilitate the development of a summary disclosure document for exchange-traded funds. This is similar to the new fund facts documents that are now being prepared for mutual funds and segregated funds, which provide concise information about a fund in an easy to understand format.

3:40

The proposed amendments relating to harmonization include the prohibition on front running and the creation of a new definition of associate. These amendments are intended to curtail insider trading and tipping.

Finally, there are several technical and housekeeping amendments to Alberta's Securities Act, which are intended to clarify or update existing provisions.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments will ensure Alberta honours its commitment under the 2004 memorandum of understanding through ongoing securities regulatory reform and to meet international commitments. Regardless of what happens with the national regulator initiative, the reality is that it will not yet be operational. So it is incumbent upon Alberta and the other provincial governments and their securities regulators to continue to work co-operatively on improving securities regulation to ensure the fair, efficient, and effective operation of our capital markets and improve protection for investors.

I ask that members of this House support the bill, and I move third reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, are there any others who wish to enter the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll keep my comments fairly brief. I just want to highlight the fact that, you know, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has been calling

on the need for a national regulator and a need for tougher regulation on securities for years now. I do want to just cite the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina are the only countries in the world besides Canada without a national securities regulator. Most other countries around the world see a need and a role for it. I know that there are other provinces that are pushing for it, and of course it's this PC government that's been resisting the need and the call for a national regulator.

Calls for one date back to 1935 and actually include the 1964 Porter Commission, a 1979 study by the department of consumer and corporate affairs, among the 1994 memorandum of understanding between the Atlantic provinces and federal government, the 2003 Wise Persons' Committee report, and the 2006 Crawford panel. So as it stands, to my knowledge, Mr. Speaker, only B.C. and Ontario and the federal government are going to be entering into a co-operative regulatory system, and once again by choice this PC government in Alberta will be left out.

We have in this House, because this is the revamp or the second coming of a bill from the past, to continue to use resources and time in updating legislation, in harmonizing it with other jurisdictions across the country as opposed to just having a national regulator that could deal with this for our whole country. I think it's important to know, Mr. Speaker, that capital markets are increasingly integrated and increasingly global. It's inefficient and in many cases impossible for a provincial regulator to be able to handle these complexities. It's also not the best use of resources when we can deal with this on a national level.

I think part of our concern is the fact that a system with 13 different territorial and provincial regulators leaves us fairly vulnerable to fraud or to just increased regulatory failure. When you look at the crisis that occurred back in 2007-2008, the asset-backed commercial paper crisis, it cost billions of dollars to Canadians and was a symptom of this problem. I think that if we truly want to protect the citizens of this province and protect the integrity of our system and ensure that the industry is properly regulated, we should be moving toward a national securities regulator.

Again this bill continues to come back to the House in various forms and needs to be updated every couple of years. I think we should deal with this once and for all, move forward, working with other provinces and our federal cousins, and ensure that Albertans are protected and that we are less susceptible to fraud and other potential problems that could occur if we try to deal with this solely within our own province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others who wish to join in? The hon. Member for Rimbe-Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise and, like the other members here, am going to support the bill. But the bill is, I think, a haphazard attempt at regulation that doesn't quite fit the current state of affairs in our financial industry. Maybe it is the answer that we have a national securities regulator. There are arguments both for it and against it.

One of the things that I picked up out of this bill, which is carried on from the previous act, is that the commission by any order can exempt any person, company, trade, distribution, security or derivative from all or any provision of Alberta securities laws. Now, that to me is a massive hole in our regulation. I don't know how a small jurisdiction – when I say small jurisdiction, when we're dealing with derivatives, derivatives are a world-wide phenomenon in the financial industry, and Alberta is a player in that. It's in many ways a small player but a player nonetheless. So I don't know how

it puts us at an advantage or a disadvantage when the regulator themselves can take a specific deal and exempt it from our security laws.

You know, dealing with over-the-counter derivatives like puts and calls, various options, is one aspect, but the over-the-counter trades are the majority of derivatives trading. They have caused tremendous problems in our financial industry. They are the cause of the 2008 financial collapse in the world. They are the cause of the 2012 issue that we dealt with around the world. If you go back, you can look at other situations where derivatives have impacted the world financial system in a very negative way.

I realize the ministry is trying to figure out how to regulate this or how to control it in what, I would hope, would be in the best interest of the public, but in all honesty, it fails miserably if we're not negotiating on a national or an international level to come up with solutions. We cannot solve this problem alone.

I would like that to what's happening in the oil industry today. The price of oil is dropping, yet the price at the pump is rising, and we are told that that is somehow a world market situation. Oil and gas is probably one of the major derivatives traded on the futures exchanges in and over the counter. How that impacts the daily price is always an interesting phenomenon. Whether that's a manipulation, free market, or collusion is always a question.

Here we are on a local jurisdiction level, a province trying to regulate, and to be perfectly honest, I think we're blowing a lot of hot air into a hurricane. There is a bigger problem here, much bigger than Alberta, and I think it needs to be dealt with on an international level. So with a local securities regulator taking this on, I'm not sure how they can possibly do this.

What I don't know and I don't think anyone in the government can tell me is how this is affecting our capital markets here in Alberta, whether it affects the raising of capital or infringes upon that and is an impediment to raising capital. I don't know that. I just know that it is problematic. It's problematic on a local level, which is provincial, a Canadian level, and an international level, and it needs to be addressed. But it can never – never – be addressed on just a local level.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to support the bill.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

I see no one. Is there anyone else who wishes to chime in on the debate?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education on behalf of the Minister of Finance to close debate.

Mr. Scott: Yes. I move to close debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The question is then called.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a third time]

3:50

Bill 13

Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015

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

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise today and move third reading of Bill 13, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 13's proposed amendments will enable mandatory watercraft inspection and other risk mitigation measures, give law enforcement officers greater opportunity when dealing with containment watercraft and greater clarity regarding the role in ensuring compliance with the law and providing

education about it, and include a controlled invasive species list in the act, including aquatic invasive species of concern to Alberta. At present the term "invasive" is not found anywhere in the Fisheries (Alberta) Act, and we have very little specified authority to address harmful aquatic invasive species.

Mr. Speaker, this approach is based on what is working to keep the western states below us mussel free. Increasing authority will allow designated fishery officers such as the RCMP, fish and wildlife officers, conservation officers, and forestry officers the ability to stop vehicles transporting watercraft that fail to stop at designated inspection stations. Watercraft inspectors are also proposed to have limited authority in inspecting and cleaning watercraft on-site at an inspection station. The watercraft inspectors must request fishery officers to be present if there is any need to take additional steps beyond inspection and cleaning. While the initial focus will be on watercraft, fishery officers and guardians will have the authority to inspect, detain, and quarantine any conveyance, container, or equipment that may be harbouring aquatic invasive species.

I would like to address some of the questions that were raised in Committee of the Whole yesterday. The main intent of the legislation is to allow authorities to address all circumstances where there are reasonable grounds that there is a potential contravention of the fisheries act or, specifically, that there are invasive species present. What constitutes reasonable grounds is not set out in the legislation. In this respect the legislation defers to the courts to determine whether the conditions for reasonable grounds are met. Section 28.02 ensures private dwellings are not to be entered or inspected by officials without first having permission from the person in possession or responsible or unless a warrant has first been obtained.

There are some specific reasons why the use of "any place" is captured in the legislation. An example would be to inspect a pond if there was a report of invasive plants or other invasive aquatic organisms in an area. Another would be to inspect retail fish markets where live aquatic species are routinely held. If reasonable grounds exist to inspect a container on a train, it would be done in a manner that would not conflict with federal transportation regulations.

Mr. Speaker, this is good legislation that will make a big difference in the efforts to protect our precious water resources. During Alberta's 2014 watercraft inspection season we inspected over 3,700 boats and intercepted four mussel-infested boats. Unfortunately, only 50 per cent of the boats stopped for voluntary inspection. Increasing authority for designated fishery officers will give them the ability to stop and detain any vehicle transporting watercraft that fail to stop at a designated inspection station, thus greatly reducing the risk of infested boats entering Alberta water bodies.

Mr. Speaker, if we don't take action on this, the cost of invasive mussel infestation would be upwards of \$75 million annually. These amendments ensure we have sufficient compliance authority and mechanisms to manage the potential introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. As promised, I did make contact with that incredibly powerful and knowledgeable group of people called old guys that fish and was able to get some really interesting and useful feedback, I think. One of the main points that they raised was that we don't have very many officers that are working in compliance. The member talked about: well, it

could be the RCMP; it could be a warden; it could be all kinds of people. But what I'm hearing from old guys that fish – that's a powerful group; I wouldn't go messing with them if I were you – is that they're not generally stopping vehicles. Now, they don't have enough time to. There are not enough of them to actually follow through on that.

So the concern and the question is: well, okay; we see what you're trying to do with these invasive species, but you don't have enough people doing the job right now, so how are you going to add more to their job and expect that we're going to be able to keep up with all of this? If you can't keep track of what's happening now and you don't have enough people in the field, how are we possibly going to manage it when we heap even more on their plate? I think that's a real concern. You know, I think: oh, well, maybe they're going to start using RCMP. But when you come through the border, they don't have time to look at that. They're just not looking at that stuff. Of all the times that I've gone back and forth with a snowmobile trailer, they've looked at it exactly once. They just don't have time. If you're going through Coutts – yeah, Coutts – that's a really busy border crossing. They've got a lot of stuff going on there and a lot of traffic going back and forth. They don't have time to stop these vehicles.

I didn't hear the member talking about a lot of increased staffing being put into this, and that may not be appropriate. Times are tough. Friends are few. Government is looking to cut positions. But this is what happened last time. We cut a lot of the people that do the monitoring and the compliance and enforcement, people like park wardens and licensing officers and the like. As a result, we basically lost control of poaching and, you know, clean, safe campgrounds and all that kind of stuff because there was just nobody there to do the work. So certain things fell into disrepair. There was certainly some pretty blatant flaunting of the law around hunting licences and poaching, et cetera. We might be in the same kind of situation here.

The second question was around training. I know the member mentioned that there was going to be a new kind of officer, a water specialist or something, a fishery guardian or a fishery officer, which is a new position that can be created under this act, but it's not giving us a great deal of detail about how they get trained. I think a lot of us would be kind of hard-pressed to be able to tell you exactly what a pumpkin seed looked like or a bighead or an orfe, or an ide, or a tubenose goby, a ruffe or a zander. So how are we training these people to be able to recognize these invasive species that they're supposed to? Like, what is the training program that's involved there? Having enough officers to actually perform this, what kind of training are they going to get?

The final piece. I think the hon. member sponsoring and I were talking somewhat at crosspurposes. She was talking about that no one can enter a private dwelling. That's true, but in sections 25, 26, 27, and 28 there are all kinds of powers that are being doled out here, and that includes the power to stop and order movement of the conveyances, which is literally to stop somebody pulling a trailer and say, "Move over," and the person is supposed to comply. That makes sense.

4:00

But I was asking the member about section 25, which says: "enter on and pass over land." Now, that's not a private dwelling. That can be done without a warrant according to section 25, so they can come onto your land and go across it in order to ensure compliance here or to ascertain the presence of any invasive organisms. They are entering private property there although it's not where you actually live.

Later the term "inspect any place or conveyance" – so "any place or conveyance" starts to turn up repeatedly. When I went and checked the definitions of that – and this appears on page 3 if anybody is following along here. The definition for "place" is a "building, structure . . . a tent or . . . temporary shelter." That could be a garage, could be a shed, could be a boathouse, could be one of those Quonset hut things that people have on their property for machinery. It's basically any structure that doesn't have someone living in it. They have the power to enter and inspect. That's the power of entry in section 26.

But in section 27 they have the power to enter and search any place or conveyance, again, without a warrant. Then you get to section 28, and they have the power to seize. Cross over, inspect, search, and seize: they can do all of that in any kind of structure except where you actually live on a permanent basis but not on a temporary basis. A lean-to or a tent, that kind of thing, they can go into without a warrant and enter, cross over, search, and seize, all of those things.

Again, when those kinds of powers are given and the power of discretion is given to officers on the front line, you want to know and feel very comfortable that they have had absolutely top-notch training and that you really can trust that they're going to come on and do exactly what they're supposed to do and that they're going to do a good job of it. That I am not seeing in this act.

So those were the problems that were specifically raised by old guys that fish: the number of staff that are available, the actual time in their jobs. That is the last piece that was raised. What is the ranking? We already have a number of other wardens and park people and wildlife licensed officers and monitoring officers that are out there, and they've already got a lot of jobs to do, and this is now being added to that. What's the hierarchy? Is the hierarchy that they're supposed to do this first and wildlife poaching second? Where's the hierarchy spelled out about exactly the way they're supposed to be approaching their jobs? I think that's important to know, not only for us as citizens or people who potentially will comply with these requests but also for the people doing the job, and I would hope that we could get that kind of information from the sponsoring member.

Once again, the number of officers available, how their time is ranked as to what they're supposed to do, training, the fact that we're giving them the power to cross over, enter, investigate, search, and seize, all of which are, you know, significant powers, and that they can come into every structure we have and cross our land except for the actual place where we live permanently: I'd be interested in hearing how those questions get answered, and then I can cut out the *Hansard* and mail it out to old guys that fish.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others who wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As much as I am a supporter of this bill – to deal with the issue of any invasive species, I think, is honourable. It's what the government should be doing, taking measures to actually do something about it, which I support, but where I have difficulty with this bill is the power of the search without a warrant. There are times in any type of law enforcement when this is tolerable, when it is necessary: when we're dealing with issues like first responders, and in this case under section 27 it talks about circumstances of danger to human life. Well, that makes sense to me, but what doesn't make sense to me is when we extend that privilege, where there is no threat yet we still don't require a warrant to enter onto someone's property.

That's what we're doing right here. We're actually legislating the ability to abuse. Now, I'm not going to say that anybody is intending to abuse power, but I think the safety margin that we should be taking any time we draft legislation is to never actually give the ability to abuse power. There need to be checks and balances.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre brought up the issue of training. We're creating this new position here of a fisheries guardian, and it's an interesting title. I don't know exactly what it is any more than anyone else does, yet the same title may or may not have the ability to enter onto private property without a warrant. When I think in terms of warrants, I'm thinking in terms of a qualified law enforcement officer, who has been trained, versus somebody who has been appointed or just anointed with the new title. It's really important that we have clarity in legislation to make sure that we don't abuse the power that we give to these law enforcement officials.

Because of that issue, I'm not going to support this bill. I'm going to take a principled stand on it, as much as I support – it will pass. We need to do something about protecting Alberta from invasive species, but in terms of allowing unfettered access to property and abuse of power, this one section, 27(1), does not protect the innocent, does not protect the average citizen for due process of law. What it does is that it gives the ability of abuse of power and the exercise of that abuse of power without very much of a recourse for the innocent citizen.

With that, I still support the government's effort to deal with the issue of invasive species. I will not support the violation of fundamental rights, things like freedom of speech, freedom of association – now, I know Bill 45 is coming back; we'll discuss that later – also the idea of the freedom of the enjoyment of your private property. To have some arbitrary authority say, "I can come onto your property" and that they can basically make it up and justify it as being reasonable: I think that's wrong. There has to be just cause, and it's not listed there. The onus is not on the law enforcement to prove their issue; it is now on the landowner to defend and prove that the entry was somehow unlawful. That's wrong. The onus of proof is on the wrong side of the equation.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I see no one wanting to take advantage of that.

Is there anyone else who wishes to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

4:10

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments from my two hon. colleagues ahead of me, and I can certainly concur with some of their concerns. I'm sure, as everybody knows in this house, I'm not really someone that takes orders well either or being told what to do. However, I come from southern Alberta. I have irrigation. This could destroy our irrigation. This could destroy the largest sustainable resource in this province, and it's called food. So if you'll permit me, I'd like to do just a little biology lecture here, and I think it's probably even lower than 101. Anyway, let's go for it.

Zebra and quagga mussels are virtually impossible to eradicate. They can cause millions of dollars in damage to water-operated infrastructure, disrupt natural food chains, and create toxic algae blooms. They can kill fish and birds, decrease property values, and reduce recreational enjoyment of natural areas. Any freshwater mussel that is attached to anything – that can be hip waders, kayaks; it doesn't have to necessarily be a motorboat. Anywhere that someone has spent time in water where there already exists mussels

can easily have those attached and then spread them. They spread quickly. One female mussel can produce up to a million eggs in a year. The population estimate for quagga mussels in Lake Havasu, Arizona, is 3 trillion while an estimate for zebra mussels in the Great Lakes is exponentially larger than that. Those numbers are pretty scary. I know they're little, tiny things, but when they start building on each other, it's like a concrete wall.

Ecologically speaking, zebra mussels, as I've mentioned, can wipe out entire populations of other species as they dominate a body of water. One of the harmful things these mussels do is deplete the water of calcium, which they absorb. Zebra mussels are filter feeders. That means that they strain water to absorb the food and nutrients they need from their environment. Mr. Speaker, a single adult zebra mussel can filter upwards of one litre of water per day. Nearly all particle matter is removed from that water. That includes microscopic plankton organisms, which form the basis of the entire food chain in a body of water. Other species depend on this food source for their survival. Zebra mussels also require calcium in order to build and maintain their shells. They absorb this calcium from the water around them, therefore depleting the calcium levels and certainly depleting that calcium level that is so necessary for all of the other species in that body of water. They literally can choke the life out of an ecosystem.

We should be very concerned, and I am very pleased with Bill 13 because it does say that we are concerned. The fact that we are having mandatory boat inspection, I think, speaks volumes to how important this is, and we will be able to get started on this right away. The boats that are coming in from the south, where there are huge infestations, will have a chance to be inspected properly, because of the snowbirds that are coming back with their boats.

As I've said before, irrigation is fundamental to farming, and ranchers require water transportation in order to care for their livestock. Pipes figure heavily, not the XL but pipes, in the work of irrigation, and they frequently draw from natural resources. Irrigation pipes are different than in the old days, when we had irrigation canals. They are now enclosed pipes. The difficulty would arise when zebra or quagga mussels got inside those pipes and proliferated. They could clog them and actually close them, and they're very difficult to get at because it's closed.

Again, Bill 13 is an exceptionally important bill, particularly in southern Alberta but certainly to any body of water that people enjoy as a recreation facility, so having it in third reading and being allowed to speak to it, I think, is a nice way for me to wind down a political career. I've worked very hard on this bill for two and a half years through PNWER and also brought it up as an issue with the Can/Am Border Trade Alliance, that I sat on for a couple of years.

Back to my former colleagues and what they had to say: this is an important first step. Better to take a first step than no step. I'm pleased to say that we are – well, I'm assuming that this will be passed, and we can start doing the educational portion, that will be so important.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. No one taking advantage of it?

Let's move to Drumheller-Stettler, then, and hear his words.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope to be brief and coherent. Some of the members opposite will disagree with that. The Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015, is an important piece of legislation. I happen to live along one of the interprovincial borders in western Canada, and I know it's one of the most porous borders. Certainly, the regulation isn't necessarily going to talk about this border – I understand – but the idea of ultimate control

was tried a long time ago in China, and it didn't really work out very well either, and it didn't work out very well in portions of Germany either. I certainly understand as an agrologist or a producer of food the importance of this. I understand the importance of water, but some of the legislation spoken to by the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre about rights of entry and improper legal access is of great concern to me.

I think it would be important if that was considered to be an amendment or something forward. I don't think that it's a hill to die on, but I hopefully would present that information to the Assembly so that if there are issues in the future, it's recognized. This may be a form of cutting one's nose off to spite their face. It could well be possible overkill, so I just wanted to recognize the severity of some of the legal implications there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see no one.

Is there anyone else who wishes to enter the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll weigh in very quickly and, first of all, just commend the member for this bill. I know this is a very serious issue. My only, you know, question and I guess concern is that if this is as serious as the mover of this bill has articulated, which I don't disagree with, then I hope that the government will be allocating resources because I know that the officers that work very diligently to protect our wildlife and natural resources are stretched quite thin. I mean, it's important to bring forward regulations in this area, but if they aren't enforced, then there is little point to bringing forward legislation. So my question to the government is: how will this be resourced, and will there be resources to ensure that we continue to protect the natural habitats of this province?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Seeing no one, is there anyone else who wishes to speak at this time?

If not, then let me go to Bonnyville-Cold Lake to close debate.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you. There are just a few things I want to say to close the debate. We will have enough manpower to staff the 11 stations 10 hours a day, seven days a week. There are also five roving crews that will be sent to secondary roads to respond to emergencies in events that draw a lot of boaters like fish derbies,

water board tournaments, and so on, so staffing is not going to be an issue there.

Training. We all hope that—as with anything, when we train, you hope that you're training to the best of your ability. There's never any guarantee in any type of training or any type of profession whether the individual is going to be to the calibre that someone may expect. They found out that the trained dogs can inspect the boat in two to three minutes, and they've been tested that they've been a hundred per cent correct every time.

The inspection. We can inspect your pond without warrant but not without reasonable grounds. We hope that all officers of the law will follow the law and have reasonable grounds when they inspect.

I encourage all members to support this bill. Like the member to the left of me said: the first step is better than no step at all. This is the first step to educate the people, and if we don't do anything, the cost is just too, too tremendous.

At that, I hope that everybody will support this bill, and I close debate.

4:20

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 13 read a third time]

The Speaker: I believe you have unanimous consent on that, so we'll move forward. So ordered and so carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just before we end today, I would like to ask the Assembly for unanimous consent to revert to Notices of Motions.

The Speaker: You've heard the request from the Government House Leader to revert to Notices of Motions. I'll ask this question.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: There has been an objection, so no unanimous consent is offered.

Let me return to the Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As it is near 4:30, I would move that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:21 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 28th Legislature - 3rd Session (2014-2015)

Activity to March 19, 2015

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 199 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1 Respecting Property Rights Act (Prentice)

First Reading -- 6 (Nov. 17, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 30-31 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft.), 142-46 (Nov. 24, 2014 eve, passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 169-73 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 206-11 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft.), 277-79 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014; SA 2014 c15]

2* Alberta Accountability Act (Denis)

First Reading -- 404-05 (Dec. 8, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 456-67 (Dec. 9, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 500-14 (Dec. 10, 2014 aft.), 515-16 (Dec. 10, 2014 eve., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 516-20 (Dec. 10, 2014 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014, with exceptions; SA 2014 c9]

3 Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014 (Quadri)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 89 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 165 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 173 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 259-75 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014; SA 2014 c14]

4 Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 89 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 165-67 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 174-75 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft.), 177-79 (Nov. 25, 2014 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 279-81 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2014 c12]

5 Securities Amendment Act, 2014 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 89-90 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 167-68 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 173 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 281-83 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014, with exceptions; SA 2014 c17]

6 Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2) (Olson)

First Reading -- 22-23 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 90-92 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 175 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 193-206 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft.), 283 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 321 (Dec. 2, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014, with exceptions; SA 2014 c18]

- 7 Chartered Professional Accountants Act (McIver)**
First Reading -- 159 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 275-76 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve.), 319 (Dec. 2, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 425 (Dec. 8, 2014 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 480 (Dec. 9, 2014 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2014 cC-10.2]
- 8* Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (Kennedy-Glans)**
First Reading -- 159 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 276-77 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve.), 319-21 (Dec. 2, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 425-28 (Dec. 8, 2014 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 480 (Dec. 9, 2014 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014; SA 2014 c13]
- 9* Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014 (Olesen)**
First Reading -- 237 (Dec. 1, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 336-38 (Dec. 3, 2014 aft.), 428-33 (Dec. 8, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 470-75 (Dec. 9, 2014 aft.), 477-80 (Dec. 9, 2014 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 495-500 (Dec. 10, 2014 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2014 c10]
- 10* An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children (Jansen)**
First Reading -- 238 (Dec. 1, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 300-18 (Dec. 2, 2014 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 338-55 (Dec. 3, 2014 aft.), 357-66 (Dec. 3, 2014 eve.), 367-74 (Dec. 3, 2014 eve., passed with amendments), 538-548 (Mar. 10, 2015 aft., recommitted, passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 536-38 (Mar. 10, 2015 aft, recommitted to Committee), 548 (Mar. 10, 2015 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 19, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 1, 2015, with exceptions; SA 2015 c1]
- 11 Savings Management Repeal Act (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 334 (Dec. 3, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 433-41 (Dec. 8, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 468-70 (Dec. 9, 2014 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 494-95 (Dec. 10, 2014 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014; SA 2014 c16]
- 12 Common Business Number Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 562-3 (Mar. 11, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 619 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft.), 698 (Mar. 17, 2015 aft.), 733-4 (Mar. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
- 13* Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015 (Leskiw)**
First Reading -- 563 (Mar. 11, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 619 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft.), 668-71 (Mar. 16, 2015 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 730-3 (Mar. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 754-57 (Mar. 19, 2015 aft., passed)
- 14 Agricultural Societies Amendment Act, 2015 (Olson)**
First Reading -- 563 (Mar. 11, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 619-20 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft., adjourned)
- 15 Securities Amendment Act, 2015 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 563 (Mar. 11, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 620-21 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft.), 667-8 (Mar. 16, 2015 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 730 (Mar. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 753-54 (Mar. 19, 2015 aft., passed)
- 16 Statutes Amendment Act, 2015 (Donovan)**
First Reading -- 563-4 (Mar. 11, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 621-22 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft.), 666-7 (Mar. 16, 2015 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 727-9 (Mar. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 751-53 (Mar. 19, 2015 aft., passed)

- 17 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015 (\$) (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 597 (Mar. 11, 2015 eve., passed)
Second Reading -- 612-19 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 659-66 (Mar. 16, 2015 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 687-9 (Mar. 17, 2015 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 19, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 19, 2015; SA 2015 c2]
- 18 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (\$) (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 698 (Mar. 17, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 716-22 (Mar. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 748-51 (Mar. 19, 2015 aft., passed)
- 19 Education Amendment Act, 2015 (Dirks)**
First Reading -- 635-6 (Mar. 16, 2015 aft., passed)
- 20 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015 (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 636 (Mar. 16, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 722-7 (Mar. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
- 21 Safety Codes Amendment Act, 2015 (Casey)**
First Reading -- 746-47 (Mar. 19, 2015 aft., passed)
- 201* Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014 (Anglin)**
First Reading -- 86 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 125-28 (Nov. 24, 2014 aft.), 238-52 (Dec. 1, 2014 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 406-08 (Dec. 8, 2014 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 408 (Dec. 8, 2014 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014; SA 2014 c11]
- 202 Safe and Inclusive Schools Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (Blakeman)**
First Reading -- 86 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., passed), 335-6 (Dec. 3, 2014 aft., withdrawn)
- 203* Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 192 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 409-18 (Dec. 8, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 639-42 (Mar. 16, 2015 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 642 (Mar. 16, 2015 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 19, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force 3 months after date of Royal Assent; SA 2015 c3]
- 204 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014 (Amery)**
First Reading -- 388 (Dec. 4, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 642-51 (Mar. 16, 2015 aft., adjourned)
- 205 Police (Protection of Victims of Sexual Violence) Amendment Act, 2015 (Cusanelli)**
First Reading -- 747 (Mar. 19, 2015 aft., passed)
- 206 Childhood Comprehensive Eye Examination Act (Jablonski)**
First Reading -- 636 (Mar. 16, 2015 aft., passed)
- 207 Independent Budget Officer Act (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 636 (Mar. 16, 2015 aft., passed)
- 208 Alberta Human Rights (Commission Accountability) Amendment Act, 2015 (Saskiw)**
First Reading -- 713 (Mar. 18, 2015 aft., passed)

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



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The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 23, 2015

Issue 24

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Speaker
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont (PC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Allen, Mike, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (PC)
Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)
Anderson, Rob, Airdrie (PC)
Anglin, Joe, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (Ind)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
Bhullar, Hon. Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Bikman, Gary, Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
New Democrat Opposition Whip
Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL),
Liberal Opposition House Leader
Brown, Dr. Neil, QC, Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (PC)
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)
Campbell, Hon. Robin, West Yellowhead (PC)
Cao, Wayne C.N., Calgary-Fort (PC)
Casey, Ron, Banff-Cochrane (PC)
Cusanelli, Christine, Calgary-Currie (PC)
Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
Denis, Hon. Jonathan, QC, Calgary-Acadia (PC),
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Dirks, Hon. Gordon, Calgary-Elbow (PC)
Donovan, Ian, Little Bow (PC)
Dorward, Hon. David C., Edmonton-Gold Bar (PC)
Drysdale, Hon. Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-Calder (ND),
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Fenske, Jacquie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W),
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Fox, Rodney M., Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
Goudreau, Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (PC)
Hale, Jason W., Strathmore-Brooks (PC)
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)
Horne, Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)
Jeneroux, Matt, Edmonton-South West (PC)
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Johnson, Linda, Calgary-Glenmore (PC)
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL),
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Lemke, Ken, Stony Plain (PC),
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Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (PC)
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Quadri, Sohail, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
Quest, Dave, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (PC)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rowe, Bruce, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)
Saskiw, Shayne, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition House Leader
Scott, Hon. Donald, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (PC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (AL),
Liberal Opposition Whip
Smith, Danielle, Highwood (PC)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL),
Leader of the Liberal Opposition
Towle, Kerry, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC),
Government Whip
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (PC)
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)
Vacant, Battle River-Wainwright
Vacant, Spruce Grove-St. Albert

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 70 Wildrose: 5 Alberta Liberal: 5 New Democrat: 4 Independent: 1 Vacant: 2

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Jonathan Denis	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Gordon Dirks	Minister of Education
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Wayne Drysdale	Minister of Transportation
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Jeff Johnson	Minister of Seniors
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Stephen Mandel	Minister of Health
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Hehr	Starke
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Hehr	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Cao	Young
Fraser	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 23, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray. Great Spirit and Holy Creator, as we begin our deliberations for this week in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, we ask for balanced insight to help inform the decisions we make for the benefit of our province and the people whom we proudly serve. Amen.

Hon. members, please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem, which today will be led by Miss Hayley Grundy.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you, Hayley, and thank you for having recently joined our heritage interpreters and tour guides at the Legislative Assembly of Alberta some few weeks ago. Welcome. [applause]
Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Member for Lesser Slave Lake 26th Anniversary of Election

The Speaker: Hon. members, 26 years ago, on March 20, 1989, to be exact, one of our esteemed and honourable members was first elected to our Legislative Assembly. In addition to being the longest serving woman to ever serve in this Assembly, a total of 9,500 days including today, this hon. member is also the 16th longest serving of all members in the history of our Assembly. Please join me in expressing our congratulations and our gratitude for her dedicated service to her constituents and all Albertans.

Hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, congratulations. [Standing ovation] Thank you and congratulations.

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly His Excellency Dr. Bálint David Ódor, the Ambassador of Hungary, who is with us. His Excellency is joined today by Éva Simon, who is the consul of the embassy, and by Alexander Szenthe, who is the honorary consul of Hungary here in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, I've always believed that cultivating mutually beneficial partnerships with jurisdictions around the globe is a priority for this province, and that's why I'm so pleased to introduce to the Assembly these special guests. They build on a strong relationship that exists between Hungary and Alberta, which includes ties in terms of trade, in terms of investment, education, and culture. I don't think I'm alone in saying to them that there are so many distinguished people in our province and indeed in our

country who are descendants of Hungarians who have come to Canada, so we're proud to have them with us.

Between 2010 and 2014 Alberta and Hungary have benefited from an excellent two-way trading relationship, and Alberta's postsecondary institutions have also been exploring a variety of partnerships with Hungary, everything from language to faculty and student exchanges as well as knowledge sharing. Their visit here today is an important occasion to reinforce our shared priorities. I'm confident that our relationship will continue to thrive and that we will strengthen the excellent relationship that exists between us. His Excellency Dr. Ódor and Mr. Szenthe are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask our honoured guests to receive the traditional welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups. Let's start with the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Right in the middle of the wonderful constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar is Clara Tyler elementary school. We have grade 6 students here today with their teacher, Mr. Zane Wei, and also parents and helpers Tammi Bexson, Karen Hiebert, and Pauline Gillanders. They're in School at the Legislature this whole week. I'll be dropping in several times for little visits with them. If that group from Clara Tyler, the students along with their guests, could please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school or education groups?

Seeing none, let's move on to other important guests, beginning with the Minister of Service Alberta, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some fantastic community leaders from St. Albert. We're joined today by Suzan and Ward Krecsy and Charlie Schroder. They're sitting in the members' gallery beside Michael Cooper. We've got a St. Albert row up there. If I could ask them to rise while I introduce them.

Our community, Mr. Speaker, is made up of families from all walks of life, and that includes some families in need. Our guests here today are with the St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village. The community village aspect as well as the food bank is a service that provides programs, services, and support to assist people to return to a state of independence, personal safety, and an improved quality of life. It's a hand up as well that our food bank provides. Suzan has been the executive director for almost 10 years. Charlie Schroder, the current chair of the board, has served in a leadership capacity for almost that long. Suzan's husband, Ward, after a distinguished career in the military and as the executive director's husband has done pretty much everything at the food bank. I'm so proud to call them friends and to call St. Albert home, and one of the reasons is because of our dedication to the well-being of everybody in the community. These fine folks represent that spirit incredibly well.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of everyone in the Legislature I would like to provide a special welcome to our guests, and I ask the honoured members of this Assembly to provide them with the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let us move on to Edmonton-South West, followed by Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a gentleman seated in the members' gallery that many of us members are familiar with. He's a federal Conservative candidate for Edmonton-St. Albert and has been involved with politics since he was 14 years old as an active member of his local constituency. Looking at him, you may think that was just yesterday; however, he's matured significantly since then. He's currently a lawyer at Ogilvie LLP. It is my pleasure to introduce my friend and future Member of Parliament, Mr. Michael Cooper. I'd ask him to now rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some folks representing an association that has a common professional interest with me, although I suspect that their patients have less likelihood of moaning and kicking. My guests are from the Alberta Association of Midwives, and obstetrics is certainly something that is more than a passing interest in my practice, especially this time of year. I'd like to ask them to rise as I read out their names. My first guest is Joan Margaret Laine, the president of the Alberta Association of Midwives. Joining her today is Nicole Matheson, the vice-president; and also the executive director, Lolly de Jonge. They're seated in the members' gallery.

The association provides midwifery services to over 1,600 Alberta women and their babies annually. [some applause] Yes, exactly. I'm certainly looking forward to meeting with them later. We had a very excellent presentation to our rural health services review from the association, and we're going to continue on that discussion with regard to services to be provided to rural and remote areas of Alberta as well as the rest of the province. Now that they've risen, I'd ask my colleagues to join me in the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a fine young Albertan who like many other boys wrote his annual letter to St. Nick before Christmas. His name is William Kendall, and he's sitting in the members' gallery. When St. Nick read his letter, he had his elves send it to me as Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. Why, you ask, would St. Nick do this? Well, it wasn't because William asked St. Nick to put a note in his brother's gift for him to be a little bit nicer. I come from a house of three boys; I know that request has been made lots and lots of times. It's because William asked St. Nick to help stop global warming and to help the big cats and for the world to be more environmentally friendly. I have long said, as has the Premier, that Albertans are conservationists at heart, and this is why our ministry takes its mandate so seriously. I would ask William and his proud parents, Chris and Valerie, and William's siblings, Tyler and Katie Kendall, to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, followed by Edmonton-Riverview. I understand you may have more than one introduction.

Mr. Mandel: I've got two.

The Speaker: Please proceed with both.

Mr. Mandel: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through to the members of this Assembly members of the Mental Health Patient Advocate office. As many of the members in this Assembly know, navigating the health care system can be challenging for those struggling with mental illness. The office of the mental health advocate works with patients and health providers, serving as an independent investigative body and as a resource for the mental health community. They're here today to see the tabling of the 2013-14 mental health advocate's office annual report. I would ask the guests to rise as I call their names: Carol Robertson Baker, the Mental Health Patient Advocate; Beverly Slusarchuk, patient rights advocate; Ryan Bielby, patient rights advocate; and Lorraine D'Sylva, administrative assistant. I'd like the Assembly to give them the traditional welcome.

Mr. Speaker, again it's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly some strong advocates for skin cancer prevention. They're here today to witness the tabling of a very important piece of legislation that will have significant positive impacts on Albertans and future generations of Albertans for years to come. I'm talking about Bill 22, Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act, that will be introduced later this afternoon. I would like to ask each of these guests to rise and remain standing as I call their names. First, we have Raheem Suleman. Raheem is a medical student at the University of Alberta. Next, we have Mrs. Sarah Hawkins, who is a public policy analyst for the Canadian Cancer Society. Also here today is Ms Cathy Gladwin, who is with the Alberta Public Health Association. We are also fortunate to have with us Miss Violetta Ambrozuk, Ms Becky Lynn, and Miss Evie Eshpeter, who are skin cancer survivors. Thank you for joining us and witnessing this today.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two representatives from the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues. The EFCL does an amazing job of representing the diversity within our city. With us today are the president of the EFCL board, Mr. Masood Makarechian, and the marketing director and lead for the 100th anniversary project, Nora Begoray. Yes, 100 years of the EFCL. They are seated in the public gallery, and I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some very special visitors. With us today are Dr. Brent Saik, and I believe with him there are his wife, Jenelle Saik; and Brenda Saik-Martin. Dr. Saik is the founder and organizer of the world's longest hockey game, which took place at Saiker's Acres in my constituency of Strathcona-Sherwood Park from February 6 to 16 this year: 40 dedicated players, 250 hours on the ice, over a million dollars raised for the Cross Cancer Institute in the fight against cancer. They're seated in the members' gallery, behind me.

I would ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly my very, very best friend and tremendous partner. She has been at my side for over 41 years now, an incredible journey. She is the mother of our three great daughters. I would ask Angeline, who is sitting in the public gallery, to now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

That concludes the introductions that were forwarded to my office, but if there are others, I would be able to recognize you to recognize them.

I see none.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have two minutes for each statement. Let's proceed, starting with Little Bow and then the Leader of the Official Opposition.

The hon. member.

Agriculture

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great honour today to rise and talk about agriculture in rural Alberta. Agriculture is the backbone of this province and the provincial economy. If not for agriculture we wouldn't have roads, bridges, railways, and a lot of this province would have never been found out and flourished the way it did. Agriculture was one of the first starts to all the stewardship and, in future, to the environmental movement in this province.

It's been a great pleasure to me, under the new management of our Premier, to be able to tour the Harmony Beef plant in Balzac with the minister of agriculture and the Premier to show how important agriculture is in this province. This state-of-the-art, European Union-certified plant will allow Canadian beef, up to 800 head per day, to start shipping all over the world to show how our triple-A beef is nothing but the best.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is Canada's largest beef-producing province. We have 151 feedlots in this province, that have more than a thousand head per feedlot, 1.8 million head per year. Sixty-nine per cent of Canada's feed cattle production is done in this province alone, not to mention the fact that 41 per cent of the national herd is in this province. These are great things that we can be very proud of.

Other things we have that we can be proud of in rural Alberta and agriculture are the 50 million acres that are under crop in this province between crop, grass, forage, and pasture land. We also have dairy production, poultry production, egg production. Even our honeybee keepers do a great job in this province, Mr. Speaker. Potatoes and beets are among some of the other great things that we have in this province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm a little biased. As a farmer myself I can't be prouder of what we do in this province for rural Alberta and agriculture. All I can tell you is that it's a true honour to be the MLA for the Little Bow riding, where Feedlot Alley happens to be. As a farmer myself I couldn't be prouder to be part of this Legislature and tell everybody about how great Alberta agriculture and rural Alberta are.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member of Calgary-Fish Creek and Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Retrospective by the Official Opposition Leader

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is with all likelihood the last member's statement I will give. It was over 22 years ago that I joined Ralph's team. We were sent here not for a job but to do what is right and to always be a servant to those who elected us. I would hope that despite the political battles I've been a part of, my friends, colleagues, and my constituents will say that I never strayed far from those values.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, I have always believed that our role as MLAs is to speak up for those without a voice. There is perhaps nothing more heartbreaking than stories of children involved in prostitution. I am grateful that we passed the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, a first in Canada. I hope someday soon my legislation requiring the mandatory reporting of child pornography will finally be proclaimed. As Solicitor General I brought forward the Amber Alert program, the first in Canada and now right across this fine country. When I became minister of children's services, we passed important legislation to protect drug-endangered children. While I would never have imagined being Leader of the Opposition, the support from Albertans has been truly overwhelming.

But, Mr. Speaker, there is one face who stole my heart, and I will never forget little Aleena Sadownyk, suffering from a rare disease and looking for treatment. I had the honour of meeting the little one and her family just two years ago. All Aleena ever wanted was the energy to dance. Her daddy prayed that he could be her dance partner. Through endless work and advocacy she finally received the treatment that was long overdue. She now has energy and has a bright smile, and she can dance with her daddy. As I fade away from public life, I ask that we never forget the story of little Aleena and how our work in this Legislature can make a difference.

For all the staff who have touched my life, hugs all around. For my family, who have allowed me to follow my dreams, I love you so much, with all my heart. Lastly, to the constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek and, for that matter, to all Albertans, it's been an honour, and it's been a privilege. Happy trails until we meet again. [Standing ovation]

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Well, in a moment I'm going to turn to the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, but before I do, let me just remind all of you that we have 35 seconds for each question; we have 35 seconds for each answer. I will then interrupt you if you exceed either of those two limits.

With that having been said and a wonderful speech just having been made, let us recognize the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Government Policies

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were three boxes to tick on the government's survey on the budget: hike taxes, slash spending, run a deficit. It's not hard to figure out that hiking taxes has been the Premier's preferred choice for months. He's talked about introducing a sales tax, a sugar tax, higher income tax, higher gas tax, and a tax on everything he can think of. Premier, Albertans are wondering what tax you'll bring in and how much you'll be

taxing them. Can you clarify to the House what your favourite tax is and how much Albertans will be paying for it?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, there are obviously no easy choices in the circumstance that our province faces. The Minister of Finance will deal with this in the coming days. We are all concerned about the loss of jobs in our province and what's been taking place over the last several months. It's something that this government is dedicated to deal with. It's about strengthening our economy. It's about diversifying our economy. It's about all the things that we need to do to make this province stronger. The hon. member will hear in the fullness of time this week the plans that the government has.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another day, another shocking story about our health care system. This weekend reports emerged that a woman in Fort Saskatchewan sat uncomfortably in a public waiting room chair for seven hours while she miscarried a child. It's just one story at one hospital on one evening, but we know it happens all the time. It's absolutely appalling that in a province that spends half of its budget on health care, this continues to happen. Premier, how are we going to address these horrible situations?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, first of all, our thoughts and prayers go out to the individual this happened to. It was a very sad situation. This government is spending a tremendous amount of money – \$50 million was just announced – investing in our emergency departments and increasing the number of long-term care facilities, long-term care beds. We're making every effort to try to put the system in balance, and we'll continue to do that. Unfortunately, our hearts and prayers go out to that family.

The Speaker: The hon. member. Final supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. Five years ago this government said that we would have a patient-accessible electronic health care record by this year. It would improve communication between patients, physicians, and specialists, and it would ensure the continuity of patient care. Two years ago Greg Price died because this system still wasn't in place. The Health Quality Council wrote all about it, acknowledging the role it played in Greg's death. Fast-forward to today, and it's still not in place. Premier, this government promised the Price family that this system would be created. Why has it not been done?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I can't speak too much about previously, but we are working diligently with a group of people today to put in place the proper computer system that will allow records to be effectively put in place for this province so these things don't happen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Livingstone-Macleod.

Premier's Address to Albertans

Mr. Saskiw: For weeks the Premier has been telling Albertans that there is no more money. He made it crystal clear that he has no intention of passing his budget in the House and will instead be using it as a PC Party central campaign platform, which is why Albertans are furious that he is spending over 100,000 taxpayer dollars on a PC campaign commercial. The Wildrose said no to this absolute farce. Premier, will you do the right thing and have the PC Party pay back taxpayers for your campaign ad?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a strong and entrepreneurial and resilient province, but it has been clear for several months that we face serious economic circumstances with the collapse of oil prices, the effect on our public finances and our economy. We see job losses in this province beginning to mount. Albertans want to know where their government stands on this, what their government will do. They need to hear from their Premier. They need to hear about our steps to diversify the economy for a hopeful future, and so they will.

Mr. Saskiw: You don't need an ad, Premier.

Here are the facts. The previous Premier spent \$45,000 to fly to South Africa while this Premier is paying \$100,000 for a campaign ad that includes \$10,000 to write a speech, that includes \$3,000 per minute in production costs, a makeup artist, production directors. The list goes on. Again to the Premier: why on earth would you need to blow taxpayer money right now, before a budget that blames and punishes Albertans for the fiscal mess you got us in?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we are a strong province. We face serious economic circumstances. There's not a single person in this Chamber who has not been affected at this point by someone, directly or associated with them, who has lost a job in the province. Albertans want to hear from their government. They want to hear from the Premier. They want to know about help for those who are unemployed. They want to know about the stabilization of our public finances. They want hope for the future, and they want to know what we're going to do to diversify our economy. I intend to address Albertans and speak to them about those issues.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans don't want a TV ad. You made it clear that you do not intend to pass the budget in this Assembly; you'll run a campaign on the budget. So this is \$100,000 in a campaign ad, twice the amount Redford spent to go to South Africa. It is clearly a purely partisan piece of PC propaganda. Again, since taxpayers will receive no benefit, will you do the honourable thing and have the PC Party pay back taxpayers immediately?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, Her Majesty's Opposition was afforded the opportunity to speak directly with Albertans and to share their plan. I think the essence of it is that they do not have a plan. They don't have a plan that will address Albertans relative to the diversification of the economy, how we're going to stabilize our public finances, and what we're going to do for young people and the future of this province. They don't have a plan, so they're not prepared to speak with Albertans. We are.

Mr. Saskiw: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, your point of order was noted 30 seconds ago, and it will be dealt with later.

Let's move on to Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

2:00

Navigator Ltd.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's cozy relationship with Navigator has been well documented, from the sole-sourced contracts to PC nominations to the backroom, floor-crossing deal that was made in the dark of night out of the Premier's

office. This Premier said that he would do something about sweetheart deals for companies like Navigator in the past, but so far it's been business as usual. To the Premier: to what extent does your ongoing relationship with Navigator influence the business of this government?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier made it very clear when he took on as Premier that we are under new management. He made it very clear that there would be no more sole-sourcing contracts, and we've lived up to that bargain.

Mr. Stier: Well, earlier this month the government promised to spend upwards of \$80 million to upgrade and install sprinklers at all seniors' facilities in this province. It seems like this should have been a no-brainer decision, certainly, but it took extensive lobbying to have the government act on this file, and according to the lobbyist registry it was Navigator that was doing the lobbying. Premier, it's time to start being honest on this. I'll ask you again. To what extent does your continued relationship with Navigator influence the business of this government?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to say that this government is doing the right thing because it's the right thing to do. One of the things that the Premier has us mandated to do is to upgrade our seniors' facilities so they're up to current safety standards. That's one of the main things that I got as a mandate as the Minister of Seniors along with creating more affordable supportive living and renewing our rural lodge program, on which we've taken great steps and expedited. We're trying to do a very good job with that.

Mr. Stier: Well, I was asking about Navigator in that question, minister.

The Premier's excuses simply don't wash. It's clear that the access to the Premier's office is facilitated by the people at Navigator. In return the Premier leans heavily on Navigator for their advice on both party and government business. Records indicate that Navigator is also being paid MSI funds to lobby the government on behalf of the town of Okotoks for the funding of a water pipeline. Now, we all know this pipeline is needed desperately, but Navigator shouldn't be scoring on the deal. To the Premier: why is government money being paid to Navigator to lobby this same government for more government money?

Mrs. McQueen: Mr. Speaker, any MSI grants that are given out are given out without strings attached to municipalities. Municipalities make the decisions on what's most important for their communities, and that's how they use and invest the MSI dollars that are given to them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Privately Operated Seniors' Housing

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. During this session the Liberal opposition has spoken a lot about Martha and Henry, the severely normal Albertans mythologized by past PC governments. Today many of those original Marthas and Henrys are seniors, and thanks to this PC government they're being treated as cash cows by private, for-profit seniors' home operators. Public Interest Alberta released today government documents reporting projected profits for Alberta's two major corporate care providers at \$5,500 per bed annually. The same corporations received millions in capital construction grants. To the Premier: why are you padding the coffers

of private care providers while at the same time forcing seniors to pay . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, let me try and clarify. The affordable supportive living initiative in Alberta is a very successful program that leverages government dollars to partner with private and nonprofit resources to create a greater number of spaces. With this year's ASLI, which the member alluded to, we're leveraging our \$180 million taxpayer investment into projects totalling \$850 million. We're building a thousand more beds than we initially projected. We're doing that by partnering, and we'll partner with anyone who can help increase the quality of life for our seniors.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Liberals recently released AHS figures showing the low cost of publicly provided long-term care compared to the high cost of keeping individuals in hospitals. To the Premier again: why are you providing funds to private, for-profit companies instead of investing in public, community-based home care and long-term care?

Mr. Mandel: We're investing in home care, long-term care, acute care. We are trying to ensure that all Albertans get the best care possible. This government has made a tremendous commitment to ensuring that there is a greater investment, as the Minister of Seniors said, in the continuing care continuum. We'll continue to do that as we continue to be effective.

Dr. Swann: One hundred and eighty million dollars wasted every year on in-hospital beds.

The government has been unable to ease the access-to-care crisis due to its failed seniors policy. It recently announced that it would double down on ASLI grants to solve the crisis, which hasn't worked in the past and won't work this time. Why does the Premier, who talks about making decisions based on conservative fiscal principles, insist on subsidizing by millions lower quality, higher priced care?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think the many nonprofit and private providers out there should take great offence at that last comment. They're delivering excellent care to our seniors across this province.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk about the facts. The facts are that Alberta seniors enjoy the second-lowest regulated accommodation rates in the country. ASLI grants help seed projects in communities that demonstrate need for supportive living, and any unit developed with ASLI money must charge the government-regulated rate for 30 years. So let's be clear. We're focusing on low-cost rent for seniors, that affordable housing piece, as opposed to focusing on who owns the building.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, leader of the ND opposition.

Emergency Room Wait Times

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I released more documents showing the ongoing crisis in Alberta's hospitals. Five years ago this government promised that 90 per cent of the sick would be admitted into Alberta emergency rooms within eight hours. Instead, our numbers show that, in general, people are waiting three times that target, and in some cases people are waiting not hours but days to be admitted to a ward. To the Premier: do you

think it's reasonable for someone to have to wait 71 hours to be admitted to emergency care?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I think there's a bit of number-playing here. In the province of Alberta the Foothills, Peter Lougheed, Rockyview, Grey Nuns, Misericordia, Royal Alexandra, and University hospitals all have far less time today than they did five years ago.

Ms Notley: Well, actually, no, Mr. Speaker. Compared to two years ago, everything's gone up a long ways.

Emergency rooms are crowded, they're stressful, and they're not meant to house for days on end people who need to be admitted to the hospital. This weekend we heard about a young mother who miscarried in the emergency room while waiting for care. To the Premier: don't you understand that your government's long-term failure to improve emergency wait times has real-life consequences for the Albertans who depend upon our health care system?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, the latest real data from CIHI show that our emergency access is similar to other provinces or even better. As a matter of fact, the national average is a 3.2 hours' wait, and we're at 3.1 hours. You know, for example, for ages 20 to 64 in emergency Ontario is way higher than we are. So we're doing all we can to continue to build a very, very fine health care system in the province.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the numbers show that it's getting worse here.

Now, over the last two weeks of this soon-to-be-abbreviated session I've asked the Premier 17 questions about the state of our health care system, and he has not risen to answer one of them. So my question, again to the Premier: is your failure to answer these questions because you don't know about health care, you don't care about health care, or is it because you looked in the mirror and decided that somebody else was responsible for health care?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, actually, the reason that the Minister of Health has answered the questions is that we have a remarkable and extraordinary Minister of Health.

Childhood Immunization

Dr. Swann: Children's lives continue to be at risk with this government's lax approach to mandatory choice for school vaccinations. Although the Minister of Health and the Minister of Education both said they believe in vaccines, one has already categorically denied he will make the choice mandatory for school enrollment. Both have said they need more time to consult on what is a clear medical and scientific fact. The Premier is failing to provide leadership for all Albertans on this file by allowing this confusion to continue. Let's try and get some clarity. To the Minister of Human Services: does the government vaccinate children . . .

The Speaker: We'll have to hear from the minister now. Minister of Health, I think you got something out of the preamble.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I'll respond that we've looked at the information. There is a variety of processes and procedures that you can take, and mandatory has not been shown to be the most effective. We need to look at what is the best way to ensure that every child in our school has the proper process for vaccination and there's a proper record in the school for them.

2:10

Dr. Swann: I'll try it again. To the Minister of Human Services: does every child in Human Services, every child in care, receive vaccination? Are they vaccinated?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that many families use the public health clinics when they go to get their shots. We know that. We work with parents at the parent link centres. We provide support to them. We provide them with all the choices to get the necessary vaccinations to protect their families.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you for the non answer.

Given that we are continuing to see a rise in vaccine-preventable disease and this government only spends 3 per cent of its budget on prevention, given that this government vaccinates children in care, will you do the right thing, Minister of Health, and direct the government to make vaccines mandatory, at least a mandatory choice for vaccines before children go into school?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we've already answered that question several times. We need to look at what is the most effective way, not just a mandating way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Employment Skills Upgrading

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current low price of oil has led, unfortunately, to major layoffs in our oil and gas industry. Our province is expected to lose 31,000 jobs by the end of 2015. Generally during a tough fiscal environment people need to return to school to build their new skills for the upcoming good times. That is why we need to have the government help. My question is to the hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. What steps has our government . . .

The Speaker: We'll have to hear now from the hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. member talking about layoffs, and I can tell you that two big concerns of this government under new management are people without jobs and jobs without people. When there are layoffs, we encourage employers to work with the federal work-sharing program. We have programs to help underrepresented groups in the workforce such as youth, aboriginal people, and women. We work closely with the federal government on the Canada-Alberta job grant. There is more work to be done, and I can assure the hon. member that we will keep doing it.

The Speaker: First supplemental. The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: how much funding is currently available to assist out-of-work Albertans to get training during these tough times?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, on an individual basis, for example, on the Canada-Alberta job grant there's up to \$15,000 per person out of work either to get trained for a new job or get upgraded for a better job, out of which the government pays two-thirds, up to \$10,000, and the employer pays up to \$5,000. That's just the one program. There are several thousand Albertans that

have already qualified for this, and we have other programs, which I'd be happy to talk to the hon. member about at his leisure.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. Given that it is important for Albertans to have access to retraining and stay longer in school in these tough times, what efforts has our government taken to work with our postsecondary institutions to meet the training and learning needs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Ed.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud that our postsecondary institutions offer many opportunities for Albertans looking to retrain or upgrade their skills, and our goal is to make the system as accessible as possible. In addition to traditional learning at one of our 26 institutions, the Campus Alberta system has a wealth of flexible online learning programs and opportunities. There are more than 900 online courses and 70 programs offered by our postsecondary institutions. This includes academic upgrading for provincially approved certificates, diplomas, and applied degrees. Albertans also have access to financial support. If you apply for a student loan and you qualify, you'll get one.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Kananaskis Country Golf Course

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has approved spending millions of taxpayer dollars on a golf course while Albertans are still waiting for DRP relief. Last week the minister said that the government will be reviewing this situation, but the money has already been approved, and millions of dollars have already been spent. Minister, will you take this boondoggle off the backs of taxpayers?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I share the hon. member's concerns about this. This is not an appropriate time to be expending public dollars on rebuilding a golf course. No additional spending authorities have been given since December of 2014. The Kananaskis golf course rebuild is under review, and no further public dollars will be devoted to this purpose without further notice.

The Speaker: A point of order has been noted from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills at 2:15, following that last exchange.

Let's move on to the first supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The government has just handed over \$5.4 million of taxpayer money to a company with close ties to the PC Party for this golf course, but you claim that only \$2.3 million has actually been spent. Will you make this contract public so Albertans can see what you are doing with their tax dollars?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. There has been that amount of money paid as part of the contractual obligations to an operator as a result of doing the maintenance on the upkeep of the assets that are there and the contractual obligations for a lack of funding. The additional money has been used to do the flood cleanup as the result of the flood. As the Premier has indicated, there will be no more public money going to the rebuilding of this golf course.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, it's been in supplemental supply and estimates.

The Premier has a tough time settling on priorities, whether it's an \$18 million golf course or \$10,000 for speeches and makeup sessions. This Premier is wasting taxpayers' dollars just as he's about to bring down record tax increases. Minister, will you hold off on spending any more taxpayer dollars on this golf course until you close every last DRP claim?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier was quite clear just a couple of minutes ago that there will be no more money going towards this project. It is under review, and we will make sure that in this time of fiscal restraint the priorities of Albertans are reflected, and we are ensuring that there will be no more money going towards the rebuild of this golf course.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, your point of order was noted during that last exchange, 30 seconds ago.

Let's move on.

Bighorn Sheep Harvest

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, recently the Department of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development announced plans to change the hunter harvest of bighorn sheep in Alberta. The proposal is to require horns of harvested rams to have a full curl instead of a four-fifths curl. This has raised concerns from hunters, big-game outfitters, and taxidermists, who may be affected by the potential lack of harvestable animals. All of my questions are for the Minister of ESRD. Can the minister tell the House why the change is being proposed?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to be very clear that we are reviewing this as a potential change to the hunting regulation and that no decision has been made yet. However, there are concerns that have been brought forward by hunters and outfitters and the like regarding the quality of trophy rams in this province over the years. Analysis of over 30 years' of data supports these concerns that overharvesting is occurring and the quality of trophy rams in our province in Alberta has been decreasing.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister say what scientific evidence there is that such a change, if it goes ahead, will result in better trophy size?

Mr. Fawcett: The harvest of trophy rams, Mr. Speaker, is exceeding the 5 per cent target for rams of this size to survive the posthunting season, which is not sustainable over the long term. Biologically, there needs to be some mature rams left in the population to ensure a healthy age and size class structure for this range to succeed over the long term.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister assure hunters and outfitters and others affected that there will still be a sufficient number of animals available for harvest in the initial years if this change did go ahead?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. These proposed changes to the hunting regulations will reduce the harvest of trophy sheep in the short term and will allow for fast-growing rams to reach maturity prior to being harvested. We are in a process of ongoing consultation. We will continue consulting on this issue, and this will

result in a review of the bighorn sheep management plan as well as habitat studies regarding sheep resiliency. We'll continue to make that data available publicly so that we're transparent about any decisions that are made.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed Edmonton-Decore.

2:20 Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. As far as I can reckon, the Alberta government's main strategy for climate change has been prayer. At the time I observed that the '08 strategy was back-end loaded; in other words, not much done now but much hope and prayer that something, anything, maybe some technology, would appear toward the end that would save them. My question is to the new minister of climate change. No one but this government has ever believed that the '08 strategy would achieve reduction targets. What has changed?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, with responsibility in this area.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has actually achieved its targets in a number of ways. Just to give you a couple of examples: wind has increased from 1 per cent to 9 per cent; conventional coal has decreased from 52 per cent to 39 per cent. Today more than 45 per cent of Alberta's electricity generating capacity comes from alternative and renewable energy sources. Total flaring has decreased by 10 per cent. Solution gas has decreased by 13.5 per cent. I could go on – and you're waving me off – and I will in the next question.

Ms Blakeman: All right. The government has always diminished and obfuscated on climate change by basing reductions on a business-as-usual scenario rather than the start date and by using emission intensity to measure change rather than the actual reduction of emissions. So will this new, perhaps old strategy of the government please stop using these two mystifying terms?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, Alberta has established, as we know, a carbon price that has led to a cumulative reduction of 51 megatonnes and a contribution of \$500 million to the climate change fund. We've invested \$1.3 billion and will invest \$1.3 billion in carbon capture and storage, which alone per year will reduce emissions by 2.7 million tonnes. We are committed to slowing growth of emissions while protecting the economy. We set realistic targets, and that is why we are renewing our climate change strategy to meet our 2020 targets.

Ms Blakeman: Well, in 2012 you produced 249 megatonnes, so I don't know that getting rid of 50 is going to make that much of a difference here.

You know, in the past I've heard the Premiers and the climate change ministers complain that there is really nothing they can do while Albertans continue to drive cars because what comes out of the tailpipes is far worse than what comes out of the oil sands. Now, is the minister planning to achieve climate change targets by making it the commuters' problem?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would say to the member: stay tuned as we renew our climate change strategy. We'll be

looking at a variety of measures in order to meet the 2020 targets. We'll be doing this. If you think about this, our population has increased by 1 million people between 2002 and 2015, and we have a strong economy, which this government is responsible for making sure that we protect while meeting our reduction targets.

Seniors' Care

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it is important to me that all seniors live in situations of dignity, with needed supports, and my questions are to the Minister of Health. Given that two years have passed since the move to give large firms the contracts for providing home care and given the controversies surrounding that change, to what extent will the Legislature be receiving a comprehensive review of the results and the effectiveness of the major change in home-care service delivery to seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'll make it clear that this wasn't a major change in the way we do home-care delivery, and we've always contracted providers delivering nonprofessional services such as personal care and assistance with their medication through individuals. What changed two years ago was that Alberta Health Services went through a request for proposal to make home care more efficient and cost-effective by consolidating and standardizing services. I am pleased to note that home-care spending has grown by 26 per cent. We have 112,000 individuals on support right now, and we are putting together a program which we can give . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, and we'll probably hear more in the first supplemental.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that a recent study by the Canadian Institute for Health Information, CIHI, shows that the \$506 per capita cost of seniors' care in Alberta is 19 per cent below the Canadian average of \$625 per capita and given that there is a clear and substantial shortage of long-term care beds for seniors, will the government be increasing the per capita seniors' care spending to the national average in order to fund more long-term care beds for seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, first of all, we spend about \$2 billion per year in continuing care. We've announced, under the Minister of Seniors, tremendous expansion to the continuing care program, which in itself and by itself requires a tremendous increase in investment in our seniors. Furthermore, in Alberta 12 per cent of our population are seniors; other areas of the country are at 15 per cent. So you need to put those numbers in balance, not necessarily on a per capita basis but with the number of seniors, so that you put them in the proper perspective.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the current care and accommodation standards established by Alberta Health give facilities eight weeks' notice of inspections and given that such notice may undermine the very purpose of such inspections, will the government ensure a policy of regular and unannounced inspections of all seniors' care facilities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Our goal is to make sure that seniors are receiving safe, appropriate care, and that includes ensuring that facilities meet our standards. My ministry and AHS formed a continuing care audit working group. They're hard at work thoroughly reviewing continuing care audits and assurance functions, including the practice of giving facilities notice. I do agree that we need to do this on a very individual basis and go there without any notice.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Red Deer-North.

Kananaskis Country Golf Course (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Despite the Premier's last-minute, pre-election change of heart, in the last year the provincial government has already spent \$5.4 million on the Kananaskis golf course. Given that the Minister of ESRD has said that the money is justified because, quote, the grass has to be kept nice and given that he should have added, "Nice for the Tory insiders operating the golf course, who are being subsidized through a sweetheart contract whose terms are being kept secret and which was awarded despite other bids being superior," to the Minister of ESRD: will the minister immediately make public the terms of the secret backroom deal, and if not, why not?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, again, the Premier has been very clear on this. We will not be spending any additional funds on the rebuilding of this golf course. It doesn't fit within the fiscal priorities of the government at this time. You know, we do have the contractual obligations with the operator that operated this golf course prior. We have to keep those contractual obligations, but as far as rebuilding the golf course, we will not be putting any money towards that.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister refers to the contractual obligations of the government, but he dodges the question as to whether or not he will make public the terms of the contract. Will he or will he not make it public, and if not, why not?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, again, it's very clear. This project is under review. We're reviewing all of the legal obligations and necessary obligations of the government. There was considerable damage there as a result of the flood. It has required that the government do some cleanup like it has everywhere else that was impacted by the flood, and that work was conducted. As the Premier said, it's under review, and right now it doesn't fit within the financial priorities of this government.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister completely dodged the question for a second time, let me ask him this. The supplementary estimates are going to be passed, or they'll have passed third reading by later today, which means the government can always spend the money, if it chooses to, after the election. Will the minister or the Premier undertake to repeal that section of the supplementary estimates so that the government does not have the authority to spend the money?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, again, the Premier has been very clear in this Assembly and to me as the minister that there will be no

additional expenditures on this particular project until a review has been conducted and we understand the realities of the situation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Eye Examinations for Children

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Children with undiagnosed visual impairments often have serious challenges learning to read, the foundation for all learning. Children with undiagnosed visual impairments usually suffer a loss of self-confidence and self-esteem, further impairing their ability to learn, and in many cases develop behaviour problems in the classroom and the schoolyard. To the Minister of Education: given that comprehensive eye exams are one of the best ways to diagnose visual impairment and that the government covers the cost of these exams for children to the age of 18, how supportive are you of having every child receive a comprehensive eye exam prior to grade 1?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, kindergarten students may take part in the Eye See . . . Eye Learn program, a very important childhood eye health and vision awareness program funded by Health. Educational materials to support school staff in the identification of possible vision problems as well as information for parents about the importance of eye examinations are available through this program, and free eyeglasses are provided to children who require them.

2:30

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: given that studies have shown that children with undiagnosed visual impairments often require additional supports in the classroom and are unable to learn to their full potential, what is your ministry doing to ensure that all parents and guardians are aware of the importance of comprehensive eye exams prior to grade 1, where learning to read begins?

Mr. Dirks: I thank the member for the question, Mr. Speaker. We support our colleagues in the Ministry of Health to ensure that possible vision problems are identified in children and students as soon as possible. However, Education does not regulate parental choices, including those related to child health. The Eye See . . . Eye Learn program requires parental consent, and participation is not mandatory. However, during the '11-12 school year 44 per cent of Alberta five-year-olds completed eye exams. This collaborative partnership between Health and Education is a good example of working together to inform parents.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the Minister of Health: given that the government already covers the cost of comprehensive eye exams for all children up to and including the age of 18 and that fewer than 44 per cent of all children starting grade 1 have received a comprehensive eye exam, will our government continue to be committed to funding comprehensive eye exams for 100 per cent of all children prior to grade 1?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for the question. I deeply believe that if we don't have our children's eyes examined before they go to kindergarten or at least in their early years, tremendous problems can happen, so we are committed in Health to ensuring that every child has an eye examination, working with the optometrists' association to make sure that's done. We need to be more creative in how we do this. We need to be more

proactive in making sure children get this. This is very, very important.

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

Privately Operated Seniors' Housing (continued)

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today Public Interest Alberta released freedom of information documents detailing the government's policy of funding private corporations to provide seniors' care. Of all the disturbing information in this document, of which there was plenty, the numbers speak the loudest: \$36.5 million to private corporations, 27 per cent profit, and average profit of \$5,500 per year per bed. To the Minister of Seniors: what is the upside of providing such exorbitant profits to friends and insiders of your government?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I take exception to those numbers. I think there's a fair bit of homework to be done before you could disclose those kinds of facts out to the public. That's certainly not what we're seeing, but let me tell you what we are seeing. We are seeing that it would have taken \$850 million of taxpayer funding to produce all the units that we just produced with the ASLI grant, and we did that with \$180 million of taxpayer funding. That's good news for seniors.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that companies can expect to make \$5,500 profit per bed – those numbers are good – and given that the money could do a whole lot more to raise the quality of care in the facilities for seniors, hiring more staff, having better ratios for health care staff, better quality of food, to the Minister of Seniors again: wouldn't the money that we invest in seniors' care be better spent in nursing care and other services that seniors need rather than thickening up these companies' profit bottom lines?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think a couple of things are important to consider. One is that that \$5,000 a year is coming off potentially a unit that cost that private provider \$300,000 to build, so you can do the math on what the return is there. The other thing that's important to know as a taxpayer is that those units are secured for 30 years at discounted or rebate rent accommodation prices, and those accommodation prices are the same whether it's in a private facility or a nonprofit or government-owned facility. So we're actually spending less to build the building but securing the exact same operating costs for 30 years.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that many Alberta seniors and their families are struggling to find quality seniors' care and given that the government has given millions of dollars in profits to these for-profit corporations, not just for the set-up but also for the building of these structures as well, to the minister: finally will you stop the practice of outsourcing public health care to the private sector, save our province millions of dollars, ensuring our seniors are not paying for the profits of PC friends and insiders?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the member heard me, but I'll rephrase it. Seniors who are staying in these facilities are paying the same price regardless of whether this facility is run by a private or whether it's run by a nonprofit like Covenant Health or the Bethany Group. These folks are doing good work. This is about making sure that seniors can age in place and age in their communities and with their spouses and with their families in the communities they helped build, and we can only do that if we build

more facilities. By partnering with privates and nonprofits, we've been able to build a lot more facilities. Taking care of the seniors is what this is about.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Flood Mitigation on the Bow River

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2013 floods were the worst natural disaster in the history of the province. Tens of thousands of Albertans were forced from their homes. Hundreds of businesses were shut down, including downtown Calgary. In the aftermath the government began negotiations with TransAlta to create an agreement for use of their dams to minimize the impacts of major flooding on the Bow River. Lowering water levels at the Ghost dam prior to flood season would create storage for incoming floodwaters, yet despite negotiating for almost two years now, there's still no agreement in place. To the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development: are we close to an agreement with TransAlta that would allow their . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Minister of Environment and SRD.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to providing protection to flood-affected communities. Leveraging TransAlta's existing infrastructure is one of the more immediate and effective options that is available. We continue to work on an agreement with TransAlta that builds on the pilot project that we had with them last year on the Ghost reservoir. Although the focus this year is to get that immediate flood protection in place for the community for this flood season, we are continuing to work with them on a longer term agreement on water management along the Bow River.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. To the same minister: given that sediment buildup over time reduces the storage capacity of dam reservoirs, is TransAlta committed to maintaining the reservoirs so that there is adequate room for flood water during future events?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A survey to measure the water depths and assess the reservoir bed has been partially completed at the Ghost reservoir. This will address the question of storage loss due to sediment infilling and the impact of lower reservoir levels on fish habitats. If there is an opportunity to reshape the bottom of the reservoir to provide more storage capacity while not negatively impacting the fish habitat in the reservoir, we will pursue that option.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. To the same minister: why were three dry dams, initially considered for construction above the Bearspaw dam on the Ghost River and across Waiparous Creek, not recommended for detailed study?

Mr. Fawcett: These three dams that the member is alluding to, Mr. Speaker, were investigated as part of the initial assessment of flood mitigation options. They were rejected because they would not provide the acceptable levels of flow reduction because of either their location or the size of the reservoir. Although those locations

did not pan out, we are continuing to explore other locations in combination with the work we're doing with TransAlta to try to maximize the level of protection we can provide for communities that are affected by the Bow River.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Calgary-West.

Legal Aid Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the Minister of Justice make the business case for me in which an NGO which provides a legal assistance program is underfunded to the point that judges order counsel to be provided at full cost? Can he make that business case for me, please?

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect, I reject the premise of that question. We're funding legal aid, if that's what she is referring to, adequately. We have given a 5 and a half million dollar additional stipend this year, and we continue to ask the federal government to pay their share, as they once did.

Ms Blakeman: To the same minister: can this minister explain why he has implemented a number of changes to cut down on court time and court costs but, at the same time, a group which offers lower cost legal resources, which saves the government money, is resolutely underfunded?

Mr. Denis: The same answer.

The Speaker: Hon. member, final supplemental.

2:40

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Legal Aid has two revenue sources, government and the Law Foundation, which is interest off of trust accounts. They incur the expense, but they can't control the revenue. At the same time, we have more people in Alberta and more laws under which people can get into trouble. So to the Minister of Justice: whose fault is it if Legal Aid runs a deficit?

Mr. Denis: The same answer.

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

Police Officer Deaths

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently a ceremony in the town of Mayerthorpe marked the 10th anniversary of the killing of four Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers. The event elicited a variety of emotions: grief, respectful remembrance as well as optimism and hope. To the Justice minister: in the 10 years since this tragedy, what lessons have been learned and what recommendations have been implemented which have come out of the fatality inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member's concern as a former police sergeant with the Calgary Police Service. What happened in Mayerthorpe 10 years ago was a sobering reminder of the inherent dangers that our police and peace officers face every day, and indeed one of them lost is one too many. As reported in the public fatality inquiry by Assistant Chief Judge Daniel Pahl, "There were no failings in the training, experience or abilities of the officers who lost their lives." I've been

to the monument honouring the Fallen Four in Mayerthorpe, and I encourage Albertans to go.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that we have very recently witnessed the St. Albert tragedy, in which another officer lost his life and another offender with a significant criminal history was walking the streets, what is this government committed to do in order to prevent such a tragedy from happening in the future, and what are their plans to revisit the bail reform initiatives from 2008 and 2009?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the first things that I did when I learned of the tragedy of Constable Wynn's death in St. Albert recently is that I ordered a review of the Alberta Crown prosecution service involvement with the shooter. This review remains under way. We all know that any aspect of this case could have been handled differently. If we can find that out, we want to prevent and ensure best practices to ensure that this does not happen again and that his death is not in vain.

Mr. Ellis: Given that many incidents of officer-involved deaths were perpetrated by individuals who had a history of violence or a current history of being before the courts, in 2009 this government introduced bail reform, which was intended to put more police officers on the street and put the role of the hearing officer back in the hands of the Crown, but this initiative was shelved. To the same minister: when is the government going to reopen this reform initiative with stakeholder consultation and provide a better, safer service for citizens intended to prevent such past tragedies and not allow public perception of the administration of justice falling into disrepute?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned in the last exchange, the review is looking specifically at the Crown's involvement in this case, and I expect that it will look at the bail process in general to some degree. That being said, it's my expectation that if this report identifies that more work needs to be done in reviewing the bail process in more detail, this work will be undertaken as well. As, again, this is a fully independent review, I will make it public when it is available to me, but it's too early for me to speculate on next steps, and the review is not expected likely for the next few months. I wish to thank again the member for his inquiry.

The Speaker: The bell for question period has sounded, so we will move on to the continuation of Members' Statements, and we will do that in 30 seconds from now.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Let us begin. We have two minutes allotted for each of these statements.

We'll start with Strathcona-Sherwood Park and go to Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

World's Longest Hockey Game

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to rise today again and recognize the 2015 world's

longest hockey game, held February 6 through 16 at Saiker's Acres in Strathcona county. The founder of the game, Dr. Brent Saik, and his team once again organized an incredible event that raised over a million dollars for the Cross Cancer Institute and the fight against cancer. The proceeds from this year's game are directly supporting the purchase of a PET/MR scanner. The device will produce extremely detailed images of cancer in its earliest stages and provide invaluable information for research and care. This will enhance our doctors' ability to deliver the right treatments at the right time while cutting patients' radiation exposure per scan in half.

This year's game was an unequivocal success, once again setting a new Guinness world record. Mr. Speaker, 40 brave players spent 10 days on the ice, each player skating for about 4,200 minutes, which is equivalent to two nonlockout NHL seasons. During this time more than 1,200 smokies, 1,000 hot dogs, and 2,000 cups of coffee were purchased and consumed, raising another \$17,000 for the cause. Eighty-one volunteer referees kept score, as well as the peace, while 50 volunteer massage therapists and 20 nurses ensured that weary muscles were kept moving; 2,100 rolls of tape kept sticks on the ice and pads to shins while 4,220 goals found the twine. What we get when we add these numbers up is an incredible display of generosity, grit, and determination.

I would like to thank all of the participants, volunteers, and all those who helped make this year's world's longest hockey game the best event yet. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let us move on to Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Calgary-West.

Ernest Côté

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I wish to acknowledge Mr. Ernest Côté and thank him for his contributions to Alberta and Canada. He recently passed away at the age of 101.

Members may recall that Mr. Côté was our veteran of the Second World War who made national headlines after being tied up and robbed in Ottawa. What most people do not know is that he studied law at the U of A and classical French at the Edmonton Jesuit College. In 1939 he joined the Royal 22nd Regiment as a lieutenant. On June 6, 1944, he landed in Normandy, responsible for the logistics of the third division of the Canadian infantry. Seventy years later he returned to commemorate their arrival.

What most do not know is that in 1993 Mr. Côté donated cash to U of A's Campus Saint-Jean, establishing bursaries awarded to students studying there. He revisited the campus only a few weeks before his death. Also, Mr. Speaker, only a few years ago he spoke at the 75th anniversary of Jean Côté, a small community in my constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. He was there to celebrate and remember his roots and his father, Jean-Léon Côté, who gave his name to Jean Côté. Mr. Jean Côté was a surveyor, a mining engineer, an MLA here in Alberta from 1909 to 1923, and then a Senator, appointed in 1923.

I'm very proud to have had met Mr. Ernest Côté, who left his mark on Alberta, Canada, the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and as a Canadian ambassador to Finland. We lost a man of tremendous leadership and courage. He was a true role model for all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Police Officer Deaths

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every member knows the importance of our front-line emergency services. In regard to the law enforcement officers who carry out their role under federal, provincial, or municipal jurisdiction, each of these courageous individuals has made a commitment to protect Albertan lives.

With this commitment comes risk, risk that not every person is willing or able to take. They are the chosen few who respond to situations in which their actions are sometimes unappreciated, but their split-second decisions can mean the difference between life and death. Often berated, police officers put their lives on the line to make sure that our lives are protected. Police officers who have made the ultimate sacrifice and lost their lives in the line of duty provide a stark reminder of the ongoing and ever-present dangers they face.

As a former police officer myself I would like to read the following poem, anonymously written, which humanizes the consequences of their job.

I have been where you fear to be,
I have seen what you fear to see,
I have done what you fear to do,
All these things I have done for you.

I am the man you lean upon,
The man you cast your scorn upon,
The man you bring your troubles to,
All these men I've been for you.

The man you ask to stand apart,
The man you feel should have no heart,
The man you call the man in blue,
But I'm just a man, just like you.

And through the years I've come to see,
That I'm not what you ask of me,
So take this badge and take this gun,
Will you take it? ... Will anyone?

And when you watch a person die,
And hear a battered child cry,
Then do you think you could be,
All the things you ask of me?

There should be no higher honour than that given to those men and women who give their lives in the line of duty. Their actions should never be forgotten.

I will be working with Alberta Justice in an attempt to reform the judicial administrative process to ensure that tragedies such as Mayerthorpe and St. Albert never happen again.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

2:50 St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and acknowledge some very special guests we have joining us today. Joining the hon. Member for St. Albert today are some guests doing great work in his constituency. On his behalf I welcome Suzan and Ward Krecsy and Charlie and Marilyn Schroder with the St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village. The St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village provides vulnerable people in the community and surrounding area with free services so they can return to a state of independence and an improved quality of life. It's the compassion and community dedication shown by people like the Krecsys and Schrodors that make Alberta such a fantastic province to call home.

We are pleased to support food banks in St. Albert and my constituency of Stony Plain and all across the province. Organizations such as the St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village help to empower vulnerable Albertans to achieve their full potential. Some of the services that are provided include liaison work connecting individuals and families to the appropriate social services. That includes accessing housing and food, family violence prevention, and employment services. The best way to measure a society is by how well they treat their most vulnerable citizens. That is why food banks like the Parkland Food Bank have recently received CIP funding.

Mr. Speaker, we are dedicated to ensuring that public support is available to Albertans, but we need the ongoing dedication of community members like our guests here today as well. It will take both the government and community working together to ensure that all Albertans have access to the services they need. I want to thank our guests here today for their dedication to the betterment of St. Albert and the surrounding area. Their work has made a difference.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Bill 22

Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 22, the Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act.

This new legislation would ban businesses from providing artificial tanning services to minors, prohibit advertising of artificial tanning directed towards minors, mandate health warnings in artificial tanning facilities and on advertising materials, and prohibit unsupervised self-service artificial tanning equipment in public places. Research shows that using tanning equipment before the age of 35 increases the risk of melanoma skin cancer by 59 per cent. Every Albertan, especially our youth, should be able to enjoy a life free of preventable cancers.

I would like to move first reading of the skin cancer prevention act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that pursuant to Standing Order 75 Bill 22, the Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, Bill 24, being the Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, the Government House Leader had, I thought, waved to you, but in actual fact he was waving at himself. So I hesitate to interrupt, but let me recognize the hon. Government House Leader first.

Mr. Denis: First off, Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask the unanimous consent of the House to continue the Routine past 3 p.m., pursuant to rule 7(7).

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: We will conclude the Routine when it concludes post-3 o'clock.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, actually, I would also like to ask the Assembly for unanimous consent to waive the notice required by Standing Order 39(1)(d) to allow the introduction of Bill 24, the Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: On that note, we will now move to the hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Bill 24

Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act

Mr. McIver: Thank you for your patience, Mr. Speaker. I now request leave to introduce a bill, being Bill 24, the Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill, if passed, would repeal the Public Sector Services Continuation Act, which was passed in December 2013 but was never proclaimed or put into force. Government is currently in the process of exploring new models of public-sector legislation to ensure that the essential services Albertans rely on are provided. New legislation will align with the recent Supreme Court of Canada decision regarding labour legislation. Repealing the Public Sector Services Continuation Act is a first logical step in this developmental process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: We'll start with the Minister of Health, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the five requisite copies of the Mental Health Patient Advocate office annual report for the year 2013-14. This report was submitted to me in accordance with the provisions of section 47(1) of the Mental Health Act. The report is entitled We're in This Together: Compassion, Hope, Help. It highlights how the Mental Health Patient Advocate office protects the rights of persons in accordance with the Mental Health Act and the patient advocate regulation. The office of the Mental Health Patient Advocate opened 2,050 new files in 2014-15. I'm very proud of the important work they have done over the years, and I'm pleased they were able to join us today to see this report tabled in the Legislature. I would like to thank them for their continued work in supporting some of our society's most vulnerable populations.

The Speaker: Let me move straight on to Edmonton-Centre, followed by Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Ms Blakeman: I regret, Mr. Speaker, that I was overly optimistic about tablings today. I'll try for tomorrow.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's go to Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of 26 different letters written by my constituents and Albertans struggling with Lyme disease. They highlight how our current system leaves many Albertans jumping hurdles as they seek help and answers for their illness. They are truly heart-wrenching stories.

I thank you for this opportunity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an analysis conducted by the Holy Spirit Catholic school board on how a 5 per cent cut would affect education quality. This analysis found that two schools within the district would have to be shut down. It also found that 32 full-time teaching positions would be cut in addition to nine support staff. We at the Alberta NDP stand with teachers and students in this province. I table this analysis with hope that the government will realize the real damage that cuts like these would do to Alberta's future generations and their families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary Shaw, I understand that you have two tablings. Please proceed with both.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do rise with two tablings today. The first is a letter by Ian and Rita Campbell. Ian is a cancer survivor, and the family stopped by my office and wanted to discuss the importance of moving forward with the cancer centre in Calgary. I have the requisite number of copies of that.

I also have a letter here by a grade 11 student in my constituency, Ms Syameena Pillai. She is the president of Student Voice at Centennial high school and wanted to submit a letter about her thoughts around the implications of potential cuts to education.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well to table a document, including the appropriate five copies, a paper that was signed by approximately 540 concerned citizens of Berwyn, Whitelaw, Bluesky, Grimshaw, Brownvale, Fairview, Peace River, and the surrounding areas opposing the closure of the North Peace Housing Autumn Lodge in Berwyn. Certainly, they are very concerned about the closure of that particular lodge.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, I want to table the requisite number of copies of the letter to St. Nick from the young Albertan that I introduced today. I'll read it real quick. It'll take 30 seconds.

Dear Saint Nick,

Hello!! How are you? How are your Reindeer? Since I have learned that you only give 1 gift, not that I'm complaining, I will give you 3 things to choose from appropriate to my goodness:

1. to put a note in my brother's Gift that will tell him to be a little nicer.
2. to stop Global warming and help save big cats.
3. for the world to be more environmentally friendly.

Sincerely,

William Kendall.

And then he writes,

P.S. I would prefer #2 or 3.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to table five copies of an e-mail received in my office from the Alberta Association of Optometrists supporting my private member's Bill 206, the Childhood Comprehensive Eye Examination Act. The e-mail states: "In response to your request, the Alberta Association of Optometrists has reviewed the draft Private Member's Bill 206, 'Childhood Comprehensive Eye Examination Act' and has no objection to the optometric provisions within the Bill."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the Minister of Justice.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter from the town of Whitecourt supporting Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014, and what a great bill that was, too.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am rising to table five copies of an article by CBC news, March 17, 2015, in which one of the leadership candidates, Linda Osinchuk, for the Wildrose Alliance Party talks about, "moving from fakers and takers to the makers," and indicates: "We should be looking at selling bonds, Alberta bonds. And we can actually use this to create revenue." Those are actual quotes. Actual quotes.

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

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has been recognized, and she does have the floor. Let us give it to her with grace.

Carry on.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings, of which I have five copies of each. Would you like me to do all three in a row? Just go one after the other? Thank you.

The first tabling I have is New High School, New Name from the *Fort Saskatchewan Record* on Thursday, March 19. The new high school that is proposed for Fort Saskatchewan has a new identity and new name. St. André Bessette was chosen for the name of the Elk Island Catholic high school, and it's going to open adjacent to the Dow Centre.

My next tabling is not such good news, Mr. Speaker, and that would be a news report that was on Global on March 21 about a local Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville constituent who had to wait seven hours in a hospital waiting room. I'm certainly concerned about the triage and the grief that that particular patient went through. That should not happen to anyone else, and we need to see that change.

My last tabling, Mr. Speaker, is recognizing Carole Bossert, who is a teacher at James Mowat elementary school in Fort Saskatchewan, for her work in creating a program that links seniors and grades 4, 5, and 6 students together. That appeared on Thursday, March 19, in the *Fort Saskatchewan Record*.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with the requisite number of copies of a news release from the Alberta Forest Products Association, in which the president says: “This is great news for the forest industry and for Alberta’s economy.” Naturally, he’s talking about that great bill, Bill 203.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of two tablings. The first tabling is a search under the consultant lobbyists registration entitled CL0128, and it states that the lobbyist there is Navigator for the sprinkler systems.

The second tabling, with the requisite copies, is a search from the consultant lobbyists registration dated March 11, 2015, and it is with respect to the lobbying for certain infrastructure in Okotoks. It clearly states that Navigator is the registered lobbyist.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Mandel, the Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta 2013 annual report; pursuant to the Public Health Act the Public Health Appeal Board 2014 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we have three points of order to deal with now.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

The Speaker: The first one was raised, I believe, just around 2 p.m. by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, so if you would please proceed with your citation and your point.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise according to Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), and it is with respect to a comment made by the Premier in reference to a hundred thousand dollar campaign ad that taxpayers are paying for. He had indicated that the reason for the Wildrose not participating in this, what I would call, farce of wasting taxpayer dollars was that the Wildrose had no plan.

Mr. Speaker, this is categorically untrue. Not only do we have a very robust plan, some of the most substantive policies of all the political parties – you can check it out at www.wildrose.ca – but we do also advocate for things like lower taxes, decentralization of health care, protection of property rights, formalizing a process to lower power bills, and, of course, freedom: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of conscience. We have policies on essentially every single ministry.

Of course, on this particular issue, Mr. Speaker, it was the Premier’s chief of staff that approached our party, and we made it very clear that the reason we were not participating – it was made very clear to the Premier’s chief of staff – was because we felt that it was a waste of taxpayer dollars. The Premier should have been made aware of this, that that’s the reason why we rejected wasting taxpayer dollars like that, not according to the reason that he had provided.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know, we could dig into this a little bit more tomorrow. If the Premier is not willing to clarify his statements, we can keep digging on this. But we made it very clear what the reason for not participating was, and he has misled the Assembly in indicating why we didn’t participate.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s almost terrible that this member continues to use this type of language when he knows that you can’t have a point of order on a point of order. I’ll just leave it at that.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at what the text of 23(h), (i), and (j) says:

(h) makes allegations against another Member.

The Premier didn’t do that.

(i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member.

That didn’t happen either.

Third,

(j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

He didn’t do that either.

Mr. Speaker, it’s a statement of opinion, not fact, when someone says “we have a plan” or “we don’t have a plan.” That is a fair comment. This member talks about free speech – and I’m with him on free speech – but this is one of those cases where you can accept, respectfully, two versions of the same facts. I’m sorry. I don’t have the *Beauchesne* citation that you often indicate.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

I hope there’s no one else on this. It’s a very straightforward point. We frequently hear different accounts of different things, and the House has been reminded many times that *Beauchesne* 494 is quite applicable, and I’ll quote briefly.

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted.

And it goes on and says:

On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

I believe the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills has clarified his side of this. I see no point of order here, nor do I see the need to allow us to engage in any further debate on the point of order.

So that closes that matter.

Point of Order Appropriation Process

The Speaker: We’ll move on to point of order 2, and that was enunciated at approximately 2:15 p.m. It’s again the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, so please proceed with number 2.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’ll actually combine the second and third points of order together. I’m rising according to Standing Order 23(h), (i), (j), and, actually, in this case (l). This is in regard to a question from the Official Opposition with respect to the Kananaskis golf course. In response to those questions both the Premier and one of the hon. ministers indicated that they would not be proceeding with spending any more money on that particular topic.

3:10

Why this is interesting, Mr. Speaker, is that in the Legislative Assembly we actually passed legislation in supplementary supply that indicated that money would be spent on that golf course. So you have an instance here where the Premier of Alberta under the

Executive Council of government is overriding the will of this Assembly. These members across the aisle voted in favour of allocating money to the golf course, and now the Premier is stating that that money will not be used. That, again, is overriding the will of this Assembly. It's similar to points of privilege, actually, that were put forward previously in terms of overriding independent committees. This is even one step further, I would submit. Versus a delegated committee from this Assembly, he's actually overriding the entire will of this Assembly.

Perhaps the proper recourse would be a point of privilege here, where the Premier has overridden the will of this Assembly that has specifically stated that monies will be spent for a golf course. Now, if he is, by his own whim, ignoring the entire will of the Assembly, ignoring legislation that was passed, that would be improper, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that that be clarified or that we give notice that a point of privilege will be called tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, if this member wants to call a point of privilege, please, go right ahead and do so.

I went to dictionary.com on my BlackBerry, and it talks about estimates. "To form an approximate judgment or opinion regarding the worth, amount, size, weight . . . [or] calculate approximately". And then it goes down to say: "The department will use the estimates for budgetary purposes." That's the first definition.

Now, this member had referred to Bill 17 and Bill 18. I have a copy of them in front of me, Mr. Speaker, and it doesn't talk specifically about a golf course here. But the point here is that even if it did, the estimates are just that. What happens when a department doesn't spend the money? They're not obliged to. They're just authorized to. When I was minister of housing I would routinely return money back to the treasury. There is not a requirement under the Standing Orders or *Beauchesne's* or anywhere else that this go back to the item here.

This might be more of a point of clarification, but there certainly is no point of order here. If this member wants to make a point of privilege, he is at liberty to do so as a member of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, unfortunately, I'm forced to agree with the Government House Leader with respect to this point of order. There is no compulsion on the part of the government to spend money that is budgeted for.

The parliamentary process is that the Legislature or the Parliament must be consulted to gain approval for the taxation and the expenditure of funds, but it is not something that is then mandated when the Legislature votes certain sums. That is why in my question today I asked for the government to repeal the approval of the \$8 million because my fear, of course, is that as soon as the election is over, they will spend this money. That's why a repeal is the only answer. The point of order just doesn't do the trick, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Well, once again here, I hope there is no one else wishing to chime in to take up the time, but if there is, I'd recognize you briefly. I see no one, so let's move on.

I would agree that this is simply a matter that is frequently characterized as being a dispute as to the facts. We know what estimates are. We've been here. We've been through this, some of

us for many, many years. Estimates are in fact estimates, and they're titled that for a reason. It does not oblige the government to follow through necessarily. It provides, perhaps, a guideline or however else you might want to interpret it. But at the end of the day if a government wishes to change its mind about something that it's been directed to do or requested to do or has in its estimates to do, then the government is certainly at liberty to do that. It's within their purview to do so.

Accordingly, I find there to be no point of order on this matter, but I do thank the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills for clarifying his statements on it once again and for rolling the two together to save the House some time.

On that note, we can move on.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 204

Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014

[Debate adjourned March 16: Mr. Ellis speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-West, I believe you still have eight minutes. If not, we can pass it over to someone else. I would be happy to recognize Calgary-Glenmore in that case, and then we'll bounce back and forth with opposition members who may wish to participate.

Hon. member, you have the floor.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise and speak to you about Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014. My focus today is to explain what distracted driving means and how this impacts a person's ability to drive, which can ultimately lead to accidents.

As I begin, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for bringing this bill forward. The traffic safety amendment act would enhance the Traffic Safety Act by proposing that monetary penalties be increased from \$172 to \$250, with a penalty of three demerits for every offence.

The Traffic Safety Act, introduced in 2007, was the first strategy of its kind in Canada. The legislation was introduced due to the significantly high number of collisions, deaths, and injuries on Alberta's roads. Since the implementation of this plan the number of traffic fatalities has declined. In fact, over the past four years the loss of life has decreased by nearly 32 per cent.

As drivers we all know that distracted driving can be a very dangerous act. Alberta is known for our harsh winters, with our often terrible road conditions, and after a large dump of snow driving collisions peak. We also experience very unpredictable weather in all regions of our province.

Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that distracted driving is dangerous and that in just five seconds someone can die, whether immediately at the side of the roadway or hours, days, weeks later, and the impact to loved ones, co-workers, and the community is large.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

Individuals know that it is illegal to use a phone while driving, whether for texting or writing e-mails, and it is even illegal to talk while using your phone as a speaker. But we Albertans are clever, and no matter what the excuse some of us may give, we know that a distraction from the road is dangerous. What I do believe is that

as drivers we too often assume that the distracted driving mistake will not happen to us, and we underestimate the profound effect driver errors have on others.

Bill 204 will amend the Alberta Traffic Safety Act, encouraging drivers to stop looking at their laps and to focus on the road. Alberta has done an exceptional job with increasing awareness and improving safety on our highways. In 2004 Alberta suffered 387 fatalities due to the improper actions of drivers and distracted driving. In 2006 these fatalities rose approximately 20 per cent, to 453 fatalities. In 2007, the same year the Alberta traffic safety action plan was implemented, 458 collisions and fatalities occurred, unfortunately another year of increases.

Five years ago this month, in 2010, my family was impacted when we lost a family member as a result of a traffic fatality. It was a wonderful spring day when my mom and dad went for a drive along highway 822. Unfortunately, an accident happened, and the vehicle they were in was T-boned, and three days later my mom was no longer with us. The impact was felt not only by our family in Alberta, but friends and family in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, British Columbia, and Ontario were soon receiving the news that Helen had passed. While I am not alone in this Assembly in having lost a family member to a traffic fatality, we all feel, we all hurt, and we all want to work to make our roads safer. [some applause] Thank you. Life goes on, and daily, when I witness careless and distracted driving, I honour my mom and remind myself of the importance of paying attention behind the wheel.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to report that in the following year, 2011, the number of fatalities did decrease in Alberta to 344. While this number is still staggering, Alberta is slowly seeing improvements. In any given year the number of people killed on Alberta's roads is equivalent to the population of an average elementary school. If Bill 204 is passed, it will help keep Albertans safe on the roads and reduce the number of fatalities.

3:20

To date Alberta's fatalities from distracted driving have not risen since the low recorded in 2011. The fact that the numbers have improved is a good indication that the reforms of the Alberta traffic safety action plan are working. Unfortunately, though, we are seeing a trend up and that distracted driving is getting worse than in the previous years. Bill 204 would continue with the work that the province has set out to combat distracted driving.

Safe roads Alberta has done an incredible job with their campaign Crotches Kill. The posters, radio spots, and other advertisements were impossible to miss. These posters featured the all-too-familiar picture of a driver looking down at their lap while operating an automobile. The ad campaign had an impact, to lower the number of distracted driving offences that were committed in the last year. While the ads were offensive to some individuals, they did get the attention of the target market, and Albertans are talking more about the dangers of distracted driving.

Another agency concerned with distracted driving is the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. In their practices distracted driving is a form of impaired driving since a driver's judgment is compromised when they are not fully focused on the road. Their campaign states that every time a person texts, they take their eyes off the road for five seconds, which is too often the cause of fatalities on our roads. So let's count here, Madam Speaker, five seconds: one one-thousand, two one-thousand, three one-thousand, four one-thousand, five one-thousand. If each of us were driving, how far did we just travel?

A study conducted by the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators found that in 80 per cent of collisions the driver had looked away from the road three seconds prior to the crash. Even when drivers use a hands-free device, they are less aware of the

traffic around them as they tend to react more slowly to a critical event or, worse, they do not detect the danger at all.

Madam Speaker, Alberta's roads can be dangerous no matter what the season, but they are particularly bad during the winter months. Can you imagine the effect the added danger of poor road conditions has on a distracted driver when they are three times more likely to be in a crash than an attentive driver?

Bill 204 will support the Alberta government's efforts to stop distracted driving. Although everyone is well aware of the dangers of texting while driving, it also needs to be mentioned that cyclists are also subject to distracted driving laws. While cyclists are not operating a motor vehicle, they are on the same roads and therefore can cause harm to themselves and others when disobeying the law. Cyclists have to follow the distracted driving laws also.

Distracted driving legislation states that it is illegal to read any printed materials or electronic devices; use of hand-held phones, speaker phones; programming a GPS; personal grooming; watching digital screens; having an animal sit in the front seat; reading; writing. All kinds of activities are distracted driving.

Madam Speaker, the foundation has been laid for ending distracted driving in Alberta, and it is clear what changes need to be made to improve the system. When Bill 16 was passed, there was a drastic change for the better on Alberta roads; they became safer. Unfortunately, five years later distracted driving is back on the rise and a leading cause of collisions and fatalities on our roads. Bill 204 will help make the next necessary changes required for Albertans to be safe on the roads once again.

Bill 204, the traffic safety amendment act, would bring safety back to our roads, so please join me in supporting this bill to move forward. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and contribute to the debate on Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. Today I would like to thank the hon. member for bringing forth Bill 204 for debate. He has proven to be an important advocate working towards safer roadways across our province.

Madam Speaker, if passed, Bill 204 will amend the Traffic Safety Act by increasing the severity of penalties for persons accused of distracted driving. Currently Alberta experiences one of the lowest fines for distracted driving in comparison with other provinces in Canada. Since the introduction of distracted driving legislation the fine for distracted driving offences has been only \$172. It is the opinion of many RCMP officers that this fine has not done enough to improve the statistics of distracted driving incidents on Alberta's roadways. Widely supported by Albertans, Bill 204 would introduce demerit points for each distracted driving offence plus an increase in fines. Each offence will be met with a monetary penalty of \$250 plus three demerit points issued on a person's driving record.

Madam Speaker, it is clear that current distracted driving legislation does not dramatically reduce the incidence of distracted driving. Today 90 per cent of collisions are believed to be caused by driver error. Distracted driving continues to be a major issue that must be addressed to ensure the safety of all Albertans. In 2004 there were a reported 387 fatalities due to distracted driving in Alberta.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The RCMP have promoted various suggestions which we can use to avoid distracted driving while operating a motor vehicle. Before you drive, it is suggested that you know your route before you begin

your trip. Preprogram your trip if you're using a GPS system. Better yet, have your route memorized. The RCMP have also suggested allowing yourself plenty of time to reach your destination. If you are not rushed, you are less likely to be distracted by the time or the pressure to arrive. In addition to presetting your GPS system, it is also in the driver's best interest to preset all seats, mirrors, climate control, and radio stations.

Mr. Speaker, the RCMP have also recommended that teaching your children these simple tasks while they are first learning to drive can further their discipline and knowledge of distracted driving immediately when they receive their licensing. Bill 204 would be a deterrent to younger adults developing habits of distracted driving because the repercussions of an offence would be relatively high, further incorporating better driving habits at a young age that will stay with them through their adulthood.

Other recommendations by the RCMP for lowering your chances of driving while distracted are to secure loose objects so they do not roll around your vehicle, becoming a distraction, nor will you be tempted to reach for them while you're driving. Also, prepare your children with everything they need by giving them larger items to play with instead of small ones. Secure pets properly in the back seat. If they are moving around in the vehicle, they can easily become a distraction or a physical barrier for the driver's line of vision and ability to manoeuvre the vehicle. Finally, turn off the alerts on your phone so you're not tempted to check your texts and your e-mails. The RCMP continues to communicate to the public on what they see and hear every day regarding distracted driving behaviour and ways in which they can prevent it.

Mr. Speaker, last month was Distracted Driving Month, and Alberta RCMP officers joined together to increase distracted driving enforcement in an effort to raise awareness and educate Albertans on the various risks it imposes on not only themselves but the general public. The goal was to reduce the number of fatalities and serious injury crashes caused by distracted driving. Sindre RCMP Sergeant Jim Lank said that there is a need to change the public attitudes and values towards distracted driving; everybody, to some degree, is not complying with this law, and that is a huge traffic safety issue.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 speaks to all RCMP officers across the province and supports them in their efforts to reduce fatalities caused by distracted driving. Other RCMP officers have been quoted as saying that the problem is that society has become so dependent on the use of their mobile phones and other portable devices that there is a very low compliance rate.

Mr. Speaker, how do we increase the compliance of Albertans? Bill 204 would be a big step in the right direction and can work towards decreasing the number of fatalities seen by front-line RCMP officers in our province. According to an Alberta RCMP press release, since distracted driving came into effect on September 1, 2011, there have been over 60,000 distracted driving charges laid by Alberta RCMP officers. There were 23,913 convictions alone for distracted driving committed on roads patrolled by Alberta RCMP.

If a vehicle is travelling a hundred kilometres per hour, it travels a distance of approximately 30 metres per second. Alberta RCMP state that during a three-second glance at a cellphone, that vehicle travelled almost a hundred metres, or 270 feet. The three-second glance equates to a hundred metres at a hundred kilometres per hour, which is more than enough to get into a serious collision.

Mr. Speaker, these kinds of collisions occur across the country every single day. In many communities it has overtaken impaired driving as the leading factor in vehicle collisions. Bill 204 would

help to establish an increased deterrent for distracted driving in an attempt to further protect Albertans on our roadways. Distracted driving is a major issue, and we must begin to realize that campaigns are not going to be enough to implement the change we need in order to reduce the incidences of distracted driving and fatalities caused by it. It is in our power to implement legislation that will further protect all Albertans and serve as a catalyst to improve driver behaviour. We must consider implementing measures consistent with our neighbouring provinces to make our roadways safer for all who use them.

Distracted driving continues to surpass alcohol as a factor causing road deaths, and the public is still unaware of how dangerous cellphones are behind the wheel. It is important for the public to realize that distracted driving does not only include cellphones; it includes anything that you voluntarily do in your vehicle to prevent your utmost attention to operating your motor vehicle.

I commend the hon. Member for Calgary-East as we continue to debate Bill 204, and I look forward to hearing from our remaining members that wish to speak to it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand today to debate on Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. The hon. member has proven time and time again what a passionate advocate he is for safe and responsible driving.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, my apologies. The record shows that you spoke already, so you can't speak again.

Ms DeLong: Aw.

The Deputy Speaker: My apologies. I didn't check the list.

With that, I'll recognize the next speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and participate in this wonderful bill, Bill 204, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the hon. member bringing this bill forward. I feel grateful to stand and speak to you about the serious topic of distracted driving.

Bill 204 proposes to amend the Traffic Safety Act in order to combat distracted driving on Alberta's roads. Alberta was not only one of the last Canadian provinces to legislate a law against distracted driving, but it was the only one of those few not including demerit points with their fine. Today we get one step closer to realizing this change. Bill 204 will not only increase the already existing fine of \$172 to \$250, but it will add a penalty of three demerit points.

Mr. Speaker, distracted driving is one of the most dangerous offences on the road today, and people do not seem to realize the dangers associated with it. We must do the responsible thing by influencing the driver to stop committing this crime. Bill 204 supports those initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, my focus today will be on the importance of adding the line "a person who is guilty of an offence under section . . . 115.3." It is evident from what we have heard here today that many distractions exist to draw attention from the driver, but cellphones clearly represent the most popular form of distraction. An estimated

1 in 4 car crashes on the road today involve cellphone usage. Hands-free technology is incredibly popular today, and it is often the go-to for drivers who don't want to be ticketed for talking or texting while driving. However, new technology can be just as dangerous as using non hands-free devices as your brain still remains distracted from the road for the conversation.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 proposes increased penalties in section 158 of the Alberta Traffic Safety Act. Section 115 pertains to prohibited actions while driving a vehicle and using a hand-held Global Positioning System. Section 115.3 outlines a number of prohibited activities that will become subject to stiffer penalties under this bill.

Mr. Speaker, most if not all drivers use navigation devices to get around on the road today. Although it is a blessing, it is also a curse. The incredible technology market has taken our world by storm, and it has become so blatantly difficult for us to keep up with the ever-changing technology. Yes, we need to continue to use those great new advancements to help us navigate through life; however, we must not forget the importance of staying safe.

Distracted driving involves so much more than just texting behind the wheel; it has also to do with many activities you are performing while you're driving. Focus should be on the road. The only true solution to this problem is to put your phone or any other devices that may distract you away when you're driving.

Section 115 specifically outlines the provision when operating a Global Positioning System, or GPS, while behind the wheel.

Section 115.3(1) reads: "Subject to this section and the regulations made under section 115.5, no individual shall use a global positioning system navigation device . . . while driving."

Section 115.3(2) states:

An individual may use a global positioning system navigation device while driving or operating a vehicle on a highway if the system

- (a) is programmed before the individual [gets behind the wheel], or
- (b) is used in a voice-activated manner.

The use of a GPS is not illegal as long as they are programmed before an individual starts to drive or if it's voice activated, not hand held.

Furthermore, section 115.3(3) states:

If a global positioning system navigation device is portable, an individual may use the system while driving or operating a vehicle on a highway if, in addition to the requirements of subsection (2), the system

- (a) is not held in the individual's hand, and
- (b) is securely affixed to the vehicle in a manner that does not interfere with the safe operation of the vehicle.

3:40

Alberta has some of the most dangerous highways in Canada. The fines should reflect this, and increasing the penalty for distracted drivers should be a priority. Albertans need to start putting their phones and GPS devices away before they start driving on our roads. Mr. Speaker, Albertans need to feel safe on the road, and I feel section 115.3 is an important inclusion to the Traffic Safety Act.

Alberta's current fine of \$172 is the only penalty. When comparing it to the rest of Canada, where any driver can receive it when they are convicted of this crime, it is evident that Alberta is in need of new legislation regarding distracted driving penalties. Bill 204 will ensure that the fine is increased, and if a person commits a more severe offence behind the wheel, they will be appropriately fined for it.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that distracted driving is an issue for every province in Canada, not just Alberta. All other Canadian provinces have already taken these dangerous acts into serious consideration

by legislating tougher laws. Today the lowest fine in Canada is in Newfoundland and Labrador at \$100. However, even with it being \$72 less than Alberta's apparently steeper fine, it is still a much greater penalty in that this is the lowest fine of an incremental schedule that peaks at \$400 and also includes three demerit points. With Alberta being one of the only provinces that do not enforce the demerit points, places like Newfoundland have a higher penalty because they have demerits and monetary fines.

Section 158(5)(b) in the bill proposes to include three demerit points in accordance with the current regulations. Mr. Speaker, there is no question that having demerit points attached to the fine is not ideal; however, it may be the best solution for Albertans. By enabling law enforcement to assign demerit points, this penalty will no longer be just a nuisance but an offence that will affect driving records, creating a long-lasting effect. If so many Canadian provinces have not needed to increase their fines, then maybe they are doing something right by utilizing the demerits as punitive measures. Adding three demerits to the current penalty will provide a long-term solution for those offenders who are unaffected by the current fine. Distracted driving will decrease with substantial numbers, forcing the dangerous drivers off the road.

Mr. Speaker, increasing the penalty under section 158 of the traffic act. . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014. I want to express my heartfelt thanks to the hon. Member for Calgary-East for bringing forward this legislation about distracted driving so that we can discuss this important and, I dare say, sometimes life-and-death topic. We all know that the legislation would increase the \$172 fine to \$250, but what most people really need to pay attention to, I believe, is that it would cost offending drivers three demerit points.

Mr. Speaker, the current legislation applies to all drivers of motor vehicles and bicycles within the province of Alberta, and while the existing legislation is a deterrent to distracted driving, the addition of demerits would add significant teeth to the legislation. That's the word on the street that I've heard. Our government takes all traffic issues seriously but none more than the preventable plight of distracted driving and the sometimes mortal results.

Distracted driving is a serious problem in our society, that has been exacerbated by the ease with which we can access media and communications on our hand-held devices. Cellphones have become such a prominent part of our lives that we use them literally everywhere, including using our phones in inappropriate circumstances, times, and places such as while operating a motor vehicle.

The current legislation prevents drivers from doing a number of things while driving, including using hand-held cellular telephones, texting, e-mailing, using electronic devices, entering information on GPS units, reading, writing, personal grooming, watching a TV screen, and having a pet sit in the front seat of a car. As you can see, many things can distract drivers, but I do want to point out that cellphones are one of the more serious distractions, and here's why, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, statistics show that cellphone use while driving increases a driver's chance of an accident far more drastically than other distractions. A person who is texting on a cellphone is 23 – that's right, 23 – times more likely to have an accident, while someone who is talking on a cellphone is four to five times more likely to have an accident. Those are very serious numbers. Non cellphone related activities also increase a person's chance of an accident, with both reading and applying makeup – I

don't know how often that applies to you, Mr. Speaker – increasing the odds by three times.

Regardless of what is distracting drivers, the most important point is that it harms and sometimes kills Albertans, and it can occur on a daily basis. That's simply unacceptable. According to Alberta Transportation distracted drivers are three times more likely to be in a crash than attentive drivers. During 2012 around 130,000 collisions were recorded on Alberta roadways. One hundred and thirty thousand. Property damage collisions represented almost 90 per cent of this total while over 10 per cent were nonfatal injury collisions. Fatal collisions accounted for .2 per cent of the total reported collisions, and while that percentage is relatively small, it does add up to – get this – 307 lives lost, almost one every day on average, due to traffic collisions in our province.

Alberta Transportation estimates that as many as 30 per cent of all accidents are caused by some form of distracted driving. While traffic accidents are something we can't necessarily stop, at least not at this point in time in human history, distracted driving is something that we can make great strides to reduce.

I think it's important to understand the types of people that actually drive distracted. This isn't opinion; this is based on study, Mr. Speaker. There are many myths about distracted driving, but one I'd like to address is that this is solely a problem with our youth. Here's why. We looked into it, and we found that Ottawa's Traffic Injury Research Foundation, or TIRF, conducted a study of the number of accidents that occurred from 16- to 19-year-olds and compared them to accidents from those that are 20 years of age and older. They found some surprising results. The detailed study describes the ways in which distracted driving impacted 16- to 19-year-olds, but it overlooks important points, mainly that the number of distracted driving related fatalities among people older than 20 was actually significantly higher than in the range of the youth. But let's be very clear. This is a problem for everyone of every age group.

3:50

In 2013 researchers at the University of Alberta released a statistical analysis about texting and driving. It's good to have information from here at home. Using data months before the implementation of the 2011 distracted driving law – so this goes back a bit now – researchers determined several characteristics of people who appear to top the risk scale by using cellphones while driving. The results are shocking to some. Men actually outnumbered women by almost 10 per cent in phone use while driving. The largest proportion of offenders in both groups fell in the 35- to 44-year-old age category. The majority of mobile users had completed postsecondary education, again a surprise to many, and among income brackets the lowest income earners had the lowest level of cellphone use while driving. I don't think any one of us can be pointing any fingers on this issue, Mr. Speaker. Rates of use increased with each income category. Fascinating. Those earning over \$100,000 a year were the top users, or, shall we say, abusers.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this study paints a much different picture of who uses their cellphone while driving than some might expect. Some have made the point that current legislation does not go far enough and suggest that for those folks who can afford the inconvenience of a \$172 fine, well, the law is just meaningless. If that's the case, the demographics who most likely are driving distracted are likely unfazed by the current fines, and if that's true, more action is needed to prevent drivers of this demographic from driving distracted. Highlighting this demographic today allows us to recognize that this is not just a youth problem but applies to everyone in Alberta and beyond.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 proposes more stringent actions. Why? To prevent injury and death from distracted driving. By adding a three

demerit penalty, Albertans may in fact be less inclined to use their cellphones while driving. That's what this is all about. While penalties are an important part of keeping Albertans safe, education is also needed. We need to prevent our loved ones, including the next generation of Albertans, from driving distracted, and it's important that we also target older demographics because, of course, they're role models for the youth of our province. If adults set a proper example early, we can help to end distracted driving in our province altogether.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to again thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for his dedication to keeping Albertans safe. It's been an honour and a pleasure to discuss this topic and also to hear the debate surrounding this really important issue.

I do look forward to hearing the rest of my hon. colleagues discuss this topic, and, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your incredible attention to this ever-important topic.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. Member for Stony Plain, you have one minute in this segment.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand today to debate Bill 204, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. This bill is an excellent demonstration of that advocacy, and I'd like to use some examples from elsewhere in the country. The Ontario Provincial Police reported that in 2013 57 people lost their lives to impaired driving and 44 to excessive speed, but 78 were killed as a result of distracted driving.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

It is shocking that distracted driving is responsible for the majority of deaths in car crashes. Indeed, it has been found that 75 to 85 per cent of motor vehicle accidents are the consequence of distractions of various sorts, yet here in Alberta distracted driving is among the least punishable driving offences. This is disproportionate to the gravity of the situation, as I'm sure you all agree. Given the frequency of car accidents resulting from driver distraction and especially given the severity of consequences ... [Mr. Lemke's speaking time expired]

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East to close debate on Bill 204.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, all hon. members who rose to speak to Bill 204 on both sides of the House. As discussed, the goal of Bill 204 is to reduce distracted driving on Alberta roads by increasing the fine from \$172 to \$250 and three demerit points. This would position Alberta as one of the provinces with the strongest distracted driving fines. Bill 204 proposes a strong deterrent for distracted drivers and would spark a societal change in how distracted driving is treated by Albertans. Distracted driving is no longer acceptable, and these new measures reflect that.

Madam Speaker, incidents of distracted driving have gone up in recent years, with some Alberta police officers calling it worse than ever. Now is the time for the Alberta government to show some leadership and to listen to what Albertans are telling us. Bill 204 shows we are serious about protecting Albertans from distracted driving. A simple monetary fine hasn't been strong enough to deter distracted driving. With Bill 204 repeat offenders risk losing their licence if they do not change their driving behaviour.

Driving requires your full attention, Madam Speaker. Let's make Alberta a safer place by ensuring we do our best to reduce distractions

in vehicles. I value and respect all my colleagues' comments regarding this bill. I would like to thank everyone who participated in this debate and urge all hon. members to vote in support of Bill 204.

I call the question.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a second time]

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

Mr. Amery: I would like to ask for unanimous consent to move Bill 204 to Committee of the Whole.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 204 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Chair. I was very encouraged by the discussion during second reading, and I'm honoured to continue the discussion on Bill 204 here today and begin Committee of the Whole. I would like to thank everyone who spoke on Bill 204 already and everyone who will speak today.

Making real, measurable change is the kind of thing we aspire to as MLAs, Madam Chair, making real change for the people we work for, the people of this great province of ours. I look forward to carrying on debate today as we work towards real change.

Bill 204 is short and effective, presenting two key amendments to the Traffic Safety Act. Even those of us who are not lawyers easily interpret what is being proposed. Imagine, Madam Chair, if all bills were written this way.

Section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act is amended by adding subsection (5). Subsection (5) includes two provisions:

- (5) A person who is guilty of an offence under 115.1, 115.2, 115.3 or 115.4
 - (a) is liable to a fine of \$250, and
 - (b) shall be assessed 3 demerit points in accordance with the regulations.

4:00

Both of these provisions are absolutely necessary, Madam Chair, for this bill to be successful in curbing distracted driving. The \$250 fine is an increase from the former fine of \$172. This new fine would be one of the highest fines in Canada. This fine takes into consideration the severity of the infraction. Distracted driving is a very serious infraction that should not be taken lightly. We have discussed at length the implications and dangers that come with distracted driving, and I hope nobody will forget the conclusion that distracted driving kills.

Many of us have spoken about how many times we have seen distracted drivers on our commutes. A few of us have even admitted to being guilty ourselves. A \$250 fine will sting for those who choose cellphones and other electronic devices over safety, and it adds up very quickly for repeat offenders. Bill 204 amends section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act by adding subsection (5), and this will give authorities the power to administer this fine.

Madam Chair, the \$172 fine being amended here is one of the lower distracted driving fines amongst Canadian provinces. I proposed Bill 204 because the effectiveness of this fine has been poor. It hasn't reduced incidents of distracted driving and thus hasn't made our roads safer. We must consider that wages in Alberta are the highest, on average, in Canada. Financially many Albertans are able to brush off the fine with few significant consequences.

Madam Chair, we need a stronger deterrent. Our fine should represent the significance of the problem and the seriousness with which we treat it. By raising the fine to \$250, we will be in a position where offenders will take notice.

Bill 204 also proposes the introduction of three demerit points assessed to parties guilty of distracted driving. This point is just as integral to the vision of the bill as the increased monetary fine. Madam Chair, previously with past distracted driving legislation, notably Bill 16 from 2011, there weren't any demerits given to drivers guilty of distracted driving. That meant that as long as they had money to pay their fines, their driving records remained clean.

Distracted driving is like playing Russian roulette; if you keep playing, eventually you will lose. You may get away with driving distracted a few times, but you risk your life and the lives of others every time you do. Eventually the odds will catch up with you.

By adding three demerits, we are doing two very important things, Madam Chair. Firstly, we are working to prevent new drivers from becoming distracted drivers. Three demerit points are a significant consequence for drivers with clean records, especially young, graduated-licence drivers. Secondly, we are creating a very strong deterrent for repeat offenders.

Fifteen demerits over two years is all a driver is allowed before their licence is suspended and only eight demerits for drivers with a graduated licence, or GDL. Madam Chair, drivers will quickly realize that distracted driving can quickly result in having their driving privileges revoked. Three demerit points represent 20 per cent of allowable demerits. It represents 38 per cent for those with a GDL licence. That is a significant penalty, especially for those with prior infractions. When choosing between driving distracted or driving focused, I think many Albertans will choose to be focused when their driving privileges are on the line. You can text all you want from home if your licence has been suspended.

Madam Chair, this hard-line approach is absolutely needed to give our police officers a chance to fight distracted driving. Bill 204 will allow us to get serial distracted drivers off the road. Plus, it is important to keep the provision that would allow for the assessment of three demerit points in Bill 204.

Reading through Bill 204, it is important to remember that this is something we as elected officials have been asked for by Albertans. Albertans are the ones driving change here. We can be the conduits for that change. Adding subsection (5) to section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act is a win for the citizens of this province. It is a win for all Albertans, who value safety on our roads.

Madam Chair, this isn't about taking away liberties or punishing people. This is about aligning Alberta's laws with the values of all Albertans. This is a way to remind drivers to pull over to a safe place when responding to a phone call or to wait until they arrive safely at their destinations and to use common sense when

attempting to eat while they are driving. It is a reminder that the rear-view mirror is for looking behind you and not for vanity.

I am not here to lay blame on any particular group of people. I am not here to take away your cellphones. I am simply asking this Assembly to help make the future safer than our past. I want us to look forward and work to tackle a problem that has been going on for too long.

Madam Chair, Bill 16 started this conversation back in 2011. Since that time distracted driving has not gone away. In fact, it has gotten worse. It is time to add a new voice to this conversation, the voice of today's Albertans, who are fed up with distracted drivers endangering lives on the road. Bill 204 adds to this voice by increasing the fine and adding three demerits to an offender's driving record.

I'm excited to see this bill discussed here in Committee of the Whole, but I will not be satisfied until this bill is working to deter Albertans from driving distracted. I would like to work with everyone here to make sure that happens, and I urge you to support Bill 204.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014, and I'd like to congratulate the hon. Member for Calgary-East on this bill and for obtaining unanimous consent of the Assembly to proceed through to committee stage today. We will be supporting this bill.

It is interesting. I look back just a very few years, to when there were a number of us pushing for some form of a ban. At that time it was seen primarily as a ban on cellphone use while driving, and it was referred to one of the standing committees. We heard from the public, and we invited the police forces from Edmonton, Calgary, and, I believe, also the sheriffs to come and make presentations. On the basis of their advice we broadened out the definition from just cellphone use to all forms of distracted driving and brought forward that legislation. There was quite a bit of reluctance on the part of the government at that time to bring forward this legislation, but I think MLAs from all sides began to see the merits of that legislation, and eventually the government was persuaded to allow a private member's bill to proceed. It had the deficiency, I think, in that it did not impose demerits for convictions, so that's an important distinction. As well, the fines have been increased.

The bill brings Alberta in line generally with what is being done in other jurisdictions. We're currently the only province that does not give out demerits for distracted driving. Ontario and Nova Scotia just recently changed their legislation to include demerits.

I think one thing that I just want to mention is that this is also a boon to insurance companies, of course, because it gives them additional opportunities to raise people's rates, and some may see that as an additional disincentive to distracted driving. Others might take a different view with regard to that. Certainly, the increase in fines is justified, and many members today have spoken very eloquently about the impact of distracted driving on safety on our roads.

It's interesting that in the United States a study in 2009 found that 84 per cent of distracted driving accidents were due to carelessness or inattentiveness. In 2010 a study found that 80 per cent of collisions and 65 per cent of near misses had distracted driving as a contributing factor. In 2011 Alberta Transportation found that distracted drivers were three times more likely to be involved in a

collision than nondistracted drivers. Madam Chair, it's estimated that in Canada the cost for these collisions is at least \$10 billion, and it's clearly a very serious issue that's costing a great deal and threatening the lives of Albertans.

I think that it's an issue that's of considerable importance, and without going on any longer with regard to this, I do just want to get on the record as being supportive of Bill 204 and indicate that our caucus will be supporting it. Thank you.

4:10

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Madam Chair. Bill 204, brought forward by Calgary-East, will go to fix the deficiencies we had in the bill before. You know, we can bring in all the bills, as I said before, but we need the enforcement. This bill will bring our law more in line with Ontario, where they have introduced demerits, too.

In the bill the proposal is to add to section 158:

(5) A person who is guilty of an offence under section 115.1, 115.2, 115.3 or 115.4

(a) is liable to a fine of \$250, and

(b) shall be assessed 3 demerit points in accordance with the regulations.

After the last law came into effect, I think people were just becoming complacent. They didn't care. They said: "Okay. I'll just pay the \$172 fine. It's not a big deal." You could see that the law was not really working, and I think that maybe enforcement was an issue there, too. I see lots of people driving on the highway. They've got their phone, and they're texting, and they're doing whatever.

As I said before, too, people think that when they are in their car, it's their private property, that there should be no intrusion, that they can do whatever they want. Then in 2011 the government moved to limit the causes of distracted driving, namely the use of cellphones, by banning the use of these devices while operating a vehicle. As time passed, many, including police services, found that people continued to drive distracted without concern for a fine. Some, such as Chief Rick Hanson of the Calgary police at the time, called for demerit points to be issued to those convicted of distracted driving. Currently demerits are assessed and based on the demerit point and service of documents regulation, and this will only be demerits listed in the TSA itself.

Other provinces such as Ontario also have demerit points for distracted driving. As I said before, they have three demerits. The Ontario police have referred to distracted driving as the number one killer on the road. It is the number one killer on the road. You know, the previous Minister of Transportation was a big fan of education, and I think we should go for education, too.

Madam Chair, if you remember, we had those stickers saying: God, give us another boom. Do you remember that sticker? Maybe we should have some stickers for education. We have the report-a-poacher sticker, and I think maybe we should come out with a sticker where it says: report a distracted driver. You know, you see those stickers on cars. When people see a car driving by with the sticker on it, maybe they will think twice before they use their phone to send a text message or be on the phone.

You know, I'm glad. This is a step in the right direction, Madam Chair. As I've said before, too, maybe there should be a heavier fine than \$250 because, like the member before said, it's going to save us \$10 million in health care costs. It's going to save us all the way down on safety and productivity and all of that, right?

With those comments, Madam Chair, I'm glad to support this bill, and I congratulate the Member for Calgary-East for bringing this bill forward. Maybe, you know, we should come out with those stickers so we can hand them out for education. Even on the seat

belts, once they're locked into effect, people will not be really compliant. Maybe it's going to take education and enforcement, so let's do those both.

With that, I wish the best of luck to the Member for Calgary-East, and I will be wholeheartedly supporting this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Allen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise and contribute to the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 204, the traffic safety amendment act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. Before I get into it, I'd like to reiterate my thanks as well to the hon. member for being a stalwart advocate for safer driving. We're on the verge of making real progress here, and we should be grateful to him for taking the initiative and spearheading this.

Today I'd like to delve into some of the details of the bill. Specifically, I'd like to take a closer look at the amendment adding the fine to section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act. Section 158 is part of the Traffic Safety Act that enumerates the punishments for traffic infringements. Madam Chair, after section 158(4) Bill 204 would add subsection (5), which in turn includes subsection (a). This is one of the chief components of this amendment. It stipulates that "a person who is guilty of an offence under section 115.1, 115.2, 115.3, or 115.4 [would be] liable to a fine of \$250." It immediately precedes the addition of three demerit points for distracted driving infractions. In the Traffic Safety Act as it currently stands, the fine is set at \$172. This amendment would increase that fine substantially.

Madam Chair, this piece is obviously integral to the intent of the bill as a whole. The whole point of Bill 204 is to discourage distracted driving, and it seeks to do this by beefing up the penalties for offences. A lot of attention has been given to the question of demerit points, but this increased fine is an important part of the solution as well. The amount currently required by the act is \$172, which is extremely low when compared to the rest of the country. In fact, it is one of the lowest such fines in the country. Saskatchewan's legislation calls for a fine of \$280, for instance, whereas legislation in Ontario allows for fines ranging between \$300 and \$1,000. Legislation in some other provincial jurisdictions also has a graduation of fines, increasing with each offence. The amendment proposed by Bill 204 would set us on the path of catching up to tougher distracted driving legislation across the nation.

A fine of \$250 is not necessarily going to break the bank for all drivers, but it does send a message, and it certainly communicates that message far more effectively than the current fine of \$172 does. This is why the new section would prove so vital. The message that distracted driving is dangerous and unacceptable to Albertans apparently has not been getting through. More drivers are injured and killed in accidents caused by distracted driving than even in those caused by drunk driving, yet drunk driving carries a severe social stigma while distracted driving doesn't. People get drunk, and they get it that drunk driving is wrong. The same cannot be said for distracted driving. Far from being stigmatized, it is treated as commonplace.

Adding subsection (5) to section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act should hopefully turn this around, or at the very least it will help to assert more forcefully that distracted driving is no laughing matter. Increasing the fine could set the precedent. It could demonstrate that tougher penalties could be in the cards if improvements are not seen. Despite being an increase from our current fines, the proposed fine of \$250 is not as severe as it is in other jurisdictions. There

would be room to take further action later on if the results are not satisfactory.

4:20

The importance of adding subsection (5)(a) cannot be appreciated fully in isolation. It would be followed immediately by subsection (b), which is the demerit points, when those enter the picture. It's arguably the demerit points that give Bill 204's amendments to the Traffic Safety Act their punitive teeth. Demerit points stick to a driver's record and carry with them the possibility that driving privileges could ultimately be impacted or even revoked. This is almost certainly a more effective long-term deterrent than a fine.

However, the fine proposed by Bill 204 plays a key role in complementing the demerit penalty. This amendment to the act will present offenders with an immediate and tangible consequence for their actions. In the grand scheme of things a fine, no matter how large, probably does not amount to very much when compared with something more lasting such as a poor driving abstract that results in the loss of privileges. But this is ultimately beside the point. The point is that it gets a driver's attention the instant he or she is fined for an offence. It serves as a valuable reality check.

One reason distracted driving may not be taken as seriously as something like drunk driving is that the immediate consequences are not always as obvious. Drivers are probably perfectly sober and aware while they are driving and, for example, texting, so it's not readily apparent that they are as great a risk as if they were intoxicated. But being slapped with a fine brings them back into reality pretty quickly, and that's what this addition to the Traffic Safety Act would achieve. It would add some much-needed kick to this reality check, with a heftier fine. After all, the point of fines for traffic violations is corrective, not vindictive. They serve primarily as a wake-up call.

Research data is conflicting as to how effective deterrents can be regarding traffic violations, but many people do report that receiving a fine does get the message across. It may not work for some people, but it seems to me that the majority have no malicious intent when they do something like driving while distracted; it is simply that they're not thinking fully in the moment. I think often back to the years when we had to put in legislation to make seat belts mandatory. Over the generations that has just become an automatic thing for drivers. All they need is the nudge to remind them of their future conduct.

This amendment accomplishes two things. While the demerits, the real meat of the proposed new penalty, serve as a heftier deterrent, the fine of \$250 complements it as a more minor chastisement. Madam Chair, as we have heard reiterated in this Chamber time and time again, distracted driving is a serious and prevalent problem. What I'm also hearing is that we're committed to addressing it. The addition of subsection (5) to section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act represents a great step in the right direction. Subsection (a) in particular will set us on the path of ensuring that more robust monetary penalties are in place to act as a more effective deterrent.

With that, I conclude my comments. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Associate Minister of Asia Pacific Relations.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 204, the traffic safety amendment act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. I commend the hon. member for being an advocate for safety on our roads, and I'm proud to speak to the proposed bill. I will specifically be talking today about how implementing Bill 204 would add subsection

(5)(b) to section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act, which would add three demerit points for each distracted driving offence.

Madam Chair, in any given year the number of people killed on Alberta roads is roughly equivalent to the population of the average Alberta elementary school. Ninety per cent of collisions are driving error related. Distracted driving is a major issue, with performance degradation similar to impaired driving. We know that drinking and driving is wrong, yet texting and driving is still very common. Both inhibit your ability to drive safely. That's why the amendment to section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act would be beneficial. It could hopefully reduce those numbers.

Bill 204 would help with the enforcement of the Alberta distracted driving law by creating harsher punishments for those accused. Madam Chair, with demerit points being allocated and fines increased for an offence, this would allow for greater deterrents to distracted drivers. The purpose of Bill 204 is to increase penalties for distracted driving by amending the Traffic Safety Act to include a monetary penalty of \$250 and three demerit points for each distracted driving offence.

The section this bill is attempting to amend is 158 of the act, which reads:

(1) Except as otherwise provided in this Act, a person who is guilty of an offence under this Act for which a penalty is not otherwise provided is liable to a fine or other punishment as provided for under the Provincial Offences Procedure Act.

(2) A person who is guilty of an offence under section 52(1)(c), 65(1)(h) or (2) or 115(2)(g) or (h) is liable to a fine of not less than \$500 and not more than \$25 000 and in default of payment to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months, or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months without the option of a fine.

(3) A person who is guilty of an offence under section 51(i) is liable to a fine of not less than \$300 and not more than \$2000 and in default of payment to imprisonment for a term of not less than 14 days and not more than 6 months.

(4) A person who is guilty of an offence under section 176 is liable to a fine of not less than \$200 and in default of payment to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 months.

Now, in addition to those, Bill 204 seeks to add a fifth subsection, which would read:

A person who is guilty of an offence under section 115.1, 115.2, 115.3, or 115.4

(a) is liable to a fine of \$250, and

(b) shall be assessed 3 demerit points in accordance with the regulations.

Madam Chair, one objective of the proposed bill is to address distracted driving by introducing demerit points for each offence in addition to an increased fine of \$250. Presently the punishment for distracted driving is only a \$172 fine with no demerit points, so the addition of demerit points in subsection (5)(b) of section 158 is important because while the immediate penalty of paying \$250 as described in subsection (5)(a) stings, the long-term penalty of having the demerit points on one's record can hurt more. If someone receives too many demerit points, an individual can lose their licence, and the insurance premium may increase. If an individual's insurance premium goes up because of demerit points, then it acts as a further punitive measure in addition to the initial \$250 fine.

Madam Chair, the individual could be paying for a distracted driving offence in more ways than one. The Alberta driver control board may even suspend a licence if they consider the driver to have a poor driving record based on the number of demerit points they have accumulated. Without subsection (5)(b) the board would not know that someone has been found guilty of distracted driving because they would not have any demerit points.

Fully licensed drivers who collect a total of eight but not more than 15 demerit points will receive notification regarding their driving record. If 15 demerit points accumulate within a two-year period, then an offender will lose their licence, and it will be suspended for 30 days. If a suspension order is issued, there may be conditions that must be completed before the licence will be given back. There's also a fee that must be paid before the licence is returned. So with accumulated demerit points one could face the loss of the driver's licence privileges, increased vehicle insurance premiums, and loss of employment if driving is a required part of the job. Those deterrents do not exist under the current system, which is why I do strongly support Bill 204 and the amendments to the Traffic Safety Act within it.

4:30

Many people need to have a clean driving record, or at least nearly clean, to successfully be hired for a job. Whether that person is driving a company vehicle or being reimbursed, that driving record is very important to employers. Employers want to ensure that they are hiring a safe and responsible person to work for their organization. If passed, subsection 5(b) would allow employers the opportunity to know if they are hiring someone who will be a hazard on the road based on how many demerit points they have.

Alberta currently has the most lax laws regarding distracted driving. With no demerit points, it's no wonder Alberta beats the next-worst offending province on distracted driving by 37 per cent. Madam Chair, we all want Alberta to be the safest province in the country, but we cannot achieve that while our distracted driving is out of control. Most Albertans know it is wrong to text or call while driving, and we applaud those people for being safe on our roads. However, those who are distracted drivers have not yet felt the pinch of their wrongdoing.

Implementing Bill 204 would make amendment 5(b) to section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act, which would add three demerit points for each distracted driving offence. This act came into effect in 2011, and the original intent was to reduce and prevent incidents of distracted driving, but it just does not do an adequate job of deterring people from breaking their distracted driving habits. We know this because our province has the worst offender rates in the country by far. The current law has not noticeably reduced incidents of distracted driving. The addition of demerit points under subsection 5(b) is an important piece of this legislation. With current legislation someone could be paying the \$172 fine every month but have a clean driving record because there are no demerit points at present.

Albertans are looking to their MLAs to develop new and comprehensive solutions, and they are ready to do their part to help. Bill 204 has substantial value in that it addresses an issue of public safety and awareness that has been a topic of discussion for a long time. That is why Bill 204 is an urgent and necessary piece of legislation. It combats the dangerous result of this recent problem.

Madam Chair, as you can see, Bill 204 is a very sensible and well-timed piece of legislation. This bill has support across the board from all parties, and it's a rare and wonderful thing that we can all collaborate on this issue. I would like to thank my colleagues on both sides of the Chamber for working together on Bill 204. Again, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for bringing this discussion forward and for voicing the needs of his constituents as well as the needs of our province. Distracted driving is a very real problem with very real consequences that affect Albertans, and Albertans are ready for change to the current legislation.

It has been a privilege to speak to this bill and listen to the debate surrounding this very important issue. I look forward to hearing the rest of my hon. colleagues discussing this topic.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think most everything has been said, and I just would like to encourage all my fellow members to support this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm glad to rise and contribute to the debate on Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014, sponsored by my next-door neighbour the hon. Member for Calgary-East, an annoying neighbour sometimes. I'd like to thank him for bringing Bill 204 forward for discussion. His efforts are certain to make Alberta's roads safer for everyone.

If passed, Bill 204 would amend the Traffic Safety Act by increasing the severity of penalties for distracted driving. As we know, the penalty for distracted driving is a fine of \$172, offenders are not penalized with demerit points, and the cost of the fine does not increase with the number of offences. Bill 204 would change this by introducing demerit points as a penalty for distracted driving in addition to a fine of \$250. It would stipulate that a person who's guilty of an offence under section 115.1, 115.2, 115.3, or 115.4, would be liable for a fine of \$250 plus three demerit points.

Madam Chair, section 115.2 is an important part of this legislation. It specifies that no individual should drive or operate a vehicle on a highway if the display screen of a television, computer, or other device is in the vehicle. While it may seem obvious that a TV or computer screen would constitute distracted driving, there are cases that require drivers to look at a screen. Exemptions are related to using TV or computer screens for driving. Any other use than the ones listed below are distracting to drivers and would therefore be deserving of a fine and demerits.

The amendments to section 158 would allow for there to be a further distinction of exemptions under section 115.2(2)(a) to (f). That explains that drivers may look at the screen of a GPS while allowing them to navigate. However, in accordance with section 115.3(2)(a) and (b) the GPS must be affixed to the vehicle in a manner that does not interfere with the safe operation of the vehicle and must not be held in the driver's hand. That notation is important because GPS systems serve a valuable purpose in allowing drivers to navigate. They clearly need to be set up for use before the person starts driving, or else they become a hazard. It's particularly important to note that driving and entering co-ordinates is a major distraction that could very well result in an accident. With most of the factory-installed ones I don't think you can enter on them while you're moving but certainly the hand-held.

Section 115.2(2)(b) refers to the exemption of a cellular telephone or radio communication device being used in hands-free mode, which can also be distracting, just not as distracting. This section takes into account the fact that people need to conduct calls in their vehicles. Madam Chair, we know that it's necessary to take calls in our cars with the amount of driving that we do. The section allows all drivers to take their calls in a safe manner. Many cellphone and car companies offer different ways for drivers to use their phones in hands-free mode while driving. In doing so, they

allow drivers to take important calls while ensuring that they are still driving safely.

Section 115.2(2)(c) makes an exemption for logistical transportation tracking systems that are used to track vehicle locations, driver status, and the delivery of packages or other goods for commercial purposes. By taking business into account, we're allowing for the flow of commerce in a necessary way.

Section 115.2(2)(d) allows drivers to use a dispatch system while transporting passengers, allowing taxi, limo, and other transport vehicles to use dispatch systems. It lets them do their job, and it allows them to find clients. By allowing transport vehicles to use their equipment safely, we increase the mobility of Albertans and, in doing so, reduce the stress on parking lots around the province.

Section 115.2(2)(e) exempts the use of any collision avoidance system device while it's being used to provide collision avoidance information. There are clear benefits to this exemption in that the device being used is meant to avoid collisions and would therefore be an extension of driving rather than a distraction.

Section 115.2(2)(f) allows for instruments, gauges, devices, or systems that provide information about the status of systems or the location of the vehicle. An exemption of this nature is critical because it allows drivers to handle their vehicles properly. Being able to read something like a speedometer while driving is a function of driving and allows the driver to obey the rules of the road.

References in Bill 204 to sections 158(5) and 115.2 give a clear purpose for each of these exemptions. Simply put, these exemptions allow for drivers to look at screens when they're used for driving. The reason this section disallows watching TV or a computer screen is because it is not necessary or safe to be watching media that is not related to operating the vehicle. Very simply, if a person is not focused on driving, that person is distracted and therefore impaired.

So rather than sort of carrying on with that, I think I've made the point that most others have, that this is a good piece of legislation. I would encourage all hon. members to support it.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 204?

Seeing none, I would ask the Member for Calgary-East to close.

4:40

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm so privileged to rise to close Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 204. I would like to thank all the hon. members who rose to speak in this debate. You are of great service to your constituencies and a great asset to democracy.

Many of us have spoken passionately about this subject and for very good reason. Madam Chair, Bill 204 addresses a subject that affects all of us. We all use Alberta's roads in one way or another, and we are all put at risk by the actions of distracted drivers. Now, I'm asking that we all do our part to vanquish this problem. I want our grandchildren to look back with shock that we ever texted while we drove, that we ever used our mirrors to apply makeup, or otherwise took our eyes off the road. I want our children to look back on today like we look back on cars without seat belts. Driving distracted should be a relic of a bygone time.

With Bill 204 we can begin to make that happen. I call on all my colleagues to support this bill. Let's ensure safer roads for all future generations.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are you ready for the question on Bill 204?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 204 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Madam Chairperson. I would now move that we rise and report.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports Bill 204. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly as there are none.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to ask for unanimous consent to move Bill 204 to third reading.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Bill 204 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Speaker. A lot of things have been said, so I would like to move third reading of Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 204 in third reading?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:45 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

For the motion:

Allen	Johnson, L.	Olesen
Amery	Kang	Quadri
Bhullar	Kennedy-Glans	Quest
Brown	Khan	Rodney

Cao	Klimchuk	Rowe
Dirks	Lemke	Sandhu
Donovan	Leskiw	Sarich
Dorward	Luan	Starke
Fenske	Lukaszuk	Strankman
Fraser	Mandel	Towle
Fritz	Mason	Wilson
Jansen	McIver	Woo-Paw
Johnson, J.	Oberle	Xiao

Totals:	For – 39	Against – 0
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[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 204 read a third time]

Mr. Oberle: Madam Speaker, at this time I would move that we call it 5 o'clock and move to Motions Other than Government Motions.

[Motion carried]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Lyme Disease

508. Mr. Rowe moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to develop a province-wide strategy to combat the debilitating effects of Lyme disease, which, at minimum, would include additional education for physicians and access to additional testing and treatment for patients.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is indeed an honour and a pleasure to introduce Motion 508. I'm sure that everyone in the Assembly has heard of Lyme disease. Lyme disease is not a usual topic of conversation unless you are a family member of or are one of the unfortunate people to have contracted it. Then it is a topic of conversation each and every day if not every waking hour.

5:00

Motion 508 calls for the broadening of the treatment resources and options available to those who may potentially be suffering from Lyme disease. I first became aware of how serious this issue has become when two women in my home town of Beiseker contracted Lyme. Unable to get local doctors or AHS to treat them, they went south of the border to the U.S.A., where they were tested. The tests showed positive. Upon bringing their tests home, they found, to their dismay, that the test results were not recognized in Canada, and they were denied treatment. Two separate fundraisers were held, and approximately \$135,000 was raised to assist with costs to get treatment in American medical facilities.

The tests done in Canada, Madam Speaker, are done in two stages. First, an ELISA test is done. If this shows a negative result, no further testing is done. According to the centre for disease control the ELISA test alone only detects about 30 per cent of cases at first presentation. In Canada if it shows a positive result, a second test is done, the western blot. The western blot test does have a much higher accuracy but is not done if the ELISA test is negative. By this time the disease has advanced to a point where it is much harder to treat. Additionally, there are in fact two western blot tests, IgC and IgM. Both tests should be done and are done in the United States but are not often administered in Canada.

One of the most frustrating things about the treatment policy in Alberta is that Lyme disease is treatable with antibiotics if caught within two to three weeks of the tick bite. Unfortunately, this is hard

to do, because even with the telltale bull's-eye rash around the bite it seems to be very difficult to find a doctor with the necessary education to identify the disease and begin the required treatment immediately. Madam Speaker, this problem will only get worse if we do not address it very soon.

We all know that climate change exists. I will leave the specifics of that debate for others at another forum. Very much like the pine beetle problem that we are experiencing in western Canada, we can expect the tick-borne disease problem to increase. With warmer winters we are not seeing insects killed off by prolonged cold spells.

Recently Bill C-442, the Canadian Lyme disease strategy act, submitted by Green Party MP Elizabeth May, was passed unanimously in the House of Commons. Not a single MP voted against it, the first and so far only Green Party legislation to pass in the House of Commons. In Ontario NDP MPP Michael Mantha's Motion 13, to create a comprehensive and integrated Lyme disease strategy, also passed unanimously on November 27, 2014, again with all-party support.

So, Madam Speaker, I would ask the same of all members of this Assembly. I ask them to pass Motion 508, and let's get on with helping patients, their families, and their loved ones in getting through this difficult and very painful time. This motion will ensure Albertans have the ability to extensively be tested for Lyme disease. This motion takes into account treatment standards that previously exist and will move forward to make more testing procedures and treatments, which are necessary and, indeed, vital to treatment, available. I invite all members to join me in discussing this important piece of legislation so that we may ensure the safety and the good health of all Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Motion 508. It's a topic of considerable professional interest of mine, so I'm very appreciative.

Mr. Dorward: Oh, no.

Dr. Starke: What? You're groaning already?

It's a topic of interest to me, and I'd like to certainly thank the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for raising it. As we know, he's had an outstanding career in municipal government, and he followed that up with time in the Official Opposition, where he was a principled and dedicated although somewhat tenacious member of the opposition, and now we're very glad to have him in the government caucus.

Lyme disease, l-y-m-e, not lime disease due to the citrus fruit. Lyme disease is a very interesting disease because there's a lot that is misunderstood about Lyme disease even today. It gets its name from the community of Lyme, Connecticut, in the New England states, where the prevalence in the U.S. is certainly the highest. It was first recognized by a high incidence of patients that had arthritis in and around Lyme and Old Lyme, Connecticut, in 1975, but in fact the disease was first described in scientific literature in 1908 in Sweden.

The causative organism for Lyme disease: although it's associated with ticks, it's not the ticks that cause the Lyme disease; it's an organism that the ticks carry. That organism is a spirochetal bacterium of the *Borrelia* genus. So the technical term for Lyme disease is also known as Lyme borreliosis, or borreliosis.

In the late 1970s the American bacteriologist Willy Burgdorfer actually characterized and discovered that the *Borrelia* that he was

studying was in fact the causative organism for Lyme disease, and the organism was officially named *Borrelia burgdorferi* in his honour. If you're a bacteriologist, that is the highest pinnacle that you be acclaimed for, that they name a disease-causing organism after you.

Last year, Madam Speaker, I was very privileged to attend the 69th International Conference on Diseases in Nature Communicable to Man in Vancouver, the INCNDCM conference, that the people who attended somewhat tongue-in-cheek called the inkdinkum conference. Now, Dr. Robert Lane, who is a renowned entomologist from the University of California at Berkeley, gave a very interesting presentation on some very important facts on the transmission of Lyme disease by the deer tick of the genus *Ixodes*.

Now, ticks must stay attached for a certain period of time, but there's considerable disagreement as to how long. It's generally accepted that the tick must stay attached for at least 36 hours for Lyme transmission to occur, but some have suggested that it could be transmitted in as little as six hours. Certainly, adult ticks are larger and more noticeable, and quite often they're found within that time window and removed, and if they are, then transmission does not occur. I know that in my practice quite often that's all I would tell my clients. If they were worried about Lyme disease, I'd say: "After you've had your dog out for a walk, check him over for ticks. If you find any adult ticks on them, pick them off, and you shouldn't have any problem with Lyme disease."

In the truth of the matter, though – and this was something that I learned at this conference last year – by far the greater risk of transmission of the Lyme disease spirochete is not the adult deer tick but, in fact, the nymph form, or the nymph life stage, of the deer tick, which is about the size of a poppy seed, so it's very difficult to detect, certainly, on humans, and you can imagine on a long-haired, dark-coated dog how hard it might be to find that. Nymphal ticks, in fact, are many, many times more likely to transmit Lyme disease, and those findings were corroborated by Dr. Lane in the study and in the presentation that he made to our conference last year. That is one of the things that is misunderstood about Lyme disease and why anything we could do to increase the amount of public knowledge and education there is about, you know, this condition is helpful.

Now, the other reason why I wanted to speak today about Lyme disease – and it really speaks to the heart of the challenges that the member who's bringing this forward has highlighted – is that Lyme disease is what in medical circles is called a zebra. What exactly is a zebra? Well, Madam Speaker, a zebra is an American term, actually, that states, basically, that arriving at an exotic medical diagnosis when a more commonplace explanation is more likely is a common fault, especially of inexperienced diagnosticians. What the full phrase is: when you hear hoofbeats, think horses, not zebras.

I first heard this expression, I have to confess, when I was a veterinary student, and it was told to us by Dr. Otto Radostits. Dr. Radostits was the pre-eminent veterinary clinical instructor in large animal medicine world-wide, and we were very fortunate to have him at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine, in Saskatoon. He's originally, though, an Edmontonian, very proud that he came from Alberta, and he was awarded with the Order of Canada late in his teaching career. His son Stephen still operates a veterinary practice in Leduc, Alberta. In honour of Dr. Radostits we always thought that the zebras thing was a Dr. Radostits thing, but in fact it was first coined in the early 40s by Dr. Theodore Woodward, who was a medical professor at the University of Maryland. He told one of his medical interns: when you hear hoofbeats, think of horses, not zebras.

5:10

The reason for that is because there is a natural human tendency to glom onto the diagnosis that is unusual, the diagnosis that is, you know, wild and out there, at least amongst inexperienced diagnosticians. But over a period of time and through training, with aphorisms like the one from Dr. Woodward, the tendency is to move away from rare diagnoses and, in fact, to spend less time worrying about rare diagnoses because, by definition, they occur rarely. This is a problem with diseases that have low levels of prevalence, in that more often than not, as is the case with Lyme disease in Alberta, where we are very fortunate that we have a very low prevalence, the truth of the matter is that the disease still occurs, and as was pointed out by the hon. member in his introductory remarks, the testing is not one hundred per cent accurate.

In fact, the presentation of the clinical science is not always consistent. The bull's-eye rash that was described, erythema migrans, in fact, only occurs in about three-quarters of patients. So if you are bitten by a tick but don't develop erythema migrans, you might never know that, in fact, you have contracted Lyme disease.

I mean, the bottom line is that whenever we're dealing with rare diseases, calculations involving probability really have no meaning. Really, the pertinent question is whether disease is present in that individual or not, and whether it is rare or common really does not change the odds for that single patient. If the diagnosis can be made on the basis of specific criteria, then these criteria are either fulfilled in that patient or not fulfilled. It's not like you can have 70 per cent of Lyme disease. You either have it or you don't have it. That's one of the challenges whenever you're dealing with conditions that occur infrequently, and it is something that has been correctly pointed out through this motion. You know, certainly, I think anything that we can do to assist our medical practitioners, our public health workers, and people in general about Lyme disease are important steps to be taken.

As I said before, in Alberta we are fortunate in that the incidence of this disease is very low, but with changes in climate and with other changes that we have seen over a period of time, the incidence is increasing, and of course, as we know, we do travel to other parts of the world where Lyme disease is at relatively higher levels.

The other reason why I'd like to commend the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on this motion is that Lyme disease is a disease that for many, many years has been badly misunderstood and characterized incorrectly even by those in the scientific community. At last year's conference we spent a full day discussing Lyme disease, and there were speakers from all around the world talking about their perspectives on Lyme disease for their individual areas of the planet, and I can tell you that even there there was some disagreement as far as the pathogenesis, transmission, and some of the other key features of Lyme disease. So I really think that it is a disease that, because of its severe, chronic, debilitating effects, we have to always have higher on our index of suspicion, and that holds true for all health care practitioners, doctors, public health officials, and others.

I think, Madam Speaker, the description of Lyme disease that was given by Jonathan Edlow, who was a professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, when he quoted Ed Masters in his book *Bull's-Eye*, on the history of Lyme disease, tells that best. He points out the following:

the "track record" or the "conventional wisdom" regarding Lyme disease is not very good: "First off, they said it was a new disease, which it wasn't. Then it was thought to be viral, but it isn't. Then it was thought that sero-negativity didn't exist, which it does. They thought it was easily treated by short courses of antibiotics, which sometimes it isn't. Then it was only the *Ixodes dammini* tick, which we now know is not even a separate valid tick species.

If you look throughout the history, almost every time a major dogmatic statement has been made about what we 'know' about this disease, it was subsequently proven wrong or underwent major modifications."

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's very difficult to follow the accurate presentations from the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, because both have certain accuracies. I can personally relate to them because my wife has been diagnosed with Lyme disease, so it relates significantly to our household, and we've struggled through the Canadian medical system and the American medical system to try and get some rectification of a difficult disease. The spirit of the member's motion in the Legislative Assembly, bringing forward that we would have a province-wide strategy to combat this disease and to simply learn more about it, is heartfelt to this Member for Drumheller-Stettler. It's a significant disease, and it certainly is debilitating, and it is, as the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster says, complicated and not easily diagnosed.

I have a prepared statement that I will read going forward here. Lyme disease is a bacterial illness spread to humans by ticks which have been found across Canada and within Alberta, as previously stated. Lyme disease seems to be an emerging, potentially serious public health risk as it is on the rise in Alberta, but awareness of the disease is lacking. In some cases, Madam Speaker, if you don't look for it, you aren't going to find it, and that's some of the seriousness of this disease. The testing methods are nebulous – I guess that would be a good word – to say the very least. Many Albertans afflicted with Lyme disease are undiagnosed and untreated and may go on to develop persistent, chronic, debilitating symptoms. Many maintain that the ticks that cause the disease are not found in Alberta and that only those who travel to infected areas have the disease.

As of 2013 the province began the submit-a-tick program to try and discover and learn the areas that this Lyme disease is located in and to determine how many were carrying the organism that causes the disease. In 2013 Albertans sent in 1,221 blacklegged ticks, and of those, only 50 were found on animals, and even fewer, five, were found on humans. Of the 50 ticks found on the animals, five tested positive for this along with one of the five found on humans. So the numbers are very diminishing. In 2013 a surveillance study by Alberta Health found that 20 per cent of the collected blacklegged ticks were found infected with Lyme disease. Only 20 per cent, Madam Speaker.

Lyme disease can have as many as 75 different symptoms and can be easily misdiagnosed as something else. Lyme disease patients may firstly be diagnosed with other illnesses such as juvenile arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, reactive arthritis, infectious arthritis, osteoarthritis, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, fifth disease, multiple sclerosis, scleroderma, lupus, early ALS, Alzheimer's disease, Crohn's disease, and the list goes on. Canadians and Albertans, including my wife, often travel to IGenX Inc. in California or Stony Brook University in New York for diagnosis. Again, Madam Speaker, in Canada, if you're not looking for the disease, you're not going to find it.

Diagnosis is problematic, again for several reasons. Fewer than 50 per cent of patients with Lyme disease even recall a tick bite. In some studies this number is as low as 15 per cent, and fewer than 50 per cent of patients with Lyme disease recall any rash at all, and

the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster had discussed that. Symptoms are nonspecific. It could be anything causing these symptoms. The screening test misses 35 per cent of culture-proven Lyme disease, with only 65 per cent sensitivity, and is unacceptable as the first step of a two-step screening protocol. By definition a screening test should have at least 95 per cent sensitivity. False negatives plague people who have the disease, again leading to a poor testing system.

There are two polarized views of Lyme disease, both in terms of diagnostic criteria and treatment. The Infectious Diseases Society of America, IDSA, Lyme disease guidelines suggest that Lyme disease is hard to catch, easy to cure, and that short-term antibiotic use of a few weeks can cure most Lyme disease. In Alberta the protocol for extended use of antibiotics is not conducive to solving the problem, and my wife ran into that problem. The International Lyme and Associated Diseases Society maintains that cases of chronic Lyme disease require an extended course of antibiotic therapy to achieve symptomatic relief and that the consequences of untreated chronic persistent Lyme infection far outweigh the potential consequences of long-term antibiotic therapy. Again, an idiosyncrasy of the health care system in this province if not in Canada.

5:20

There are also two polarized camps in response to the symptoms of the disease: those who truly have the disease and for whom treatment could be beneficial or would be beneficial and those who have nonspecific, sometimes debilitating symptoms which are also called fibromyalgia, chronic pain syndrome, and depression and who believe that Lyme disease may be the cause. For these people the treatment of Lyme disease would not be advised.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'd like to close by saying that for the family of this Member for Drumheller-Stettler it's been a life-changing experience, it's been a life-changing challenge, and I'm pleased that in a past life the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and I sat together in this House and had a long conversation about this disease. It gives me great honour to rise and try to inflict some education on the disease on the Assembly.

Thank you for that.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am very pleased to rise today to contribute to the debate on Motion 508, and I would like to begin my remarks by thanking the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. He's been an impassioned advocate for the cause, and I think all Albertans owe him a debt of gratitude for it.

This motion, as we know, seeks to encourage the government to develop a province-wide strategy that would address Lyme disease. Specifically, such a strategy would target physician education and awareness while also exploring issues like access to testing and treatment for patients afflicted with the disease.

Madam Speaker, I know a number of people personally who have contracted this disease, and I've seen the devastating effects firsthand. That is the reason I feel compelled to speak to this motion here today. As a bacterial illness Lyme disease is spread by tick bites, but it's not common, of course, since it depends on tick bites for transmission. That would seem to leave it confined mostly to those who frequent areas where ticks are common such as forests. Currently cases of Lyme disease are taken very seriously, as they should be, and every single one of them is reviewed very carefully.

Madam Speaker, as a matter of fact, approximately 2,500 Albertans receive testing for the illness every single year. Meanwhile the Public Health Agency of Canada recommends a

protocol for laboratory testing for the disease, and this is the protocol, of course, that we follow right here in Alberta. Our diagnostic tests are indeed in line with the approval of federal regulations as laid out by Health Canada, and these standards, in turn, follow the protocols set by the American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These protocols do set the standard of practice all over the globe for the testing and diagnosis of Lyme disease.

Madam Speaker, Alberta is very stringent in ensuring that we do follow best practices in diagnosing Lyme disease. Our protocol is structured around a two-stage method. First, an ELISA screening test is conducted, and that, of course, stands for enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay, which refers to the test that identifies the antibodies associated with Lyme disease. The second aspect of the protocol calls for the western blot test, the purpose of which is, of course, to confirm the results of the initial ELISA test. Alberta's Provincial Laboratory conducts the test, and if that's positive or – and this is important – if the results are indeterminate, the sample is then passed on to receive the western blot test at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Motion 508 is a tool that can help expand and also promote this standardized process for handling the testing and diagnosis of Lyme disease. We must all acknowledge that the diagnosis of this disease is not quite as straightforward as it may appear on first glance. There are several factors at play that can very much complicate things, including an individual's travel history and the season of travel. Those need to be taken into account regarding whether a condition is indeed Lyme disease. This is all in addition to the probability of tick exposure and the manifestation of symptoms. Now, these factors are considered by physicians when they make their diagnosis, and all play a role when the physician makes a decision regarding whether or not to send a patient for Lyme disease testing.

Madam Speaker, statistics yielded by our established processes do indicate some good news. In the entirety of last year, 2014, there were only seven confirmed cases of Lyme disease here in Alberta. In addition to that, every one of those cases was determined to have originated when the affected individuals were travelling outside of the province in areas which are known to contain disease-carrying ticks. Now, it's true that these are low numbers, but – and this is very important – it does not account for cases that go undiagnosed since it often takes months or even years for symptoms to become severe enough for someone to seek attention. That can be disastrous for a person professionally and personally as well as for their friends, family, and loved ones. Thankfully, we have solid, proven, effective protocols in place to manage cases as they do manifest themselves. However, without proper education and awareness on the part of medical professionals and all Albertans, cases can be undiagnosed, and that can be a very, very serious problem.

That's one of the major reasons why I truly appreciate the hon. member for bringing the topic of Lyme disease to the attention of all Albertans through this Chamber. Increasing the awareness of Lyme disease across Alberta is an initiative that is invaluable even if it just saved one person from this potentially debilitating illness. But I know it will do so much more than just that, and that's, again, another one of the reasons why I will definitely be voting in favour of Motion 508. I ask all of our hon. colleagues to join us in the fight against Lyme disease.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a great pleasure to speak to Motion 508, put forward by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. It goes on to say:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to develop a province-wide strategy to combat the debilitating effects of Lyme disease, which, at minimum, would include additional education for physicians and access to additional testing and treatment for patients.

Lyme disease, Madam Speaker, is an infectious disease caused by bacteria of the *Borrelia* type. The most common sign of infection is an expanding area of redness that begins at the site of the bite about a week after it has occurred. The rash is typically neither itchy nor painful. About 25 per cent of people do not develop a rash. Other early symptoms may include fever, headache, and feeling tired. If untreated, symptoms may include the loss of the ability to move one or both sides of the face, joint pain, severe headaches with neck stiffness, or heart palpitations, among others. Months to years later there may be repeated episodes of joint pain and swelling. Occasionally people develop shooting pains or tingling in their arms and legs. About 10 to 20 per cent of people, despite appropriate treatment, also develop joint pains, have problems with memory, and feel tired much of the time.

Lyme disease is transmitted to humans by the bite of infected ticks. Usually the tick must be attached for 36 to 48 hours before the bacteria is spread. Diagnosis is based upon a combination of symptoms, history of tick exposure, and the possibility of testing for specific antibodies in the blood. Blood tests are often negative in the early disease, and testing of unusual ticks is not typically useful, Madam Speaker. Several forms of laboratory testing for Lyme disease are available, some of which have not been adequately validated. The most widely used tests are serological tests, which measure levels of specific antibodies in the patient's blood. These tests may be negative in early infections as the body may not have produced a significant quantity of antibodies, but they are considered a reliable aid in the diagnosis of later stages of Lyme disease. Serological tests for Lyme disease are of limited use in people lacking objective signs of Lyme disease, because of false-positive results and costs. The serological laboratory tests most widely available and employed are the western blot and ELISA. A two-tiered protocol is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The sensitive ELISA test is performed first, and if it is positive or equivocal, then the more specific western blot is done.

5:30

The reliability of testing and diagnosis remains controversial, Madam Speaker. Studies show that the western blot IgM has a specificity of 94 to 96 per cent for patients with clinical symptoms of early Lyme disease. The initial ELISA test has a positive sensitivity of about 70 per cent in two-tiered testing. The overall sensitivity is only 64 per cent although this rises to 100 per cent in a subset of people with disseminated symptoms such as arthritis.

Concerns have been raised by Albertans who believe they are infected by Lyme disease, Madam Speaker, yet who are unable to get the diagnosis. Typically the physician does not request a second test. Presently Alberta requires a blood test to come back from the laboratory with five positive indicators to define Lyme disease. The European standard requires only three indicators, so many feel that Alberta's diagnostic criteria for Lyme disease are unrealistically stringent, resulting in local labs giving out too many false negatives. Without a positive diagnosis from an Alberta lab any physician willing to treat Lyme disease risks censure by the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta.

In Alberta ticks are collected and submitted for Lyme disease testing. Of the ticks submitted, only about 25 per cent are black-legged ticks, the type that carries Lyme, and even fewer of those test positive for Lyme. Without the proper tests being run for Lyme, patients are left without a treatment plan for their condition. Due to the general rarity of the need for these tests, providing the additional test, the second western blot test, would not be expensive, Madam Speaker.

In 2008 Dr. Taft, then the leader of the Alberta Liberal caucus, called on the government of Alberta to review and revise the Lyme disease testing. I will be supporting this motion, too, and I think all the members should support this motion. I think this will go a long way to help Albertans get tested for Lyme disease, and, you know, maybe we could control it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise today to join the debate on Motion 508, brought forward by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. I would like to thank the hon. member for his dedication and his passion with regard to this motion itself and also to all Albertans. I'd also like to take a moment to thank the Member for Drumheller-Stettler for reminding us of the very personal impact of Lyme disease.

Madam Speaker, Motion 508 urges the government to develop a comprehensive strategy in order to improve the diagnosis and treatment of Lyme disease. The main focus of this motion is to increase awareness regarding this disease as well as to increase patients' access to treatment. If left untreated, the effects of Lyme disease can persist for years, resulting in symptoms of fatigue and pain that can reach a level of physical disability equivalent to congestive heart failure or osteoarthritis. What is clear is that anything that might help prevent Albertans from being infected with or having to suffer through Lyme disease is something that we should all honestly consider.

I would like to focus my remarks today on what actions and programs other provinces have taken in order to address this potentially devastating disease. Prevention is a key part in any province. Lyme disease strategy in B.C. is no different. The B.C. Centre for Disease Control outlines the salient issues regarding prevention on its website. This includes information on how to identify potentially harmful species, what actions to take in order to avoid being bitten as well as proper tick removal. It is important to follow the appropriate procedure when removing a tick as not doing so can increase the risk of infection.

Like Alberta, British Columbia uses a two-tier system when it comes to Lyme disease detection and diagnosis. This focuses primarily on the use of an enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay test, also known as an ELISA test, in order to identify specific antibodies. If the ELISA test is positive or indeterminate, the western blot test is used to confirm the results. Western blot is currently the most accurate antibody test, and ELISA testing can often miss the infection.

Lyme disease can be extremely difficult to diagnose, and this only increases the longer the disease remains untreated. Madam Speaker, the development of symptoms, often even months or years after the time of infection, is typically the only way to catch the disease, as routine blood work and testing cannot detect it. Supplementing their provincial program, British Columbia has the BC women's hospital's complex chronic disease program. This provincial referral centre provides comprehensive care to adults

with complex chronic diseases such as Lyme disease. The program performs clinical care as well as research.

The Saskatchewan Disease Control Laboratory follows the Lyme disease guidelines set forth by the Canadian Public Health Laboratory Network. They, too, use an initial ELISA test followed by a western blot in order to confirm results. In cases that prove especially difficult, patients may be referred to an infectious disease specialist. Madam Speaker, the government of Saskatchewan similarly outlines precautions to be taken to protect yourself against ticks, symptoms of infection as well as procedures to take if you suspect you have Lyme disease. Tests as well as research on the disease are performed at the University of Saskatchewan.

The government of Ontario also addresses the disease in much the same way. Its website is also a repository for information on the prevention, detection, and treatment of Lyme disease, including links to further valuable information about the condition. What is very much apparent when regarding the approach that other jurisdictions across the country take concerning Lyme disease is that there is a fairly standardized set of procedures already in place. Madam Speaker, the information is certainly out there, and there's no debate surrounding what current best practices are in the detection, prevention, and treatment of the illness.

This is not to say that Motion 508 may not be a helpful tool in winning the fight against Lyme disease. Rather, just by bringing this debate to the floor, we are helping to raise awareness of this disease, and for me this seems like the most significant component in improving our management of Lyme disease. We can always improve how we deliver information, and I am glad that Motion 508 gives us the opportunity to consider how we might change the current process to accomplish this.

Again I thank the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for his dedication, his compassion on behalf of all Albertans on the issue of Lyme disease.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on Motion 508? Seeing none, I would ask the hon. member to close.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and a special thank you to all of the hon. members who rose to speak to this bill. The support is gratifying. As we have seen throughout debate, extensive research and analysis continue to indicate that the western blot test would work to further protect the safety of all Albertans in addition to the already in place ELISA test. We have the opportunity today to pass a motion with a great deal of positive outcomes. In the wake of an ever-increasing frequency of infections a strategy is needed to ensure that Albertans are able to get the testing and the treatment they need in order to live the lives that we as Albertans are so fortunate to have.

There is no greater lottery to win than being born here in Alberta, and we need to ensure for our children and grandchildren that it continues to be that way in the face of this debilitating disease. Updating our current testing standards and options will ensure that Albertans across this province are able to extensively be treated and tested for Lyme disease, thus lessening the possibilities for the disease to become a long-lasting chronic disease. Albertans' health is a priority, and this motion only works to promote this idea and policy. The health and livelihood of Albertans have been compromised, with more potentially at stake. We have an opportunity here to prevent that from happening again.

I want to thank every member who participated in this debate, and I urge all hon. members to vote in support of Motion 508.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

5:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 508 carried unanimously]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It would be my motion at this point that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:41 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, March 23, 2015

Issue 25e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, March 23, 2015

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 18

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Finance it's my privilege to rise today and move third reading of Bill 18, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members who would like to speak in third reading on Bill 18? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Yes, Madam Speaker, that's the place. It's the diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler. It's unfortunate that I can't get the name of the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, but I'm adapting or trying to adapt.

Madam Speaker, it's an interesting time when I am able to speak to the Chamber here in regard to this. Today in the House there was a question in regard to allocation of funding for one golf course in the province, and that's been under review or what I understand to be under review. So we have questions as to how those funds are going to be allocated, where they're going to be finally disbursed, who the disbursers are going to be, and to whom that will be. We have questions on that.

Also, I want to make it known that in this time where we may be facing increased taxes – and all things point to increased taxes because of the low petroleum prices – it certainly will be onerous for the government to try and raise funds or have funds available for projects, especially projects like this, Madam Speaker. It's certainly challenging times.

I think that's about all that I really wanted to get on the record, Madam Speaker, this party's position of concern in relation to that disposition of funds. I'll leave it at that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 18, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour to speak to third reading of the appropriations measures that we brought in to get us through this budget period before everything lines up. I would be remiss not to note that I just came from an Auditor General's meeting, where we touched on many things that are going on in this province. We talked about the fact that we have chronic difficulties in our Northland school division with absenteeism. Some suggestions were made there on how to alleviate that and how to get systems in place and, primarily, more resources up there to assist in trying to get kids to school and having parents understand the importance of that, because if they're not attending school, well, they're not able to learn and become productive members of society.

You know, we also skipped down the thing and went through the Alberta Energy Regulator, and the Auditor General noted some issues there that were stemming from a lack of manpower and a lack of resources over there to introduce some robust systems into place that are needed on that end.

Then we go to the third part of the Auditor General's report, which touches very squarely on what we've discussed here in the appropriations measures. It discussed flood mapping and what we have done or the lack of what we've put together going back to 2006, when it became apparent after the High River flood that we needed new flood maps drawn. Obviously, after the 2013 floods it became very apparent that our flood mapping was out of date and not up to snuff when it comes to dealing with a 1 in 100 year flood, probably more frequent given global warming and the like and weather patterns here in Alberta. Again, what the Auditor General could only point to was that there is a lack of capacity within the department, a lack of expertise to actually do the work of government, and it came right back down to resources.

So if you look at this, there continues to be a chronic need for us to look at this. I know I have made this speech before; nevertheless, there is the need for us to get some handle on our revenue streams. The fact that we've spent all the oil wealth in one generation and now have gone into massive debt and have the inability to produce adequate flood maps can only lead to the conclusion that things are not all well in the province of Alberta. So this appropriation time – in particular, the Auditor General's comments in regard to flooding and that we're still not prepared. We still haven't woken up to what our responsibilities are to not just protect the citizenry but to get it right and develop plans and legislation that ensures we're doing things right going forward.

I bring that up because the hon. minister is here, and I know full well that he wants to get a handle on this flooding and this flood mapping and building berms and dams and dikes all over this province to ensure that, going forward, we're okay. But I just note that the Auditor General has commented on these things, that we've commented here on what we're doing. It appears that even though it seems that we're advancing quite a bit of money to the departments, it doesn't appear to be able to get to what we need to do to provide good government in this province.

Nevertheless, thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and speak to third reading of Bill 18, which is our interim supply. You know, I appreciate the fact that what we're debating and will be voting on shortly is the interim budget and what the government needs to continue its operations. My only concern comes in a couple of areas, where if we look at the fact that this is roughly for one quarter, the funding is inadequate for the need.

I'll draw attention to, first of all, the area of Health and the fact that, you know, we've got crumbling infrastructure happening throughout the province and that there hasn't been a sufficient investment both on the infrastructure side and on the staffing side. When we look at a quarter of what should be spent – just let me see here – I would expect there would be 25 per cent of the yearly funding for 2014-15 in the interim. When it comes to the Ministry of Health, this bill only allocates 17 per cent of what was given, so a shortfall that's quite significant when it comes to ensuring Albertans can get the access to health care when they need it and to ensure that our facilities are being properly maintained and invested in.

As well, in this bill, Madam Speaker, I'm looking at Infrastructure and the fact that in the '14-15 general estimates the budget for capital spending was \$1.143 billion of it. In interim estimates we only show \$153 million, or 13.4 per cent of the budget of '14-15, being invested in these three months. Again, when we look at the deferred maintenance price tag that exists throughout the province when it comes to, you know, the integrity and infrastructure of our schools, of our hospitals – and I would extend that to, as well, our roads and bridges – there's a real concern if this is the forecast of what will be spent throughout the year and what's coming down on Thursday. I think some Albertans are going to be more than a little concerned with what's being outlined in here.

I do want to echo some of the comments made by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo as far as the Public Accounts meeting that we were just at with the Auditor General. Again, I look forward to bringing this up if we debate the education bill this evening, Madam Speaker. You know, I find it quite alarming that in the Auditor General's report it was brought to our attention that in the Northland school division there are over 900, or one-third of students, who are chronically absent from school, which is obviously a major concern because if students aren't attending, then they can't possibly be learning and developing the skills and tools they'll need to continue moving forward.

7:40

As well, I found the conversation this evening very enlightening looking at the issue of flood mapping and the fact that there are some roadblocks that are currently in the way of moving forward with updating a lot of the flood maps. Despite the fact that, you know, there has been \$8.7 million allocated to updating the maps, there is some bottlenecking going on. The fact of the matter is that I really hope the ESRD minister is not only aware of this but, hopefully, is working diligently toward whether it's bringing forward legislation or ensuring that we can get on with having adequate and updated flood maps so that the province, obviously, can work toward prevention so that we don't have a recurrence of what happened a couple of years ago, Madam Speaker.

As I said, you know, I appreciate the fact that this is only for a three-month window, this bill that we're debating. Again, I find it interesting that many of the opposition members and media, obviously, have derived the fact that we will likely be going into an election because of the \$28 million allocated to the Chief Electoral Officer, despite the fact that when questioned numerous times in this Chamber, neither the Premier nor the front bench have been forthcoming with members of this House and with Albertans as far as whether we are in fact going to a general election a year earlier than what was established in this House and also what was a piece of legislation that was brought forward by many of the members that sit opposite.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will take my chair. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to talk to Bill 18, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015, in third reading?

Seeing none, shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker: Would the minister like to close debate on Bill 18?

Mrs. Klimchuk: I move that we close debate.

The Acting Speaker: The question has been called.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 20 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. Before I start, I'd like to first of all commend and thank the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West for carrying this excellent bill and for the outstanding job that he's doing with this.

Madam Speaker, as you know, last fall our Premier and I signed a framework agreement with the mayors of Edmonton and Calgary in order to forge a new partnership that recognizes the unique challenges and capacities of these two great cities. More specifically, it was agreed that phase 1 of this initiative, which includes development of an appropriate implementation mechanism, would be complete by spring 2015.

Bill 20 creates enabling authority to move forward with charters; however, during second reading debate we heard some concerns about some of these authorities. Specifically, we heard concerns about the transparency of the development of charters and the ability for municipal bylaws in a charter to take precedence over other provincial enactments. In response to this, Madam Chair, we have prepared an amendment to the bill that will provide additional clarity to these important matters. I would like to make a motion to introduce those now, and I'll wait for a moment while those are being distributed.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. The amendment that is now being distributed will be known as amendment A1.

Hon. member, you may continue.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Please allow me to walk briefly through this amendment with everyone. To begin, for ease of interpretation of the proposed charter section, section A(a) amends the definition of a charter to provide clarity about when the term also includes an amendment to a charter.

Section A(b) adds a provision requiring any new charter or amendments to a charter to be published to the Municipal Affairs website for at least 60 days before it is put into effect. This will ensure that residents, businesses, and industry in a proposed city charter will have the opportunity to see what is planned before the changes come into effect. This additional measure for transparency adds to the fact that as a regulation a charter will also be published in the *Alberta Gazette* and posted on the Queen's Printer website after it is approved by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

We also heard during second reading, Madam Chair, debate, concern over the transparency of a charter being developed as a regulation that would be approved by cabinet before it would take effect. I want to be clear. This amendment will not alter that approach. If we were to require that charters could only be implemented as legislation rather than through regulation, charters would take considerably longer to develop, and this would not be in the spirit of the agreement we signed in the fall.

Another concern, Madam Chair, we heard during second reading debate was in reference to authorizing a charter city to create bylaws that take precedence over other provincial enactments.

Section A(c)(i) of this amendment provides clarity to the intent of this bylaw clause by specifically stating that any such bylaws would only apply to the city charter and only be able to change an enactment in accordance with the parameters set out in the charter itself. A charter is not a blanket licence to change provincial law. Rather, it may authorize the change of specific enactments as is appropriate for the specific needs of the city.

Finally, as an additional measure of transparency to the charter process section A(c)(ii) of the amendment would require that any bylaw made under the authority we just discussed be advertised and subject to a public hearing in accordance with the rules already in place under the MGA. Madam Chair, this amendment adds clarity and transparency to the charter provisions in Bill 20. It will help potential charter cities to define their charter development processes, help their residents feel informed and engaged. Therefore, I'd like to encourage all members in the House to support this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any others who wish to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to see this amendment coming forward. I just had a question of clarification for the minister on this amendment, and then I would like to also propose questions just on the bill in whole. Now, to clarify my understanding and also for Albertans to understand this very clearly, in the case of a charter city putting forward a bylaw, that bylaw cannot conflict with the existing MGA. The MGA legislation will be the parent legislation, so to speak. If there is a conflict between the two, it's my understanding that it is the MGA itself that will prevail. I'm hoping the minister can just clarify that question, please.

7:50

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, the hon. member is right. It cannot conflict with that or any other provincial enactment, just for clarity.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, any more questions?

Mr. Bilous: Sure. Thank you, Madam Chair. A question that deals with the MGA, and it's jumping to codes of conduct if I may. Just to clarify for, again, Albertans, if there is a breach in the code of conduct – because in this act there are provisions for municipalities to enact codes of conduct for their council and mayors – I'm just curious as to what, if there is a breach in a code that a municipality does pass as a bylaw, are either the tools available or the recourse. What are the actions that would follow in the case of a breach?

The Deputy Chair: We are speaking on amendment A1.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, I could speak on that, but those will be developed in the regulations. It isn't really pertaining to the amendment, but just to answer the hon. member's questions with regard to codes of conduct, those will be developed with regulations in consultation with the municipalities.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members who wish to speak on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I did not hear all of the last conversation, so this may be redundant, and I do apologize in

advance. With this amendment there's going to be a question here. I think that perhaps you can provide some detail. The charter documents which may be developed by regulation: will the cities have the power to change any provincial laws that apply to those regulations? It seems like there's a very broad power indicated here, and I'd like to hear more about how this power will work. What does this power mean for cities and for the relationship between the province and the municipalities? I'm not sure if that's the same as what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview asked over here. Did he? Okay. Then I'll withdraw.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other questions on amendment A1?

Seeing none, we'll call the vote.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We'll go back to Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to present to the committee today Bill 20, the proposed MGA, 2015, especially with the amendments that have been made today. I'd like to thank all members who participated in second reading debate and for their supportive comments.

Madam Chair, Bill 20 is the first step in meeting the commitments made in the January 22 memorandum of understanding between the province, the Alberta municipalities association, and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. This commitment is one that we made with Alberta's municipal associations to reflect the relationship we have with municipalities, one that is predicated on partnership. Mr. Mason asked about this relationship during second reading debate. I want to be clear that we are working with municipalities, government to government, to achieve our shared outcomes.

The parties of the memorandum of understanding agreed to a three-phased approach for completing the review. This bill represents the first phase, which captures the areas of agreement between municipal and industrial stakeholders on issues that were identified by Albertans, municipal partners, and other stakeholders during the 2014 consultations on the MGA.

The second phase will introduce legislation amendments in support of more complex items, considered through the MGA review policy discussions. Meetings with key stakeholders are already under way on these items, and we're pleased that this process has already yielded results, with consensus being reached on several of these items already.

The third phase will see refinement of the legislation and work on regulatory development.

As we discussed in second reading, Bill 20 contains provisions allowing for city charters. To be very clear, we are not creating the content for the city charters through Bill 20. We are merely allowing for the provision to establish city charters. These provisions are a key element in fulfilling the Premier's commitment to the cities of Edmonton and Calgary to demonstrate meaningful progress in the development of charters by the spring 2015. We will be talking to the cities, stakeholders, and to all Albertans, taking their input into consideration before any decision on the content of the charters is decided. The cities will continue to be subject to the MGA and other provincial legislation except in those specific instances where the cities and the province agree that their unique circumstances justify an alternative approach.

Bill 20 also clarifies the administration of off-site levies but does not address the scope of these levies. The bill contains provisions to elevate the substance of several regulations made under section 73(3) of the MGA into the act or to create a new regulation-making authority to continue the existing policies as appropriate.

Finally, the bill contains some general housekeeping items to add clarity to parts of the MGA. The bill is organized in the order of the MGA, so please bear with me as we will be jumping back and forth between policies as we move through the bill.

Section 2(a) is miscellaneous and housekeeping. To begin, section 2(a) contains new and updated definitions. A new definition of “ALSA regional plan” has been added for consistency with the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. The reference to “business revitalization zone” in clause (aa)(iii) has been changed to “business improvement area” at the request of business revitalization zone constituents for consistency with other Canadian jurisdictions.

Sections 2(b) and 2(c): open council meetings. The new regulation-making power allowing the minister to define meetings for the purpose of the MGA and its regulation has been added.

Section 2 also adds a new definition for closed meetings as it relates to municipal councils, council committees, or other bodies. This new section provides clarity on when a meeting is considered closed such as when the public is not permitted entry, when the public is asked to leave a meeting, or when council leaves the room to hold discussions elsewhere. This definition will help in interpreting other parts of the MGA relating to meetings.

In sections 3 through 7 we’re doing miscellaneous housekeeping. Section 3 is a housekeeping amendment of section 13 of the MGA to ensure consistent wording throughout the act relating to conflicts and inconsistencies between documents. Sections 4, 5, 6, and 7 are housekeeping amendments to ensure that the change in name from BRZ to business improvement area is captured in various sections throughout the MGA.

Section 8: the section 73(3) regulation, or control of corporations. Section 8 creates a new regulation-making authority that will enable the creation of new regulations to carry out policy decisions that will come after our full review of all matters related to municipally-controlled corporations. There’s currently no change to the requirements for municipalities through these amendments.

In sections 9, 10, 11, and 12: amalgamations. These sections introduce a new, streamlined process for municipalities who wish to voluntarily amalgamate. This will increase efficiencies and encourage a co-operative approach to amalgamation. Section 9 allows for the amalgamation of non-contiguous summer villages adjacent to a common water body. It also ensures that when contiguous summer villages amalgamate, the new municipality may be a summer village or may be a different municipal status type if it meets the requirements for that status type.

Section 10 is related to the initiation of the amalgamation proceedings. The amendment allows for the current model of initiating the process but also adds the ability for two or more municipalities to jointly initiate the amalgamation process.

Section 11 amends section 105 of the MGA on the report of negotiations to provide clarity on what is required in reporting. The report must include a list of the items on which the municipal authorities in question are not agreed and those on which they are agreed. The report must include a certificate stating that the report accurately reflects the results of the amalgamation negotiations and that the report must be approved by resolution of the councils involved in the amalgamation. Should a municipal authority council not pass a resolution approving the report, the study may include the authority’s reasons for not approving.

Section 12 adds a section allowing the minister to make regulations to allow municipalities to jointly initiate an amalgamation as well as the procedures of joint initiation of amalgamations.

8:00

Section 13, annexation. This section allows the minister to make regulations respecting annexation procedures. Annexations can be controversial, and municipalities have indicated that clear and consistent procedures would be helpful.

Section 14, which we just spoke about in the amendment, is city charters. Section 14 introduces a new part, 4.1, on city charters to the MGA, which is an important step towards realizing our shared commitment for the development of charters for the cities of Calgary and Edmonton. These provisions are only enabling provisions. The contents of the charters continue to be developed and will be announced at a future time.

Section 14 establishes the purpose of the new part and that on the request of the city the Lieutenant Governor in Council may by regulation establish a charter for that city. A charter will allow for the legal recognition of the evolving responsibilities and capabilities of cities and of the needs of their communities by setting out that portions of the MGA may not apply or apply differently to a charter city, setting out unique provisions that apply to the charter city in addition to or instead of provisions of the MGA or other enactments. It may authorize the charter city to modify or replace a provision of the MGA or any other enactment by bylaw.

Section 14 also establishes administrative matters relating to charters such as interpretation, the application of the MGA and other legislation to a charter city, the charter prevailing in cases of conflict or inconsistency between the charter and the MGA or other legislation.

Finally, section 14 also establishes that unless a charter provides otherwise, the legal status or the rights and obligations of a city are not affected by the establishment of a charter for that city, nor are the rights of the Crown in Alberta affected by the establishment of a charter for a city.

Sections 15 through 19, accountability and conduct of elected officials and open meetings. In sections 15 and 16 we introduce new provisions related to the accountability and conduct of elected officials. Section 15 is an administrative change to recognize the new division on codes of conduct being created through section 16.

Section 16 adds a new division to the MGA on codes of conduct. This section adds a new requirement for councils to establish a code of conduct governing the conduct of councillors. Section 16 also establishes that a councillor cannot be disqualified or removed from office for a breach of the code. This section also allows the minister to make regulations respecting matters that a code of conduct must address. These matters are respecting the date by which councils must establish a code of conduct, sanctions to be imposed for breach of a code of conduct, matters that must be taken into consideration when establishing a code of conduct, implementation of codes of conduct, and any other matters the minister considers necessary to meet the purpose of the new code of conduct requirements.

To address some of the comments made on this matter in second reading, it might be helpful to consider a few examples of matters that may be included in a code regulation. For example, it could include that councillors must govern their conduct in accordance with the requirements and obligations set out in municipal legislation; not use confidential information for personal profit for themselves or any other person; not communicate confidential information to anyone not entitled to receive the same; not use their position to secure privileges, favour, or advantages for themselves or any other person; and preserve the integrity and impartiality of council. This regulation

will be made with the active engagement of our municipal partners to ensure that it meets the intended outcome of this important policy issue, to which everyone has agreed.

Section 17 clearly states that it is a councillor's responsibility to adhere to the codes of conduct introduced through these amendments that we have already discussed. Sections 17, 18, and 19 are related to increased transparency in council meetings and sharing information amongst councillors. Section 18 adds a new section, 153.1, stating that if a chief administrative officer of a municipality provides information about the operation or administration of the municipality to a councillor, then that same information must be provided to all councillors as soon as practical. This provision ensures that all councillors are given the same information about the operation or administration of their municipality on which to base their deliberations and decisions.

Section 19 provides clarity about the procedures relating to closed meetings. This helps to ensure transparency on the basis by which all or part of the council meeting is closed to the public. Clarity is provided for how a meeting or part of a meeting is to be closed, how any member of the public who is present is informed, and on the presence of other persons at closed meetings. Section 19 allows the minister to make regulations to list matters that may be discussed in closed meetings in addition to those matters that are already eligible to be discussed in closed meetings pursuant to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Sections 20 through 23, responsibilities of council administration. Sections 20, 21, 22, and 23 are related to the roles and responsibility of council administration. Section 20 removes the current section 201(1)(b), related to council's role, as this section was too general in its wording and could result in municipalities taking on administrative functions outside their legislative roles. Section 21 adds a clause to ensure that the council's role in oversight of the chief administrative officer is clear. Section 22 provides a new section 208, that condenses and clarifies the list of responsibilities of the CAO, for existing section 208 of the MGA. Section 23 amends section 209 to clearly establish that the duties of the CAO as outlined in section 208 can be delegated to a designated officer or employee of the municipality.

Public participation policy. Section 24 introduces a new requirement for all councils to introduce a public participation policy for their municipality in order to ensure that the municipalities are effectively engaged with the public, residents, business, and industry as well as other stakeholders. This section also states that the minister may make regulations respecting the content of public participation policies, the considerations to be taken into account by council in establishing the policy, a date by which every municipality must have its first policy in place, requirements for a council to periodically review its public participation policy, and requirements to make that public participation policy public.

Section 24 also establishes that the public participation policy does not affect any other right or obligation held under the MGA or any other act and that "no resolution or bylaw of a council may be challenged on the ground that it was made without complying with a public participation policy established by a resolution of the council."

In sections 25 through 30, the petitioning process, there are requirements for petitions to a municipal council by the minister. Current petition requirements can make it very difficult for the public to successfully petition a municipality. Sections 25 and 26 are amendments consequential to the addition of a new section, 226.1, in the MGA on bylaws modifying petition requirements. Section 27 adds the requirement for a petitioner to include a telephone number or e-mail address, if any, when signing a petition.

In some cases this additional information would assist a municipality and the ministry in validating the petition. Section 28 is also consequential to the addition of a new section, 226.1, in the MGA on bylaws modifying petition requirements. Section 29 extends the time frame, from 30 to 45 days, that a CAO has before making a declaration about whether the petition is sufficient.

Section 30 adds a new section, 226.1, to the MGA, that allows municipalities to modify the requirements for petitions to municipal councils by bylaw, including decreasing the percentage requirement for sufficient petitions, accepting online petitions, outlining online petition validation requirements, extending timelines for the collection of petition signatures, and allowing petitioners to remove their names from a petition within a specified number of days from the date the petition is filed with the CAO. This section also specifies that these bylaws cannot be the subject of a petition and that a bylaw made under this section must not take effect earlier than 90 days after it's passed. This section also adds a provision to protect personal information collected in petitions to ensure that it is only used for its intended purpose.

8:10

Section 31 includes a provision to ensure that appropriate notice of public hearings is given in accordance with the act as well as some amendments to clarify that the rules of public hearings apply to those hearings that are legally required to be held.

Section 32 is an amendment consequential to the addition of a new section, 226.1, in the MGA on bylaws modifying petition requirements.

Sections 33 through 36 all work to elevate the content of the current municipal finance clarification regulation, which was made under section 603 of the MGA. There's no change to the requirements for municipalities through these amendments.

Sections 37, 38, and 39. Currently the responsibilities listed in these sections are ascribed to the CAO in section 208 of the MGA. These amendments have transferred these responsibilities more broadly to the municipality so that it is clear that the CAO does not have to personally carry out these responsibilities.

Section 40 introduces new provisions requiring municipalities to at a minimum prepare a three-year financial plan and a five-year capital plan. This section also allows the minister to make regulations respecting financial plans and capital plans as well as transitional provisions for introducing these financial plans.

Section 41 is a housekeeping amendment related to how assessments are prepared. Sections 41(b) and 42 elevate the content of the current SuperNet assessment regulation, which was made under section 603 of the MGA, into the act. There are no changes to the requirements for municipalities through these amendments.

Sections 43 through 46 are housekeeping amendments providing clarity, correcting typo errors, and updating references to other legislation.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to comment on Bill 20? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my honour to speak briefly to this. I do appreciate the work that's been done and put into this bill. You know, I'm always happy to hear when appropriate organizations and bodies have been consulted and have had the opportunity to provide input. I know that AUMA, AAMD and C, and the mayors of Edmonton and Calgary, among other mayors and councillors, I should clarify, around the province have been able to give their feedback to the government and have input into this bill.

You know, as I've mentioned at other points in time, I do think that this bill takes all of the items that were agreed upon via consensus and puts them forward right now. The cynical side of me does have to ask about the timing, the fact that anything that is controversial or that will need much more time is obviously getting pushed into the fall and likely after the election when folks don't really have much of a say as far as if there's bad news to be given.

A couple of things that I did want to flag. First, I will comment on the fact that amalgamation has been updated and discussed. I do know, you know, having the Municipal Affairs file for the Alberta NDP, that amalgamation and the existing wording in the MGA were something of a concern to a lot of different municipalities, especially summer villages. I do appreciate the fact that their concerns were heard by the minister and that the amalgamation piece has been updated. I do think that that's a positive.

Then I do want to just, you know, question the fact that in this legislation city charters are referred to exactly as that, placeholders for city charters, when the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, the two largest cities in the province, have been very vocal over the last few years in advocating and requesting a big-city charter, or a city charter that applies to both the cities of Edmonton and Calgary. Essentially what they are asking for is special status versus the other 345 municipalities, if my math is correct.

I would like to just take a moment to explain the need for a charter that applies directly to the cities of Edmonton and Calgary. I mean, first and foremost, Edmonton is more than 10 times the size of the third-largest city in the province, and therefore, just based on population alone, the two largest cities, because of their size, are very unique in the sense that there are programs, specialized services, that are only offered in Edmonton and Calgary.

I know from speaking to councillors and the mayors from both cities that part of their struggle is the number of Albertans who come into the cities to use our amenities, to see specialists, et cetera. They have no other choice but to come to Edmonton and Calgary because they're only here. But the challenge that that places on the cities is that you have, you know, thousands, tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of Albertans accessing services, using services and infrastructure that the city of Edmonton and Calgary are providing. The challenge is that those two cities do not collect any revenue from those individuals in the way of property assessment, one of the only tools that the cities have at their disposal. So this puts significant restriction or constraint on the two cities because they need to be able to leverage many more dollars.

At the same time, I know the cities have also said that they are more than happy to step up as far as increasing their role as the two major cities in the province. You know, I appreciate the fact that the charter placeholder is in this bill – that is something that's very much needed – but the way that it's framed, again, for just city charters, well, many municipalities could apply for a charter. The argument that I'm going to make is that if all 347 municipalities are going to be granted or if they were granted the same tools, then essentially we're right back to an MGA that applies to all 347 municipalities as opposed to acknowledging the uniqueness and the significant responsibilities that the cities of Edmonton and Calgary have. You know, I'd appreciate it if the minister would be willing to comment on this.

But, for me, again, it is very important that we distinguish the roles that Edmonton and Calgary have and the fact that they do need to be recognized. They do have additional costs and other restraints that many of the other municipalities don't have. They don't have the same challenges that other municipalities have, and they have been asking the province to acknowledge their uniqueness and also to ensure that they have the tools at their disposal.

Now, again, I am well aware that the details of these charters will be forthcoming, and hopefully we'll have more details by the fall, but again it's very important to note that Edmonton and Calgary do deserve and need to be treated differently than the other municipalities just because of the size and scope.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour and privilege to be able to speak to this bill. Frankly, it's a good bill that goes forward and that seems to get the ducks in a row, so to speak, to see the development of city charters.

There's been a note that this has been a policy that has been long overdue. You've had the cities of Calgary and Edmonton, going back to around 2008, who have been wanting a big-city charter. I believe it is something that is a necessity given the size and the scope and the responsibilities that those municipalities face. Simply put, they're the arm of government that is closest to the people. They don't simply build roads and segregate different areas for different development. They're playing a role in the lives of their citizenry, whether you go from affordable housing to FCSS funding with many of our nonprofit groups to working on flood mitigation and disaster relief alongside the provincial government. There has to be a recognition that both Calgary and Edmonton, because of their unique size and their unique roles, need that special treatment as to what defines their roles and responsibilities.

8:20

I think this bill goes some way to providing the clarity that people want in that fashion. I know the mayors of both cities have been asking for this repeatedly. In fact, I think there was some reference to it – well, there was reference to big-city charters in the 2008 and 2012 Alberta Liberal platforms, and I think it was in you guys' platform in 2012. So this goes some measure to seeing that we're moving along that path.

I will note that for some time here in this Legislature big-city charters seemed to be at a standstill. There seemed to be no clarification between what the front bench wanted, what the municipalities wanted, and what the minister wanted, and it seemed to be that this call for big-city charters was not going to see the light of day, but I'm glad to see that we're at least plodding along that course.

There has to be a recognition, because of the role of Calgary and Edmonton, that they need new tools to engage with their citizenry. My hope – and this won't be decided till the fall, most likely – is that there will eventually be a recognition that the tax generation made available to the cities through property assessments is simply an outdated tool that doesn't serve its citizenry well. Frankly, as the local arm of government closest to their citizens, they should actually be able to engage in debate with their citizens on what they want from a city and how much they want to pay for it. This should be the primary job of the city and its citizens. Because of their unique size and stature and the way they've developed, this has to be a new means of going forward.

Yes, it's going to entail that the provincial government release some of those primary strings that you have on raising revenue from your citizens. I full well admit that, and I think everyone here will as well. But I think it's an idea that big cities in Canada have evolved to the point where they are capable of that responsibility. There's been a call, and many discussion papers out there have said that this is good public policy.

I think the federal government, too, needs to play a role in assessing what tax tools they have and sharing that with their cities in regard to infrastructure and the like and how cities can be more apt to address transit concerns, whether that be by automobile, by bus, by train, and having on those revenue generations that honest discussion with the citizens, the ratepayers, of their cities as to what they truly want. We've got to get to the principle that if you want the services, you should pay the tax, and if you don't want the services, well, then, you don't have to pay the tax.

It seems pretty simple to have that debate on whether you want to live in a city with great things – great access to public transportation, great amenities, performing arts centres, and the like – or you want to live in a minimalist city. I think that debate has to happen at the local level. Far too often there's a lot of bafflegab in between whose responsibility it is, whether it's the province's or the city's. You know, the province will say, "Well, we give the city more than enough money; we don't know why they can't do everything," and the city will say, "Well, they don't give us near enough money; no wonder we can't do everything."

Well, having a big-city charter will clarify those roles to allow more of a distinction between what each level of government does, and frankly I think it will be better for everybody. There will be less finger pointing and more accountability to your local citizens as to what you provide and less, I guess, three-card monte as to who is actually responsible for providing this.

Nevertheless, I'm hopeful this sets us in the right direction. I think this sets the framework to have the tools in place to be able to do that should this government be willing to implement good public policy for the long run, which, you know, at least in my time here they've been awfully timid at doing.

You know, I think we can look at this situation where we are, where we can find ourselves, and say: my goodness, have we really instituted what's been in our best interests for the long run and made that case to the citizens on whether we've actually had representative democracy, which is supposed to have our best long-term interests at heart? I haven't seen a lot of that in my time here at the Legislature.

My hope is that maybe a new day is around the corner, where we understand that we've grown up, where some of the old sacred cows that we held dear and near to our hearts may not be so relevant anymore, where we've matured as a democracy and understand that government has a role to play in our lives; that having functioning schools, roads that are built, and hospitals that are running is part of that equation and that we should as a citizenry participate in contributing to those necessary functions; that the government has a responsibility, in collecting that, to ensure that kids get educated and ensure access to not only good K through 12 education but early childhood learning opportunities, postsecondary opportunities, that our elderly are cared for in dignity, and that we're not simply scrambling around trying to put Band-Aids on problems that we know won't go away unless we act.

I'm hoping that the big-city charter piece will ensure the ability of cities to react to what their citizens' needs are and how we can run more efficient cities and better operating cities and more serving-the-public cities for everyone who lives there.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's a pleasure to get up this evening and speak a little bit about Bill 20 and the MGA, one of my favourite topics and one that I have a little experience in for a change.

Anyway, I'd like to offer my congratulations to the Member for Lethbridge-West in his comments and the work he put into this as well as the minister on this file. I think this is something that has been long overdue, and there have been a lot of experiences in a lot of communities around Alberta where they've had various issues, including in my own riding, that some of these changes will assist, for sure.

We're fairly supportive of this review and have been from the beginning. We know that the AUMA and the AAMD and C have been involved, and I think that's just great. That's a good way to go. The stakeholders have therefore been consulted heavily, and I think that's really important. You know, it's good to see some of these things moving forward now finally, and some of the things like closed meetings and new rules for notifying the public are all also very important. So we're pretty supportive of that.

I'd like to speak, though, a little bit more on some of the stuff that has been mentioned already, just briefly. I don't want to be redundant and hold us here all night. The city charter thing is a new direction that's being considered here, and, you know, there are a lot of people that we're hearing from who are still nervous about some of the things that may be in the city charters. I think everyone knows that. The taxation powers are, of course, one of the things that a lot of people were concerned about. We've expressed support for a charter, and we think it helps the cities, helps some of the problems they face, whether they're current or the one-size-fits-all legislation, which hasn't necessarily worked that well in the past.

You know, we generally support the charter idea, but we have always been clear that the residents of Alberta should not be faced with any new taxes imposed on them through this process. Actually, I had an amendment that we were going to bring forward about that, but it kind of got circumvented by some of the process we have witnessed here tonight. Nonetheless, we do have things that are worrisome in that regard. We still don't know how it's going to unfold, but I gather that as it proceeds along, we'll see that. But we all think that having extra taxes is not necessarily the greatest thing in this kind of environment. Nonetheless, it's moving quickly here.

You know, there are a lot of things that we get worried about when it comes to my own area, being close to the city of Calgary, like annexation, amalgamation, all these kinds of things. Sometimes there are some very difficult situations that arise out of those negotiations. We're seeing that with Leduc and the city of Edmonton and so on. I will be monitoring that and looking forward to seeing how that comes about.

8:30

That being the case, you know, it will be interesting to see how the city charter thing goes. We'll be monitoring it. We think that there will be a lot of impact to this. There will be some adjustments and so on and so forth, but we're generally in favour of this, and we look forward to hearing from others and what they say.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak to Bill 20, Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015, in Committee of the Whole?

Seeing none, shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 20 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 12
Common Business Number Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members who wish to comment, question, or have any amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Just some opening comments, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to speak to the Committee of the Whole respecting the Common Business Number Act. To begin, I'd just like to reiterate what this bill is intended to do. Bill 12 establishes a legislative framework that enables our province to enter into a partnership with Revenue Canada to adopt a common business number. By doing so, Alberta businesses will be able to conveniently identify themselves to participating provincial programs using a single identification number.

Use of the common business number is already expanding to government programs across the country. Five federal departments and agencies use the business number, and the government of Canada is examining the mandatory use of the common business number for all federal programs. The provinces of British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick have adopted a common business number for corporate registrations and other programs such as taxation, workers' compensation, permitting and licensing of alcohol and tobacco. Passing this legislation is the first step in implementing the common business number, and it will demonstrate Alberta's ongoing commitment to reducing red tape, improving services for businesses, increasing the competitiveness of Alberta-based businesses, and maintaining a positive investment climate.

I'm looking forward to any other comments on this bill. I'd be happy to answer any questions. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to comment? The hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod.

Mr. Strankman: Ma'am, it's Drumheller-Stettler.

The Deputy Chair: Oh. I'm sorry.

Mr. Strankman: It's still the diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker – Madam Chairman. I'll get it right, too.

I think this is an interesting bill, and from my business background, an agricultural background, and growing up having a social insurance number, a corporate number, a farm fuel distribution number, a lot of this sort of thing, PIN numbers of various arrangements, although this doesn't relate to that, I think common business numbers are a boon. The concern I have is the possible cost of implementation, but once it's arrived at, I think it will be a benefit and a bonus going forward.

I'd just like to get those comments on the record from Drumheller-Stettler, Madam Chairman. I'd just like to leave it at that. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my honour to speak to this bill. You know, first of all, I think it's important, and I speak on behalf of my whole caucus when I say that we support the development of customer-oriented services for businesses in Alberta, and that obviously includes developing a system of common business numbers between our federal cousins and provincial governments.

Interestingly, though, what needs to be pointed out is that I'm happy to see our government finally catching up to something that many of the other provinces already have, most notably in Manitoba. It's worth noting that Manitoba's NDP government brought in a similar system a number of years ago. In fact, what's interesting, Madam Chair, is that the text of the bill is almost word for word the same as the equivalent bill passed in Saskatchewan in 2013. You know, it's unfortunate that it took us this long to get here, but I am happy to see that the government is finally catching up and decided to get on with this.

Madam Chair, it's important to modernize government operations in order to support businesses in Alberta. We need to also ensure, though, that privacy, convenience, and flexibility are respected at every step of the process. I mean, that's going to be the focus of some of my comments. Again, I do want to mention that the Alberta NDP are strong supporters of small business. We recognize that 95 per cent of Alberta's economy is driven by the small-business community. Interesting to note that we were the only party three years ago proposing a small-business tax cut, and our party has actually increased that to cut small-business taxes down to 1 per cent in the province of Alberta.

To continue with ensuring that privacy is respected as well as convenience and flexibility, just a couple of minor questions or concerns that I have that I'd like to share with Albertans and members of this Chamber. Subsection (2) enables the minister to enter into an agreement with the government of Canada to establish a system of common business numbers. Now, as much of the act is worded, it's fairly vague, Madam Chair, and it's important that the government is very up front with Alberta businesses about how the system will be implemented. Specifically, will the common business numbers be the same as those used by the Canada Revenue Agency?

Another area of the bill, section 4, which is equally vague is that the purpose of establishing a system of common business numbers enables any public entity to share business information with any agency in the government of Canada. I'm curious. Why is such broad permission required if communication is really only needed between the province and the Canada Revenue Agency? Or is it as well with a number of participating federal programs?

Section 4 also enables a public entity to require information from a business entity in order to assign a common business number. It also allows the public entity to provide this information to the government of Canada or one of its agencies. The public entity may also use the information currently in its possession for this purpose. Given the extent of the information being shared, there must be adequate systems or regulations in place to ensure that business information is used only for the purpose of assigning a common business number.

As well, section 4 creates a sanction, that any public entity may refuse to act on information provided to it by a business entity should the business fail to provide the information necessary for the system of common numbering. Now, if a business has legitimate concerns about the privacy implications of this information sharing, why shouldn't it be able to opt out without penalty?

Section 4(3) requires that a business's information be provided in any form or format that the public entity considers appropriate. Now, whatever that format is, it must not place an additional burden

on the business. Preferably, businesses should have the option of providing the information in different formats depending on what's best suited for their needs, again keeping in mind that we don't want to be burdening businesses any more than we have to.

Sections 4(5) and 5(4) require that business information received by public entities be provided to the minister. Now, there are no restrictions on the use of this information nor direct justification for this clause with respect to establishing a system of common business numbers. If public entities may provide business information to the government of Canada themselves as per section 4, why must the minister receive the information as well? The role of the minister in implementing this system must be clarified, and I really hope that the member sponsoring this bill and the minister will clarify this.

Section 6 pertains to the creation of an information system for the common business numbers. As per 6(2)(d) the information system may hold any other prescribed information about the business. So who will make the prescription? What limitations will be placed on it? Will the information system be expanded or be capable of storing information other than the information set out in section 6? If so, how will the scope of the information system be expanded?

Section 6 also fails to identify where the information held in the information system will be stored and who will be responsible for controlling access to the information other than the minister.

8:40

Madam Chair, we must ensure that these things are clear in the regulations such that information remains secure. Again, I think most businesses, if not all, throughout the province, you know, will want to know that the information is going to be secure, that privacy is of the utmost importance in the passing of this legislation.

Section 7(1)(a)(ii) enables the minister to disclose the information in the information system to a public entity for the purpose of law enforcement. However, given the murky scope of the information to be held by the information system, it's a little disconcerting that it may be used for law enforcement purposes. Businesses must know what information will be held in the information system before being forced to comply with the legislation.

Lastly, Madam Chair, section 11 pertains to regulations. Here 11(a) sparks the most concern because it enables the Lieutenant Governor in Council to define, enlarge, or restrict the meaning of any term or expression used in this act but not defined in this act. In other words, the government may significantly alter the implications of the legislation without ever having to formally amend it. I mean, that is and has always been a concern of mine and my colleagues when we're giving, you know, complete authority to a minister or in this case to the Lieutenant Governor in Council to be able to alter the act significantly without it ever having to come back to the Legislature to be adequately, publicly, and properly debated. So that is another great concern that I have with the current legislation as it's written.

Madam Chair, you know, we want to make sure that Alberta's businesses benefit from this bill as opposed to simply handing over more information to the government with less oversight. Again, it's of utmost concern to us or a very large priority that we are respecting the privacy of businesses, that we are ensuring that any information that is being stored is in fact secure and that, obviously, businesses are made completely aware of what information will be stored, how it's going to be stored, how it's going to be used – the last thing we want to see is a very vaguely worded bill passed and the intention, the spirit, of the bill altered or misinterpreted down the road because it's not specifically and clearly outlined in this bill – and, again, most importantly, you know, that it's publicly debated,

that it's given the opportunity to be discussed and scrutinized by all members of this House and not done behind closed doors.

With that, Madam Chair, I will take my seat. I truly hope that members opposite were taking note of some of the questions and concerns I have. I would love to hear some of the answers so that we can move forward in our debate.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 12?

Mr. Hehr: Yeah.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. My goodness, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview did such a good job going through the details of that bill. I'm not going to muck it up further by getting to details in the weeds there.

Nevertheless, I look at this, and some broad comments sort of pertaining to small business come to my mind here. It looks to me like our small-business community actually is one of the engines that is trying to survive and thrive here in Alberta, is adding value to our economy, and is not necessarily tied to our oil and gas industry, which is a good thing as we all well know that many of our eggs are tied to the one basket. It's natural that a commodity like oil and gas, that generally sells at large profit margins and can provide good wages and actually has people going into that business for many good reasons, is your dominant driver of the economy. Small businesses appear to be one of the ways to balance that approach.

I, too, would echo the comments that I note the hon. minister of jobs indicated, that he enjoyed our conversion on the road to Damascus on small business taxes. I would actually share that conversion on small businesses as it appears to be a reasonable way to try and get more people involved in the economy and starting different businesses. The hope is that with those companies some good ideas emerge, and eventually they become big companies, and then we can take our pound of flesh – right? – Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. I'm joking here. I'm joking.

Nevertheless, I think it's important that we foster that sense of opportunity amongst people who want to go out and try new things. It may actually be a way to slightly diversify our economy. That always brings me back to note that now the government of the day is pounding a diversification drum again. I'm interested to see what that actually means as many economists that I read and the Alberta Treasury Branch's Todd Hirsch have indicated that this seems to be a very difficult thing to do and almost, even, a dangerous one. I note that he notes for many reasons like I do that we're very good at oil and gas, and it is the driver of our economy and the like.

I have a sense that what should be done with that oil revenue is for it to be saved in the heritage trust fund for the day when oil and gas eventually runs out, or probably what happens more quickly is that the world moves on. Being prepared for that day is primarily through that vehicle, the heritage savings trust fund, which we've ignored for the last 25 years. Or if you're looking at another avenue instead of that, it would be maybe to make the best universities in the world or something if you found a public good where the opportunity costs outweighed the savings. I haven't seen that argument made, and maybe that's what is going to be forthcoming from the government.

But I look at the diversification thing. It's always something that's easy to say, and it might make for good election politics, but I'm not certain how to do it. So I'm looking forward to the government enlightening me on that. Of course, we look to solar

and wind and many of those things. As the minister pointed out today in question period, she noted that we have had some successes in that event. Maybe there are some other things we can do in that regard, but that doesn't seem to be diversification but more energy production. Maybe I'm wrong on that.

All I'm saying is that it appears that small business is one of the ways that we actually have a tried-and-true mechanism for diversifying the economy that may actually work and has proven to work. My hope is that this new common business number – it looks like it's been implemented elsewhere successfully. I'm sure they've dealt with some of the challenges brought up by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Hopefully, we're following along with best practices that have been done by provinces before us to ensure that small businesses are getting the information they need and are providing the information that's required yet is not an undue burden on their business practices nor on the privacy concerns of theirs and their customers, which is a slippery slope, as we all know in this day and age, and the like.

Nevertheless, I think it's a good measure forward. I'm looking forward to the government's responses to those questions. I'm always interested in hearing how we're going to diversify things because, you know, it's easier said than done. So I look to be illuminated here in the next little while.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 12, the Common Business Number Act, in Committee of the Whole? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the comments from Calgary-Buffalo and Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Just to clarify a couple of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview's questions, first of all, about the security of it and what's being collected. The intent is really to collect no more, of course, than is necessary. The information that is collected for the common business number will be shared only between public entities, Service Alberta, and the Canada Revenue Agency, and it will be completely secure through an information exchange hub.

8:50

Also, section 4, the question about if they actually want to opt out. Well, they can't really opt out on the Revenue Canada number, and this is basically the same information. If they choose to opt out, then that'll be their choice, but they would assumedly, then, still have two business numbers, which really is kind of counterproductive. But I suppose they have that option. We wouldn't be able to co-ordinate the common business number for those few cases that may decide to opt out.

With respect to the burden to small business I think we're all agreed that this reduces that burden. This government will do anything and everything it can to continue to reduce the administrative burden to small business.

More questions on sections 4(5) and 5(4). Again, I think we've covered the security part. It will be completely secure through this information exchange hub. With respect to the data collected, we don't expect that we need to collect and store any additional business information other than for the purpose of administering the common business number.

Other than that, I think that covers some, if not most, of what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview was asking. With that, I'll take my seat if there are no further questions.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 12, Common Business Number Act? The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Chair. I'll be brief. I just wanted to thank the hon. member for bringing this forward and the minister responsible. I think that if we carry on this way, people will start to believe that government is acting in their best interests even more so than they already do. I think it's a good example of trying to actually cut some red tape for business, and I intend to support it.

I hope that was as brief as I advertised.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 12?
Seeing none, shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 12 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the Committee of the Whole rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 12. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 20. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 14

Agricultural Societies Amendment Act, 2015

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Scott]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Scott: Question.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak in second reading on Bill 14? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to be recognized from the diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler. I was fortunate enough to attend the briefing that the agriculture minister held in regard to the Agricultural Societies Act.

Being from a rural constituency, I think it's important that this bill be brought forward, and I will be supporting it. What it does is modernize the Agricultural Societies Act in an important way by bringing it to a third-person atmosphere, much like a corporation does. Currently there are almost 300 agricultural societies in the province, and this is an important way of bringing those organizations in tune with the modern era. It modernizes legislation, and it better aligns the Agricultural Societies Act with the Societies Act. Period. It makes it less prescriptive in recognition that different agricultural societies need to have the ability to structure themselves to meet their own needs, and it requires all agricultural societies to have effective bylaws in place to ensure good governance.

One of the things that I found interesting was the stipulation that some of these societies have to maintain a specific distance apart so that there is not overlapping of regulation.

Madam Speaker, I think that the proposed changes are a sensible approach to modernizing these organizations in rural communities. Our rural communities are in some cases, in the constituency of Drumheller-Stettler, becoming further and greater distances apart, so we have to modernize the way that these function. This will allow them to function in a more autonomous fashion and allow them to meet the local goals by developing their local bylaws and objectives.

There are some negative parts to it, but I believe that they are far outweighed by the progressive side or the innovative side coming forward here.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'll resign the floor to you and to anyone else who wishes to speak to the act.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. With regard to the Agricultural Societies Amendment Act, 2015, I do want to just make a couple of brief points. The Alberta NDP does recognize the importance of agricultural societies and the contributions that they make to our communities.

Interestingly, for over a century agricultural societies have provided communities in Alberta with opportunities to come together, exchange knowledge, and share in the bounty produced by our vital agricultural sector. In 1879, Madam Speaker, the Edmonton Northlands agricultural society was established. Today there are over 295 active agricultural societies. However, unlike the societies themselves, the legislation surrounding them has not been significantly modified since the late 1800s. You know, we recognize that this bill intends to modernize the legislation surrounding these societies to enable them to function to their full potential.

I'm happy to learn and to know or to comment on, Madam Speaker, that an extensive consultation process with agricultural societies found there was broad support for these changes. Certain prescriptive details are removed from the act, which should make life easier for these valuable community organizations.

One of the most important amendments contained in this bill will broaden the object statement to reflect the broad community presence of agricultural societies. However, a few other changes are noteworthy, Madam Speaker. One is the addition of a section on amalgamation of agricultural societies. I'm curious to know why the minister sees fit to add such a section. I mean, it is important to clarify whether the minister anticipates that societies will have to

amalgamate due to changes in funding or if there are other reasons which we're not aware of.

9:00

In addition, the government will no longer guarantee agricultural societies' loans. Ministry staff have indicated that while they felt the provision was unnecessary as it is no longer used by agricultural societies, no consultation, to our knowledge, was conducted on the change.

Significantly, we see in this bill a substantial broadening of the minister's regulation-making powers. For example, he or she may now make regulations "exempting a society from the application of any provision of this Act or the regulations, subject to any terms and conditions that the Minister considers appropriate." Now, again, Madam Speaker, for us and for many Albertans clearly this raises some concern and some flags since the scope of the power that the minister now has is extremely broad.

Any time in this House that bills come forward that allow the minister to make sweeping changes without having to work through the Legislative Assembly is a cause for concern, Madam Speaker. Again, we're not talking about questioning the current minister's integrity or intentions, but the concern, obviously, is that once a bill is passed through this House today, it will stand for many years to come, similar to the fact that the original bill was written in the 1800s, and now, well over a hundred years since, we're making significant modifications to it.

So that concern, I think, is noteworthy, Madam Speaker. It should be clearly outlined in the bill so that it can be debated publicly and so that all members may participate in that debate. That's probably my largest concern with this bill. Having said that, though, I think it's important that agricultural societies receive and continue to receive stable and predictable funding for their activities, which I think all Albertans would agree are of vital importance to the communities that they serve.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak in second reading for Bill 14, Agricultural Societies Amendment Act, 2015?

Seeing none, would the hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education like to close?

Mr. Scott: We move to close and move this forward.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a second time]

Bill 19 Education Amendment Act, 2015

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I ask leave to move second reading of Bill 19, the Education Amendment Act, 2015.

Bill 19 is the result of due diligence prior to proclamation in ensuring the Education Act will be effective in serving the long-term needs of Alberta's students. Bill 19 does not in any way change the intent or overall policy objectives of the Education Act. The amendments are administrative in nature. They were identified during the regulatory review process and ensure that the Education Act will be able to fulfill its full purpose upon proclamation. Amendments of this nature are not uncommon in large, complex pieces of legislation. These amendments aim to achieve further clarity and accuracy of the policy directions of the Education Act. This is beneficial for our stakeholders as they continue their hard work in preparing for the act to be proclaimed.

Bill 19 includes a relatively extensive list of amendments. Let me just give you perhaps one or two examples of these kinds of changes. Again, these amendments are administrative in nature. They do not change the intent or overall policy objectives. Section 18 deals with courses as well as programs of study. As it is currently worded, this section allows the minister, by order, to “prescribe courses or programs of study” and “prescribe requirements for the granting of credits, certificates and diplomas,” course sequencing, and more. Requiring an order for each of these purposes would become an administrative burden and, in fact, is not currently required under the School Act. For this reason, the amendment proposes the minister may prescribe or grant items in this section by means other than an order.

There are some other aspects as well. Perhaps a second amendment, section 56. Through Bill 19 this section would be amended to ensure all requirements regarding records of students and children, the access to these records, the ability to ask for copies or corrections, that these kinds of matters are consistent across all types of school authorities, which would include school boards, private schools, and private early childhood services operators.

I believe these amendments assist in highlighting the importance of Bill 19. I see the true value of Bill 19, the Education Amendment Act, 2015, as helping empower the Education Act, which is a landmark piece of legislation and will have a significant long-term impact on our education system. The purpose of Bill 19 is to ensure the Education Act will be effective in serving the long-term needs of our students, and I sincerely hope that the House will join me in supporting this important piece of legislation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise on Bill 19. We just have a few comments on this, and I'll get through them as soon as I can due to the lateness of the hour. There seem to be a number of changes here to mostly take care of some housekeeping items, I understand, as the minister has said. I gather many of them come from the shift in term for the school board trustees from three to four years, et cetera.

We're generally supportive of Bill 19, but there are a few changes that we do have a few concerns about, where there are some word changes from “evaluation” to “assessment” in provincial achievement tests, and so on and so forth. We realize that's been taken out, but we think that one of the responsibilities of the education system should be to measure how our students are doing and report that measurement to the students and their parents. For a number of years now, as everyone knows, we've had the provincial achievement tests in Alberta, which were taken at the end of grades 3, 6, 9, et cetera.

While there have been, certainly, some concerns raised about PATs and whether they are the best tool for everyone, the Wildrose has been on record defending some form of standard testing. We feel that's very crucial. The province has recently been piloting a different test called the standard learning assessment, which does not test the curriculum. Instead, it is taken by students at the beginning of the year, I understand. However, it isn't clear that SLAs will do everything that PATs do. Bill 19 doesn't actually make this change from PATs to SLAs, but it strikes out the exact phrase “provincial achievement tests” and replaces the term with “provincial assessments.”

These changes are not unexpected, but we have to make sure that we are making the right moves for students and for the whole system. It's so important that we have consistent, transparent measures of how our children are doing in school. It helps everyone

involved: teachers, parents, and the students themselves. To make good decisions about what a child needs to support their education, we need qualitative grading and quantitative grading. This change is part of a policy shift away from the standardized testing, and we need to make sure that we have good, transparent reporting methods in our schools.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise and speak to this legislation. I agree with my colleague the Minister of Education that Bill 19 is effectively a means to an end. It is a piece of legislation that will enable a second very significant piece of legislation, the Education Act, to be effective. As the Education Act has already received royal assent and Bill 19 does not change the intent or the overall policy of the act, I don't see any reason to withhold support of the Education Amendment Act, 2015.

Looking through the bill, it's quite clear to me that the amendments are as represented; they are administrative in nature. For example, I see that Bill 19 includes changes to several sections of the Education Act that are a direct result of amendments that have been made to the Local Authorities Election Act. In recent years the Local Authorities Election Act shifted the term of office for school trustees from three years to four years. Some of the amendments contained in the bill would make the same changes in the Education Act. It is clear that without the corresponding adjustments, the Education Act would be in some aspects outdated or incorrect at the time of proclamation.

9:10

I appreciate that the Education Act is a complex piece of legislation. In these cases it is understandable, even logical, that minor changes may be identified and addressed before proclamation. In the case of the Local Authorities Election Act the legislative amendments caused a domino effect that should be rectified. I can appreciate that as a result of additional feedback and review of the act by both governments and stakeholders such a large piece of legislation could, when put into practice, stand to benefit from minor adjustments to increase clarity and accuracy.

I support the content of Bill 19 and also its timing. I believe it is sound practice to make these amendments prior to proclamation as opposed to opening up the legislation once it's already come into force. In some cases the amendments in Bill 19 are actually necessary for progress towards proclamation to continue.

As a former teacher I believe that the Education Act will have a positive long-term impact on the education system in Alberta. Albertans and stakeholders have been involved in the Education Act and, I believe, will be supportive of Bill 19 moving forward. For these reasons, I see Bill 19 as an important checkpoint in the preparation process for the Education Act, and I'm supportive of this legislation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available for anybody who wishes to make comments or questions.

Seeing none, we'll move on to the next speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my honour to rise and speak to Bill 19, the Education Amendment Act. You know, I don't disagree with the hon. minister that much of this

act has to do with making some administrative changes, including extending the trustee's position from three years to four years and just harmonizing that with what we've done for our municipal leaders, which I am in agreement with. For me, Madam Speaker, there are three areas of concern that I do have, which took quite a bit of thorough examination of the bill and speaking to some school boards throughout the province on this bill.

The first one on what the bill might do and the concerns that I have is around residency requirements. Now, as we understand it, the changes made in sections 2 and 3 are meant to be in line with other changes in the Education Act which focus on the student rather than the parent. For us, obviously, while a focus on students when it comes to education is definitely a positive step, it may be a little more difficult when it comes to proving where a student lives. Now, this is because the parents have bills; they have ways to prove what their residence is. If a child says that they're living with a friend, for example, it can be difficult to prove. It could also lead to difficulties for school boards in ensuring that schools don't become too full and classrooms don't become unmanageable because, again, a student could say that they're living with a friend within the catchment area, and a school board that's already, you know, close to maximum capacity or at that capacity might then be over capacity.

There are going to be difficulties that are raised in terms of funding when it comes to special programming. This is probably the larger concern, Madam Speaker, that students may not have in their home jurisdiction – well, I'll give an example: the Alberta School for the Deaf. It costs a great deal to offer the right programming for students who are deaf. However, the costs of such programs greatly exceed the current per-student level funding that the province gives to the school boards.

Now, this could pose a problem. For example, let's say a child comes to Edmonton to go to the School for the Deaf, and the parents live in Grande Prairie. When the funding falls to the parents' residence, both the parents' home jurisdiction and the board – in this case, Grande Prairie – would work with Edmonton public or the board which offered the special program and would agree to split the additional costs for any special programming from their general revenue. If the funding switches and follows the child instead of the parents and the board follows the child and the board of the residence of the child, the one offering the special programming will not have assistance from the board where the parents are from. Therefore, that board would be solely responsible for the programming for that student.

Again, what this would do, Madam Speaker, is that it would result in a great deal of costs for the boards offering these special programs. Quite frankly, there is concern throughout the province with some of the boards in that if they do not have the ability to share some of those costs with boards from the jurisdictions that the students are coming from, it may end up being so costly that down the road the board may not be able to afford to offer these types of programs. I mean, as a result, it's going to be more difficult to offer specialized programming because of the reduced transfers the boards offering specialized services would receive. That's one concern, which I do hope – and I appreciate the fact that the minister is listening intently to these concerns – that he will be able to address. I think it is a very valid concern that I'm raising.

The second point, Madam Speaker, is ministerial appointment of an official trustee. Sections 15 of the bill and 72 of the Education Act deal with ministerial appointment of an official trustee to conduct the affairs of a board when the minister considers it important for the public interest. Now, we've seen this done in Northland school division. In January of 2010 the then Minister of Education appointed an official trustee to replace the board of

Northland school division. They did so because of the serious concerns regarding student achievement with this board. The act, Bill 19, that we're debating here, as it currently stands, does not include any term limit for the appointment of these official trustees. The current official trustee for Northland school division has been in place for five years. Community members, I can tell you, Madam Speaker, in Northland are getting frustrated with the way that this is going and very much want an elected board in place.

You know, there are many challenges that continue to be faced by students and the community in Northland school division, and this was highlighted in the Auditor General's report that just came out, the one which I referenced earlier, that we were talking about tonight in Public Accounts. There are still great challenges regarding improving student outcomes. As well, there were recommendations from many different studies and reports that were made: the need for the schools to be more community centred, including their administration, which is not likely being done with an official trustee appointed by the provincial minister;

the need for a governance structure that supports the principle of local control based on a democratic, representative electoral process while recognizing the need for an ongoing educative support system that enables governors to implement visionary, policy driven practices and avoid –

I'm going to leave out that last part.

What the report from the AG shows us is that even after five years of having an official trustee, there have not been huge improvements in attendance. In fact, it says that "poor attendance is ... often accepted as the status quo." I found it quite alarming, Madam Speaker, the fact that one-third of students, or 900 out of 2,700, are chronically absent in Northland school division. There are a number of recommendations that the Auditor General has come out with.

Now, these are issues that I'm speaking of that remain within the Education Act that could have been addressed with this legislation. Again, without providing a term limit, who knows how long an appointed trustee can remain in place as opposed to a democratically elected board of local representatives?

My third point, Madam Speaker – and hopefully I don't run out of time here – is about the subject of dysfunctional boards. Now, some of our community stakeholders are concerned with the power currently given to a board to dismiss trustees. This section of the Education Act as it currently stands, section 87(1)(c), states that a trustee may be "disqualified from remaining as a trustee" if they have "breached the code of conduct," and the board can determine if they should be disqualified.

Now, rather than allow the public, who elected the trustee to be involved in any decision that may disqualify them from their position, it's letting the trustee's colleagues, or board members, make all the determinations.

9:20

Now, as a result of this significant power in the hands of the boards, there have been concerns – and I have been approached, Madam Speaker – that this may result in the unfair dismissal of some unpopular board members. I appreciate the fact that it's not in the scope of this current legislation, Bill 19, that we're debating to deal with such a change. It is something that's an important issue, that I felt should be flagged, and it should be addressed – and therefore I'm sharing it with the minister and all members and Albertans – either by giving the minister the power to oversee it or by allowing a public recall of the trustee or some other recourse rather than simply a disqualification by the board on which the trustees themselves work.

The concern really comes from, Madam Speaker, I mean, the liberty that the opposition members have in this House to express

our opinion, to critique legislation, and knowing that we are protected in this House. It is really the cornerstone of our democracy that we can disagree and debate and have a fulsome debate and I don't have to worry about recourse from, say, government members deciding to unelect me or vote me out because they disagree with my opinion or my stance on certain positions. The concern here is that if you have a trustee that is constantly raising either contentious points or who disagrees with the rest of the board, the board has the authority to remove that trustee. I'm not talking about examples where a person is either trying to abuse their position or to be a troublemaker; I'm talking about if they legitimately are raising points that differ from the perspective of other members of the board.

I will point out in my last few seconds here that what's interesting to look at is our municipal legislation, where city councillors may be removed from their position after council forwards a complaint to a judge, who then examines the case and then makes a decision. So there are multiple steps for a council to get a colleague removed from their board, but there's still the possibility for the councillor in question to appeal the decision. There are opportunities and processes in place to ensure that a person doesn't get picked on or ganged up on or, you know, unfairly dismissed from a position via the MGA.

This is a concern that I wanted to raise with the minister. I acknowledge the fact that it's not in the current legislation, but this is a concern, and we need to make sure that there is a proper process. In my opinion, again, if it's the public and Albertans who are electing our trustees, well, they should in fact have a say if a trustee is behaving in a way that they feel they should be removed for as opposed to solely giving that power to their colleagues.

So, Madam Speaker, I will take my seat. I will be supporting this bill. Again, I just wanted to raise some of my concerns. I appreciate the fact that the minister is, you know, acknowledging and taking notes on some of these questions. I look forward to his answers and to further discussion on this.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Five minutes of questions and comments. Anybody on 29(2)(a)?

Seeing no one, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I may be brief because many of my concerns have already been noted. Just two things. I, too, am concerned about the Northland school division. An example that has been pointed out there is that we've had a trustee now in place. What are the term limits? How are we going to get back to local school board control and hopefully effective mechanisms to move the community forward?

I would be remiss if I didn't add that I thought initially, when the Education minister dismissed the board in the first place, it was probably a good move. Okay? There was clearly some situation that was emerging in the Northland school division that was seemingly not moving that jurisdiction forward, and there were some real concerns whether the kids were being educated. That being said, one would think that when this government took that bold a step – they went in in a heavy-handed fashion – they would roll up their sleeves and try and fix the problem.

Lo and behold, here we get an Auditor General's report where five years after they've instituted a trustee, five years after they knew some really serious and egregious practices were emerging that were not getting kids educated, we learned from the Auditor General that things may actually be worse today, worse than they were when this government took the approach of dismissing an

entire elected school board. That to me is dumbfounding, Madam Speaker, how they could actually digress even further with the minister and this government taking charge of a board and seemingly recognizing the problems yet seemingly doing nothing over the course of the last five years to make the situation better.

We learned from the Auditor General today that roughly one-third of the students in the Northland school division are chronically absent. That is what we learned. That is a shame, Madam Speaker, where we have a school system that is clearly – and the government knows this – falling down, needing help, needing support, needing a full-scale intervention. The government knew this, and seemingly they have done nothing over the course of the last number of years. That to me is disappointing as all getup, and it really should be addressed in some form or fashion by the new minister because we're failing a generation of kids up there. It hasn't gotten better in the last five years, and I have a suspicion it's been going on for a lot longer or else you wouldn't have had a former minister, actually former Premier now, of this province take the bold action of dismissing the board because he recognized the problem. Yet nothing has been done about it.

That dovetails into the whole conversation that we can have great legislation, we can have glorious intentions and well-written documents, but simply put, if you're not providing the mechanisms or the support and the actual dollars behind your education system, well, it doesn't amount to a hill of beans. There truly have been since 2008 winners and losers in the province of Alberta. Let me be clear. I don't believe the kids of Alberta have been winners during that time period. If we would have even kept the funding at '08-09 levels, we would have 2,500 more teachers in our classrooms today if we had kept up with population growth at that spending rate. Clearly, that has not occurred.

We've seen it nickelled and dimed, not doing the best we can. We haven't moved on full-day kindergarten. In fact, some jurisdictions are even unable to provide full-day kindergarten in jurisdictions where it is much needed. It was targeted where those areas were that were getting full-day kindergarten by the boards in question. They recognized that they needed that support, and that is no longer being provided.

In my view, I think this government knew in '08-09. That's when you saw the publishing of the Emerson report, where it recognized that our fiscal structure was broken. It sort of was paralysis by analysis when this government looked at it and said: "We'll, we're going to do nothing. We're going to drain down the contingency account. We're going to cut public funds to education and health care and infrastructure spending, and – my goodness – there are going to be some people who may not be successful. Hopefully, we'll get to 2020 where we go from 2 million barrels a day sold to 3 million barrels a day sold to maybe reaching payout on a few payments, and maybe no one will notice." Well, guess what? I noticed, and kids in this province noticed, and we may have actually not served them in their best interest.

Yeah, it may have been good politics. But remember, there were winners and losers as a result of the action that we didn't take when, I believe, this government had full knowledge of what was facing us, what the next eight years would look like, and where we, in fact, are today, which is that we've substantially spent all the oil wealth in one generation, gotten into massive debt, and now our . . .

Mr. Dirks: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member. The Minister of Education has called a point of order.

Carry on, Minister.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Dirks: I believe Bill 19 deals with some very specific administrative amendments to the Education Act, and it seems to me that the member's comments are straying well beyond the intent of Bill 19. I would ask that you consider that and ask him to focus his comments on the specific nature of Bill 19.

9:30

Debate Continued

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. member, please keep your comments directed towards Bill 19.

Mr. Hehr: I understand that Bill 19 is meant to make a better education system, so I'm commenting directly on those amendments and what actually would give those amendments some teeth and allow, actually, for kids to learn in a better place. I'm surprised that the hon. minister would actually not want to hear my thoughts on how to actually make that better, but I've only got about eight minutes left and, frankly, not much time after that. Many people have heard this rant before, so maybe they're more used to giving some leeway on it. The hon. member has just begun to hear this speech, so maybe it's new to him. Nevertheless, there we go.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, keep your comments relevant to Bill 19.

Mr. Hehr: To education and Bill 19 and how it pertains to our kids in this school system and how it is serving them now and how it goes forward.

I'm concerned, too, as the hon. member is, on section 87. Now, let's go back to, actually, the Northland school division, you know, and primarily having that trustee in place, where I thought this province put the trustee in place to make education better. Why was that not successful? Was it because maybe we didn't have the term limit in place? Maybe we didn't put an elected board back in? I don't know. Was that the only failing? Or maybe it was some of the things I was talking about before, that we maybe didn't go to having a community adviser who went in and worked with the parents and the kids and maybe went out to the houses and said: "Hey, look, how are you really feeling today? Do you think it may be wise for you to go to school? Can we work through this?"

You know, maybe with that amendment that we're talking about here on having term limits, if we would clarify that in this legislation, it would allow this government to see the true problems that are up there. It's a fact that 900 of our kids are not going to school and that that problem hasn't gone away in the last five years, and this government has seemingly not done anything about it. Maybe that amendment directly has something to do with the fact that we're failing 900 of our kids. You see how it's connecting right to that amendment, Madam Speaker, and connecting right to the heart of the matter, the education of our kids?

That amendment: it's important for that clarity and how then that term "limited person" can get the information back to this government of how they're failing a whole group of kids up there. Maybe if that amendment is cleared, maybe the minister would have better success in understanding the funding challenges and the differences in community approaches, you know, that have shown: look, they haven't kept up with population growth. If we had that amendment straightened out, maybe they would have called up the minister and said: "My goodness, you know, our population is growing, yet our teacher numbers aren't going up. Why is that? Why is it that our per-pupil funding has gone down over the course of this

year when I've got 900 kids who are not coming to class and we have no outreach mechanism?"

That amendment would be great if it got clarified because then maybe we'd have that openness and transparency and that board in place that seemingly could have told this government over the course of the last five years, "We're struggling; our kids aren't succeeding" despite the fact they should have known about it because the former Minister of Education a couple of terms ago eliminated a whole elected board. That's how that amendment connects to the chronic what we have done in this Legislature over the last eight years.

With that, I look for the minister to clarify that amendment and, hopefully, put some progress in place to ensure all of our kids get educated. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a), a five-minute period for questions and comments. Is there anyone who wishes to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, we'll move on. Are there any other members who wish to speak in second reading on Bill 19, Education Amendment Act, 2015?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Education to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a second time]

Bill 21

Safety Codes Amendment Act, 2015

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 21, the Safety Codes Amendment Act, 2015.

Bill 21 addresses areas of concern that have been identified by key stakeholders. The proposed legislation also addresses opportunities that will enhance and strengthen the safety codes system.

The first proposed change would enable new additions of codes and standards that Alberta has already adopted under regulations of the Safety Codes Act to be automatically adopted. The new addition of codes and standards would come into force 12 months after their publication or by ministerial order. This means that when new codes are developed by nationally or internationally approved agencies, they will automatically be approved in Alberta. It is important to note that the in-force date, however, is not the same as the approval date. For most codes they will come into force 12 months after their publication. The codes may also come into force early by ministerial order or may be delayed if necessary.

The adoption of codes and standards upon publication will allow the minister to implement codes and standards in a time frame that meets the needs of municipalities, industries, and the public. This proposed legislative change would improve the adoption of codes and standards in Alberta while providing appropriate transition time for new stakeholders to prepare for new additions of codes.

The second proposed change would be the transfer of the administration of the act in unaccredited municipalities to the Safety Codes Council. Currently the province is responsible for providing permitting and inspection services for nonaccredited municipalities, largely smaller municipalities. Nonaccredited municipalities are not authorized under the Safety Codes Act to provide services such as permitting and inspections, and they do not have safety codes officers on staff to complete this work. The proposed legislative change would have the Safety Codes Council, through the establishment of the Alberta safety codes authority, manage and monitor the agencies. The authority would ensure appropriate delivery of services for permitting, inspection, and enforcement services to unaccredited municipalities of the province.

A critical component of the proposed change is that the Alberta safety codes authority would use a fee-for-service approach, remitting permit funds to the accredited agencies as work is completed. This is consistent with sound business practice. If an agency failure occurs, the authority would have the funds to complete the outstanding files. This legislative change will result in better services to unaccredited municipalities, greater consistency, improved agency accountability, better performance, and will support the establishment of a more resilient safety codes system.

Madam Speaker, the third proposed change included in Bill 21 would be to enhance the current compliance tools under the act by enabling administrative penalties to be issued. Currently the only enforcement tools available under the act are orders issued by a safety codes officer and prosecutions. Administrative penalties would be issued for repeated noncompliance with orders or for serious accidents that may cause injury. For example, administrative penalties could be used to address serious accidents related to faulty amusement rides, entertainment stages exceeding occupancy loads, and many others. This proposed legislative change would focus on encouraging compliance and remedial action rather than punish noncompliance.

The proposed legislative change would also align with other Alberta statutes such as the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the New Home Buyer Protection Act, and the Fair Trading Act. These statutes provide authority for administrative penalties to be issued for contraventions under those statutes.

9:40

The fourth proposed change, Madam Speaker, would be to provide the Safety Codes Council with greater operational independence and to strengthen the council's accountability framework. Currently the council is governed by a co-ordinating committee which is established by council bylaw. In addition, the council membership is appointed by both the minister and the co-ordinating committee. As well, the bylaws that govern the council must be approved by the minister prior to coming into force. In an effort to ensure operational independence, a proposed legislative change would replace the co-ordinating committee with a board of directors as established in the act. This would reduce the number of ministerial appointments and remove the requirement for ministerial approval for council bylaws. These changes will help reinforce the council as an independent body and will clarify roles and the reporting structure for stakeholders and the public.

The last key proposed change in Bill 21 would provide authority for municipalities to establish bylaws with respect to private sewage disposal systems. Currently the act does not allow municipalities to create bylaws that regulate matters under the act. The proposed legislative change would provide an opportunity for some municipalities to address private sewage issues in their communities.

In addition to the key proposed changes discussed, Bill 21 includes a number of other necessary housekeeping and clarification amendments to the act. These proposed changes include amendments to revise or add definitions for clarity; amendments to clarify that the Regulations Act applies to ministerial exemption orders issued under the Safety Codes Act and that these ministerial exemption orders "exempt any person or municipality or any thing, process, or activity from any or all provisions" of the act; amendments to liability protection to ensure the council employees and officers are provided liability protection in carrying out their duties under the act; amendments to clarify the role of provincial safety codes officers within the safety codes system; amendments to clarify that a refusal to issue a written variance by a safety codes officer may be appealed to the council; amendments to align requirements under the Architects Act and the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act; amendments to provide authority for costs and expenses to be recovered by municipalities and

the Crown in case of emergencies; amendments to provide authority for provincial safety codes officers to obtain telewarrants in the course of an investigation; amendments to clarify that both administrators and provincial safety codes officers may enforce orders in both accredited and unaccredited municipalities; deletion of areas of duplication such as release of information provisions that conflict with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act; as well as other minor housekeeping amendments, including transitional provisions, commencement dates, and coming-into-force dates that support the implementation of the proposed legislation.

Madam Speaker, the key proposed changes in Bill 21, the Safety Codes Amendment Act, 2015, will address concerns brought forward by safety codes stakeholders and enhance the safety codes system. The other proposed changes will provide necessary clarification to industry, municipalities, and the public while strengthening the administration, governance, and enforcement of the safety codes system throughout Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak to Bill 21, the Safety Codes Amendment Act, 2015? The hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise this evening and speak in general support of Bill 21, actually. It seems like there are some positive changes here regarding the timely enactment of the codes and standards and so on, as the international and national bodies seem to have. It's my understanding that a lot of stakeholders have confirmed the widespread desire for amendment to this, and with that consultation with the government it seems that the government has listened and that they're going to go forward with that.

While it will provide some predictability to our code update process, we think it's important that we retain the ability to implement standards that are unique to Alberta's circumstances and our specific needs. It looks like this is probably going to be meeting those requirements, so that's good as well.

With respect to the administration it seems like the proposed changes will allow the Safety Codes Council to assume administration of this, and this will manage some of the agencies and some of the municipalities that aren't set up, or it should improve the accountability of some of the third-party inspectors. We think this, too, is a sensible change to improve accountability to residents and municipalities for work done by these accredited agencies.

As far as administrative penalties, another of the proposed amendments in here looks as though it's going to have a section on the introduction of penalties. I think that it's important to have enforcement in these sorts of situations. We support these measures to the extent that they should be levied in a fair and transparent, consistent fashion and certainly to address some of these offenders that have been noticed in the past, and that's the intent of this bill, to try to fix that. I think that's good as well.

There's another section there with regard to private sewage disposal systems. It seems like this, too, is a reasonable change that grants greater authority and responsibilities to those people that are in touch with residents that are working on these situations as they come about.

In a very quick fashion, as you can tell, due to the lateness of the evening, we're fairly supportive here. We believe these amendments are constructive and practical and allow for some flexibility of the safety codes as well as conformity to the codes. With that in mind, I'll let the others take a chance.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my honour to rise and speak to Bill 21. I'm going to keep my comments fairly brief. I do acknowledge the importance of harmonizing our codes with our federal cousins' and understand where that's coming from. I do like the fact that we are updating our safety codes. I mean, I'm a big advocate of strengthening our codes, whether it's our building codes or our safety codes, and then ensuring that they are adequately funded so that they can be enforced because I think that probably the larger aspect when we bring forward legislation is: do the authorities who are enforcing the legislation have adequate funding so that they can do their job? I do see, obviously, that there are some penalties that will be levied or could be levied. I think that's one form of deterrent. I may speak at a later time toward, you know, the actual dollar amounts of the penalties.

I'm sure that many smaller municipalities have been lobbying the Minister of Municipal Affairs as far as not having the resources to be able to administer this act or the capacity to administer and enforce safety codes, so the creation of a safety codes authority does make sense and, I'm sure, provides some relief for them as well as for the government, I mean, considering that when smaller municipalities can't undertake these responsibilities, they probably, from what I know, defer to the province. Then the province is spending its own resources and time and doesn't necessarily collect or get reimbursed for the resources they're expending.

But at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, I think it's important that we have strong safety codes not only for, again, the safety of the people of this province but looking at having codes and thinking long term. What I mean by that is, you know, the minimum of codes or standards that people or builders or companies have to adhere to. We'll save people money down the road if we increase those minimums. I think strengthening our minimums, whether we're talking about actual building codes themselves, is a long-term benefit. Increasing both the standards and the minimums, I think, is very important.

I do also like the fact in this bill, Madam Speaker, that municipalities can make their own bylaws regarding sewage disposal systems. I think that's very important. I haven't spoken to AAMDC personally about this, but I would imagine that they are on board, and

this is probably even one of their ideas that they were putting forward to the government. Again, recognizing that in this beautiful province of ours we have varied geography, we have different challenges that different municipalities face, giving them the tools to be able to work within their own realities, I think, is very important.

9:50

I also want to acknowledge the fact that when we're looking at enforcement in this bill – and I'll specifically speak to section 29 on section 56(1)(b) – when we're talking about Métis settlements and patented land, there has to be written notice given to carry out an order when we're talking about going onto patented land. I think that's very important, again, to acknowledge – well, I don't want to say the independence – the fact that this authority is going onto Métis land, that they should be given proper notice and due course. So I will commend the mover of this bill for ensuring that we are respecting our indigenous people's rights in this province through this bill.

In closing, Madam Speaker, you know, I do appreciate and like the fact that we're moving toward a timely adoption of safety codes. I think this is a step in the right direction, so I will be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Are there any members who wish to comment or ask questions of the member?

Seeing none, are there any members who wish to comment further on Bill 21, Safety Codes Amendment Act, 2015, in second reading?

Seeing no other members who wish to speak, the question has been called.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that we call it a night and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow, Tuesday, March 24.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:53 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, March 24, 2015

Issue 25a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 24, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray that today we be given the necessary tools of mind and body that are required in order to help us fulfill our duties as elected representatives of those whom we are so proud to serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have many, many introductions today. I ask you please to be brief so we can get them all in and move on with other business of the Assembly.

Let us begin with school groups. The Minister of Service Alberta, followed by Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Khan: Thank you so very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some incredible students from my constituency of St. Albert. Today we're joined by nearly 40 students from Sir Alexander Mackenzie school. They're with their teachers, Ms Lina Rosato and Ms Wawrychuk. I want to congratulate Ms Rosato for being awarded teacher of the month in St. Albert. I'd like to extend a warm acknowledgement to the students. I went to Sir Alexander Mackenzie when I was in elementary school, so it's great to see the students here. If my colleagues could give them a warm greeting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my very great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 21 visitors from Holden school in the constituency of Battle River-Wainwright. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Oslund and Ms Arychuk, as well as parent helpers Ms Hoveland and Mrs. Fairless. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 26 very bright, enthusiastic students from St. Jerome school in my constituency of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. They are accompanied by Mrs. Laura Blythe, Ms Diane Lacika, and Mrs. Jennifer Lewin. I just want to add that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and I a few weeks back were judges at their annual science fair of some of the best and brightest minds in Edmonton. I would now ask all members to give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other school or education groups? Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you the members of Inner City High School that are here today to take a tour and to watch the proceedings. I think they

might still be on tour, but let's give them a hand for being here anyway.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

If not, let's move on to other important guests. Let's start with the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the first time in 14 and a half years I have the great privilege of introducing my family to you and through you to the members of this Assembly. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I'd ask them to rise as I call their names: the Jablonski family patriarch, Bob Jablonski, my husband of 44 years, my hero and my everything; my son, Jeremy Jablonski, president and CEO of The Coverall Shop, entrepreneur, and future MLA; my lovely daughter-in-law, Amber Jablonski, a cardiology telemetry RN and one of the best mothers of two that a grandmother could ever hope for – it might be faster if we just hold the applause because we've got to rush through; thank you – my granddaughter Camryn Jablonski, an honours student, competitive swimmer, and a piano player; my granddaughter Morgan Jablonski, also an honours student, incredible dancer, and the Energizer Bunny; my beautiful daughter Amy Corrigan, mother of two, administration manager for The Coverall Shop, and an elected director of the Servus Credit Union; my number one son-in-law, Tyler Corrigan, project co-ordinator for Pumps & Pressure and gourmet chef; my granddaughter Hannah Corrigan, an honours student and lifeguard in training; my incredible grandson Kaden Corrigan, builder of tree forts, Lego creations, and Nordegg breakfast sandwiches; my lovely daughter Krystin Jablonski, pregnancy and babies' family nurse for Red Deer primary care network and wonderful mother of one so far; my oldest granddaughter, Taiya Jablonski, an honours student and dancer extraordinaire; Ivan Smith, a close family friend, bison rancher, and entrepreneur.

Mr. Speaker, this is my family, of whom I'm very proud. I thank them with all my heart for their love and support, and I ask all members to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. Member for Red Deer-North, I believe you have a second set of introductions.

Mrs. Jablonski: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you for making it as brief as possible. That's very considerate of you.

Mrs. Jablonski: Well, Mr. Speaker, every MLA knows that having an excellent assistant makes your life a whole lot easier. I'm fortunate to have had assistants who were always one step ahead of me and to whom I am truly grateful. I would ask them to rise as I call their names. From my Red Deer-North office I would like to introduce Cheryl Christie, a very experienced and efficient assistant. With her is her husband, His Worship Steve Christie, the mayor of Lacombe. I'm also privileged to have another very wise and experienced assistant from the Legislature, Marilyn Nixon. My heartfelt thanks and gratitude to both of them, and I would like to give them the warm traditional welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the Minister of Health.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House my fiancé, Robert Stephen Spencer. Robert recently retired as VP membership from my Calgary-Bow constituency board. He worked extensively on the recent leadership campaign and the by-elections and is my unofficial and unpaid assistant. Most importantly, Robert has made my last three years as an MLA a joy: more productive and more satisfying. I ask that he stand in your Speaker's gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, a hard act to follow. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this House my constituency assistant, Cindy Ho. Stand, Cindy. Cindy has been an essential and valuable part of my constituency office in Edmonton-Whitemud, and she was also a big part of the previous person's who was there, whom we all know very well. Cindy, thank you for being here.

Mr. Speaker, it's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the wonderful staff I have in the Minister of Health's legislative office. As many of you know, they have been working exceptionally hard to improve health care for all Albertans. If they could stand as I list them: Christel Hyshka, chief of staff; Jennifer Pougnet, chief of staff; Claire Puyaoan, correspondence co-ordinator; Sarah Hamilton, deputy press secretary – look how tall they are – Steve Buick, not so tall press secretary; Allyson Seeney, scheduler; and Debbie Giroux, ministerial assistant. Thank you all very much. Can we give them the normal welcome?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce to you and through you Julie Ali, who was excluded from the Good Samaritan Mill Woods Centre for trying to ensure her family's care. Her sister Rebecca had been evicted from the care home. The Ali family and the Alberta New Democrats are calling on the Health minister to help resolve this matter so that Rebecca can return home to one of the only two facilities in Edmonton that meet her specific medical needs. I would ask Julie to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations, followed by the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce my constituency manager, Mr. Bernie Trudell, who is capably looking after all the affairs of 42,000 people on the corner of 75th Street and Whyte Avenue in Edmonton-Gold Bar. Bernie retired after a career of service to the public in the GOA, and I'm so pleased that he serves the people of Edmonton-Gold Bar now. Bernie, please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you my chief of staff, Jonathan Koehli; his wife, Elise; and Anthony, the newest addition to their family and potential new Finance minister. Jonathan has been my closest aide for several years. I'd like to congratulate them on their first child. Jon hasn't been as tired as I would have expected, so it tells me how hard Elise must be working. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my constituency assistant and the chief of staff to the independent caucus, who I think is probably one of the most qualified and best assistants that anyone could ever possibly brag about. Now, I understand that everyone believes that their assistants are the best – I understand that – but my assistants have to put up with me, and that makes them superior to anyone else's assistants. If Krista Nelson, my constituency assistant, and Kaelyn MacGillivray could please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly seven guests who have assisted me during these two terms as MLA. My first set of guests is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to stand as I call their names. They are my current and former leg. assistants: Marshall Thiessen, Justin Brattinga, Shannon Hamelin, and Terri Kemball. I would ask that my guests receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

My second set of guests is seated in the public gallery. They include my constituency staff from Bonnyville: Carmen Banman, who has worked in the office for 16 years and is the heart and soul of our constituency, and Julie Krawiec, who's been with us for five years. Also, it's my great pleasure to introduce my husband of 40 years, Ron. I couldn't have done this job without him. I would ask my Bonnyville guests to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Jill Sheward. Jill is a partner at Brownlee LLP, practising municipal and commercial real estate law. In addition to her practice, she serves on the board of directors of Junior Achievement of Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories, is the president of the Edmonton Commercial Real Estate Women, and is a member of the steering committee for the Edmonton Famous 5 Foundation. Jill has spent some time up in the heartland area as a summer student, so she can't get rid of me. I would like her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two special guests, Dr. Joel Christie and Mavis Christie. Both are avid volunteers in my community, particularly Dr. Christie, who led the aging in place community fair last year, that drew over 800 people. My guests are sitting in the public gallery. Now I would ask them to rise and receive the thunderous warm welcome from this House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very important guest with us today. We're joined by Yolanda de Kleer, who is seated in

the members' gallery and is the mother of one of our wonderful pages in the Legislature, Erin. Yolanda and Erin moved to Alberta about five years ago from B.C., and they currently live in Spruce Grove. Erin is a student at Spruce Grove composite while her mother, Yolanda, works as a recreation therapist. Don't worry, Yolanda; I want to assure you that Erin, as with all our pages, is doing a remarkable, remarkable job. On behalf of everyone in the Legislature I would like to say welcome. I would ask that you now rise as our guest and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have two minutes per person assigned here.

Retrospective by the Member for Red Deer-North

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, for the past 14 and a half years I've had the privilege of serving the people of Red Deer-North and Alberta as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. During that time I spoke about great leaders in Red Deer, winning teams, and a young man who died because of a drunk driver. I also faithfully spoke each year about the Armenian genocide. This year is the 100th anniversary of that massacre.

I've had the opportunity to work with five Premiers and to make a difference. There have been small victories, and there have been huge victories. Among the most momentous was when I was granted unanimous consent to set aside Orders of the Day and proceed with early consideration of my private member's bill on PCHAD, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act. Today I am still greeted by parents who thank me for helping them to help their children.

I served as minister for seniors and community supports and helped to develop continuing care in Alberta. I helped to develop Alberta Supports, a one-stop program that eliminates duplication and allows people to tell their story once instead of three or four times. I served as chairperson for numerous committees. As the third Speaker in Alberta's 28th Legislature I made history by becoming the first female Speaker to preside over question period.

I would like to thank the hundreds of friends and volunteers who supported me and the PC Party throughout five campaigns and three leadership races. We've had many great moments of victory together. I especially want to thank my husband, Bob, and my children, who have stood by my side through thick and thin, and my five grandchildren, who are just starting to understand why their grandmother was away so often.

Winston Churchill said that we make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. I want to thank my family, the people of Red Deer-North, the people of Alberta, and the members of this hallowed Assembly for allowing me the opportunity to give. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you. Heartfelt comments for sure.

Retrospective by the Member for Calgary-Buffer

Mr. Hehr: It has been an honour to sit in the Legislative Assembly with all of you. With my time drawing to a close, I found myself going through the last seven years, assessing lessons I have learned. The first is that it is not easy being Premier. The second is that having a strong opposition is important to a well-functioning democracy.

Opposition matters. I can point to tangible moments where changes were made to government policy as a result of MLAs speaking out where government policies were unfair, unwise, or unnecessary. Three years ago I found out that Albertans living in long-term care facilities could only get one bath a week. The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and I raised this indignity, sounded the alarm, and the government changed the policy.

Last year I raised another issue about the safety and care of our students in Motion 503, which started the discussion about the need for gay-straight alliances in our schools. Although this motion was ultimately voted down, my fellow Alberta Liberal the MLA for Edmonton-Centre then brought forward Bill 202, which essentially continued the debate on the need for GSAs and as well contained legislative principles that would move this province forward on a path to ensure human rights and dignity for our LGBTQ community. Although this, too, seemed to fail, ultimately the government listened and implemented the main points of her bill.

Without opposition I doubt that kids in all schools would be able to have a GSA today, and I doubt that section 11.1 would have been removed from the Human Rights Act. Further, opposition members have often led the debate on the issues of our times. In particular, the Alberta Liberals and the New Democrats sounded the alarm years ago on the fact that our fiscal structure was broken.

Finally, I would like to thank the citizens of Calgary-Buffer for electing me to represent them in the Alberta Legislature. It has truly been an honour not only to represent them but to share my life with them all.

Thank you, all, indeed. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: With your indulgence, I'd like to go quickly to Bonnyville-Cold Lake for her member's statement. Then we'll go on.

1:50

Retrospective by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been a pleasure to work for my community and all of Alberta for the past seven years. I'm proud to have been elected the 780th MLA in the province, a number that is more than just historic; it's also my area code. I am pleased to have been part of the class of 2008, which allowed me the opportunity to work alongside Albertans of such high calibre.

I would also like to say how proud I am to work with all the people at the Alberta Legislature, including the staff behind the scenes, who include my constituency staff, my leg. assistants, security personnel, our wonderful young pages, visitor services staff, custodians, human resources staff, and IT, who were always so available when I needed them. Please know that all of us sitting in this House are aware that we could not do this job without the people behind the scenes.

I am blessed to have been able to give seven years to the Alberta Legislature, and I thank God every day for the honour of serving the people of Bonnyville-Cold Lake and the people of Alberta in general.

I have a couple of legislative accomplishments I would like to highlight as a way of displaying the positive impact that individual MLAs can have in this role. In recent years I have brought two private member's motions, both of them numbered 503, that have become legislation because, well, I'm sort of a thorn in the side of all the ministers. My first motion, to eliminate provincial assessment exams for grades 3 and 6, took three years of persistence, and the second motion was a recent amendment to the Fisheries (Alberta) Act, with measures to guard against invasive aquatic species in our lakes.

While I will miss everyone here when my time wraps up and I will miss working in this majestic building, there is one aspect of this job that I will not miss, and that's driving highway 28.

Finally, there is a very special person I need to thank. I could not have done this job without my loving, supporting husband, Ron.

God bless you all. Continue doing the job you do so well, caring for our great, beloved province. Thank you. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members, for your indulgence there. Thank you for those heartfelt comments as well.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Let us move on to Oral Question Period, 35 seconds for each question, 35 seconds for each response. I will cut you off if necessary, as you know. Let us begin with the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition for question series 1.

Government Spending at Fiscal Year-end

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're calling it March madness. It's the government's annual use it or lose it, shop till you drop shopping spree, where departments rush around to make sure that they blow their budgets before a March 31st deadline. Last March spending ballooned by 117 per cent across government when compared to the average monthly expenses. It cost taxpayers an extra \$104 million. We've known this culture was rampant through government for some time, but now we have the numbers to prove it. Premier, this is why you can't be trusted with another dime of taxpayers' money. Why should Albertans believe otherwise?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each year a budget is approved for each department. They must stay within approved spending levels. Each ministry is accountable to the Legislature and the public for their expenses. We also have legislation in place, the Financial Administration Act, which provides direction on the disbursement of funds so they are made in accordance with all policies, procedures, and regulations, including several levels of approval.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier also made it very clear in December that there would be no new spending and that all departments will look at constraining their budgets. All ministers have done a good job of doing that. We will continue to do that in the future.

Mrs. Forsyth: On March 31 of last year, after the former Premier resigned, \$15,000 was spent on fine china and linen for the Premier's office. Who approved the expense? It was the Department of Infrastructure. At the time it was run by the jobs minister. Under that minister another \$81,000 was spent on chairs. If this spending was necessary, it wouldn't have been approved on the very last day of the fiscal year. To the jobs minister. Old management, new management: it doesn't matter. You were responsible. What is your excuse?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, in March of last year I was in the private sector. I can assure the hon. member that the only china in my office is cardboard, and it says Tim Hortons on the side of it. I would encourage you to stop by.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, somewhere we've got glass for the Premier's office, \$8,509, and china for your office, so you better find out where it is, Premier.

Every department saw this kind of wasteful spending explode last year. Executive Council would spend on average about \$10,000 a month on purchase services, but in March it spent over a million dollars. IIR spent \$100,000 on gifts in one month just because they could. March madness cost taxpayers at least \$104 million last year, and it's wrong, Premier. To the Premier: will you ensure the end of wasteful spending by your departments and return any surplus that they've . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

We'll have to hear from the Minister of Finance now.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the Premier has made it very clear that under his watch and under the new management of this government we will restrain our spending. He's made it very clear to all ministers in cabinet that we will make sure that the money we spend is in the best interest of all Albertans, and we'll continue to do so into the future.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions. Livingstone-Macleod, please.

Kananaskis Country Golf Course

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are worried about making ends meet and keeping their jobs, and while there's no more money for the Child and Youth Advocate's office, millions are being paid out to the Kananaskis golf course, that has friends high within the PC Party. Reports out today show that \$8 million has been paid out since the 2013 flood. The province is on the hook to pay maintenance and losses, apparently. Premier, can you release the contract and tell Albertans how much more money they are on the hook for for this legacy of PC waste and mismanagement?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I indicated yesterday that I was concerned about this, and I'm pleased to advise the House that the Minister of Finance will commission an independent expert report that will do two things. Firstly, it will review the 1999 and 2013 agreements to ensure that the public interest was protected, and secondly, it will develop an alternate private business model that will not require public ownership of the golf course. The Alberta government should not be in the golf course business.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you. Review or no review, taxpayers are on the hook for million-dollar payouts to friends of the PC Party. In November 2014 your government put out a request for proposals to spend \$15 million of repair work on this course, and now Albertans are bewildered that a contract exists between the government and a golf course that covers all their operating losses and almost every single one of their expenses. So can the Premier explain to Albertans how this contract was set up, please, and who at Kan-Alta management is having their bottom lines covered?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, this contract goes back to the 1990s, and under this Premier's watch he's made it very clear that we're not going to spend any more public funds on this golf course. He's asked me to look into the matter. I will bring third-party experts in to look at this and make sure that we get the best deal we can for Albertans moving forward and make sure that the golf course will not be run with public funds.

Mr. Stier: Well, the reality is that Albertans can't trust whether or not you will funnel tens of millions of dollars into more golf courses after the election.

Living close to High River, I don't recall any mom-and-pop shops getting any special contract bailouts from the government for the losses incurred by the flood. In fact, several of them waited for months for any DRP assistance while their houses were still being gutted, and some of them are still waiting. Can the Premier explain to Albertans why these businesses were left out in the cold while his government is stuffing the pockets of golf course owners?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That hon. member knows that we're working very hard with all of those poor citizens that were devastated by the floods of 2013, whether that be the business community or the individuals. We are doing everything to make sure – and we have the resources to make sure – that they are all able to recover from the 2013 floods.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St Paul-Two Hills. Third main set of questions.

Premier's Address to Albertans

Mr. Saskiw: This Premier has tried to suggest that spending \$100,000 of taxpayers' money on a PC infomercial is all above board. It's not partisan. This is just the Premier wanting to give Albertans a \$10,000 speech with \$36,000 in production costs. Well, just this morning the PC Party fired out an e-mail advertising that tonight's speech is a chance for him to "speak directly to [PC] members." We couldn't agree more. Will the Premier, then, stop this taxpayer boondoggle and have his party pay back the money for this purely partisan PC propaganda?

2:00

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly we face serious circumstances as a province. Too many Albertans are losing their jobs. I just came back from speaking at the University of Alberta, where young graduates are worried about their ability to find jobs. In these circumstances people want to hear from their government, they want to hear from their Premier. The Official Opposition may not have a plan to deal with this; this government does, and I intend to speak to Albertans.

Mr. Saskiw: The plan, apparently, is to spend \$100,000 of taxpayer dollars.

The Wildrose vision for this province is simple: lower taxes, ending payouts for things like golf courses, golden handshakes, and corporate handouts. The Premier says that Albertans want to hear their Premier give a \$10,000 speech about his central campaign platform. Now the PC Party is saying that this is for members. Albertans are saying that this is a waste of money. Premier, I'll ask you again: will you have your party pay back the money for this extravagant PC campaign ad?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, the young Albertans I spoke to this morning are concerned about how we're going to stabilize our public finances, not how we're going to run the province into debt, as suggested by the opposition party, how we are going to diversify our economy, and how we're going to strengthen this province for the future for young Albertans. That's what they're interested in, and I intend to speak with Albertans about that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, your point of order was noted at 2:01, during that last exchange. Let's go on with your final supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: It's your party that racked up all of the debt, Premier.

Here in the Wildrose we don't think spending \$100,000 on partisan campaign ads is right. The Premier clearly said that there is no more money. He also said that Albertans are set to pay billions of dollars in new taxes to pay for his government's mess. Premier, would you agree with me that, at the very least, spending \$100,000 of taxpayer money on a fancy PC campaign ad right before raising taxes is bad optics and that Albertans can't be blamed if they're upset with you and your government for this absolute waste of money?

Mr. Oberle: You know, Mr. Speaker, if you were to take the money that's planned for this event and spread it out on a per capita basis, it would work out to about 2 cents per Albertan. That party was offered the chance to give their two cents' worth, and they declined, so we're never going to know whether it was worth the price or not.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Small-business Assistance

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business released the latest business barometer survey, showing Alberta's small business confidence index fell 6.6 points in February, to 48.2. It's the third straight month of significant declines. Alberta's confidence levels are among the lowest in the country and approaching the recessionary levels of early 2009. To the Premier: why is the government failing to provide the environment where Alberta's small businesses can have confidence?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are doing that, and I'd ask the member to sit tight and listen to the budget on Thursday. All I hear from the opposition is about raising corporate taxes. All they say is: raise corporate taxes, both small and large. We as a government are not about to do that. We are a government about creating jobs and maintaining jobs in this province, to make sure that all Albertans can raise their families in the best province in Canada.

Dr. Swann: Small businesses deserve a tax break, not raises.

Small businesses have definitely fallen off this government's priority list, leaving them to fend for themselves. Another major constraint for them, according to the CFIB report, is dealing with the high cost of insurance, which is, of course, set by the market. To the Premier: what is the government doing to address the high cost of insurance, which has been identified as a major problem for small businesses' bottom line?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the hon. member across the way has probably read the polling and realized that small businesses are concerned about their jobs in this province and they're concerned about the fact that the opposition continues to talk about raising taxes. This government has never talked about raising taxes for small business, and we will not raise taxes for small business. We will do everything we can to regulate small business and make sure that we streamline regulations and that small business will have a chance to thrive in the province of Alberta.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that small business creates an enormous number of jobs in this province, particularly during economically turbulent times. Martha and Henry's families are the entrepreneurs driving our province's economy, and it's the entrepreneurs who Albertans will be relying on heavily to create

jobs, yet this government is woefully ignoring the needs of small business. When is the government going to stand up for small businesses, cut their taxes, and invest more in the entrepreneurs? Diversify, diversify, diversify.

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that I'm glad to see that the member across the way has finally got it. We've heard the opposition continue to talk about raising taxes, raising taxes, raising taxes. We're not raising taxes for small businesses. We're not raising taxes for large corporations. We're doing all we can to maintain jobs and create jobs in this province. We lost over 14,000 jobs last month, and more to come. This government is making sure that we have money in the pockets of Albertans so they can raise their families in the best province in this country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, leader of the ND opposition.

Corporate Taxes

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the government released the results of its budget survey, and unsurprisingly the results make it clear that this PC government is out of touch with what Albertans want. Indeed, 69 per cent of Albertans surveyed are in favour of raising corporate taxes. My question is for the Premier. If you're asking everyday Albertans to pay more for less, why don't you think that corporations should pay their fair share, too, especially the most profitable?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the opposition raised the issue. As I said, last month we lost 14,000 jobs in Alberta, and we lost more in the coming weeks. [interjections] According to Jack Mintz, the Palmer chair in public policy at the University of Calgary, a 1 per cent increase in corporate tax rates would result in a \$6 billion loss in capital investments and would also translate into approximately 8,900 job losses.

The Speaker: Hon. member, first supplemental. And if we could just keep the noise down a little bit, that would be much appreciated, please.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that particular source of evidence also wants a sales tax.

I would suggest that overall the evidence to support this government's assertions about the impact of a balanced, responsible corporate tax increase is tenuous at best, but the evidence to support the life-threatening impact of a 70-hour wait in an ER to a patient is overwhelming, and the evidence supporting the economic loss to a population that can't afford to access postsecondary education is conclusive. To the Premier: why won't you put as much energy into standing up for regular Albertans as you are for standing up for your friends in backroom corporate Alberta?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, these are serious circumstances that we're in. The province expects that their government will have a plan, that it will be a measured plan, a balanced plan, that it will deal with all of the circumstances that we face individually as Albertans. All of us are concerned about job losses. All of us are concerned about front-line services. Whether you speak of health care, whether you speak of education, Albertans want the quality of those services maintained. The government understands that, and we'll be dealing with it.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, today, while defending his government's reckless corporate tax cuts, the Premier said that in pursuing his agenda, it was important not to get distracted by the, quote, political noise. Now, 27,000 Albertans responded to this government's own budget survey by telling them to raise corporate taxes. To the Premier. What you're calling political noise is actually what the rest of us call democracy. So does the Premier want to take this opportunity to apologize to the hundreds of thousands of Albertans he just insulted with those comments?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have participated in the survey that the government put forward, speaking to how they attach importance to making sure that we get this right. In a typical year about 1,500 Albertans have taken part in this survey; this year more than 40,000 Albertans. We have heard what they've said. They speak about the importance of front-line services, they speak about the importance of getting off the oil roller coaster, they speak about the importance of diversifying our economy, and they speak about hope and about strengthening the future of this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Red Deer-South.

Farm Worker Labour Protection

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For decades this PC government has ignored the basic 19th century human right of paid farm workers, including children, to have a safe workplace under the guise of, quote, protecting the family farm. End of quote. Somehow our closest prairie neighbour, Saskatchewan, and every other province in the country has managed to balance the rights of workers with the interests of the agriculture industry. Not in Alberta. In addition, 9 out of 10 farm workers are not covered by Workers' Compensation because it's not mandated. To the Premier: when will you close the loopholes and allow the people that feed us to be included in occupational health and safety standards?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that here in Alberta farmers do have the right to choose Workers' Compensation Board. The associate minister of agriculture and I just yesterday met with a bunch of farm and ranch leaders in Alberta, talking about workplace safety, and I can assure you that they are doing a terrific job. Through the ministry of agriculture we have a farm safe program, and in fact we're getting results. The farms in Alberta are as safe as they are in other places, and we're still working on it. [interjections]

The Speaker: First supplemental if we can hear it.

Dr. Swann: Somehow farm workers are treated discriminatorily. Given that nearly 9 out of 10 farm workers are fully covered in every other province for WCB by their premiums, again to the Premier: when will you join the rest of Confederation and protect the people that feed us by including them under WCB? The other 90 per cent of Canada does. Why not Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every farmer or rancher in Alberta that chooses to be under Workers' Compensation Board actually has that right to do so today and has had that for

some time. We continue to work with farms. We continue to work with the farmers and ranchers. They care very much about farm safety and make a great effort to keep their farms safe, as I said earlier. Nonetheless, the work goes on, meeting with the associate minister of agriculture and I. We are looking for ways to improve. But Albertans should know that conditions are good today.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been fighting on this issue for a decade in the Legislature. I know the Premier likes to tell us that he's a real conservative, but perhaps he and his government could at least join the 21st century. Given that most farms are now large, industrial operations, not family farms, why is the Premier still allowing big business to profit from a situation that puts both adults and children at risk?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, the hon. member should be grateful for the fact that big business, which is agriculture, the second biggest business in this province, is thriving, and it's thriving because the farmers and ranchers and people that work there are doing a great job. [interjections] Rather than talk ill of them, perhaps the hon. member should be appreciating the great efforts they do, the success that they have, the money that they bring into this province, the taxes that they generate, and the food that they provide for every table, whether you live in the city or in the country.

The Speaker: There's no rule against heckling, but when it gets to a certain level, you can't hear a thing, so let's keep it down a little bit at least, please.

Let's move on to Red Deer-South, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Corporate Taxes (continued)

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all saw the results of the government online budget survey yesterday, but one minister I think had a few extra days with it. Albertans were really clear about this. They said to increase tobacco taxes, to increase corporate taxes, and to move to a progressive tax system. To the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board: why aren't you just listening to Albertans, increase those corporate taxes, cover up that \$7 billion gap?

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I just said earlier, Albertans have already seen 14,000 job losses last month, and we're seeing more every week as the days go by, and they're from both small and large companies as they cut their costs in order to keep operating. Jack Mintz from public policy at the University of Calgary has been very clear. A 1 per cent increase in corporate tax rate will result in \$6 billion in capital investment, which also translates to approximately 8,900 jobs. [interjections] Raising corporate taxes, especially in times like this, would kill jobs, and that's what the job killers across the way would like to see us do.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I would just ask, please, that you tone down the level of the heckling. If you would, it would be appreciated. I don't want to have to remind you again.

First supplemental, please.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know what Dr. Mintz said, but I also know what Albertans said. They agree with increasing corporate taxes. Won't the Minister of Finance at least reconsider his position on this issue?

Mr. Campbell: Let me be very clear, Mr. Speaker. This government is about maintaining jobs and creating jobs and diversifying our economy, and to raise corporate taxes right now would kill jobs in this province. This government is not prepared to do that at this time.

Mr. Dallas: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister of Finance risks being – you know, it's said that he's perhaps in the pocket of big corporate Alberta. What do you say to that, minister?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, if you want to talk about pockets, let's ensure that Albertans have jobs where they can put paycheques in their pockets, paycheques so that they can provide for and raise their families in Alberta, paycheques from small businesses, small and large corporations that operate in every community in our province. Our government, again, is about creating and maintaining jobs and not seeing them disappear under the regressive tax reforms that the opposition would see us put forward.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this government wants to ship thousands of jobs down bitumen pipelines to the United States and China. They shouldn't be pointing fingers at anybody.

Kananaskis Country Golf Course (continued)

Mr. Mason: In an answer yesterday that was deliberately confusing, the Minister of ESRD claimed that his government would not be spending any additional funds on rebuilding a golf course, but the government still has to pay out \$8 million more to offset losses to the leaseholder caused by flood damage. It now appears that this obligation was only added to the contract after the flood damage had already occurred. Will the minister confirm this?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, we've said that this is under review. I've been asked by the Premier to put a third party in place to look at this. Again I ask the question: how many jobs is the opposition prepared to kill?

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government is well known for using reviews as smokescreens to avoid answering the real question, and he just did it again today. Given that the government has agreed to cover the losses due to flood damage to the operators and given that if the government doesn't repair the golf courses, which it said that it's not going to do, the losses will continue next year and the year after, can the minister please explain how not fixing the golf course and continuing to pay the operators \$8 million a year to not operate is going to save the taxpayers money?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's make one thing very clear off the start. This Premier is very decisive in the decisions he makes. When this Premier says that he's going to get something done, we get it done. I've been tasked with the project to look at this. It will be done in a very timely manner. I will make it clear one more time: we will not spend public money on golf courses in Alberta.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Well, the Premier's answer earlier makes it clear that he's just going to privatize a public park in order to solve this problem. Given that the \$8 million payment to the Tory insiders that have the golf course contract was not required before the flood but now apparently is and given that it's clear that this government signed a contract deal behind closed doors to cover the losses of their friends when they had no obligation to do so – they've left the taxpayers on the hook for millions of dollars – what can the minister possibly say to excuse this betrayal of Albertans' trust?

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, this government has no friends in the golf industry.

Slave Lake Family Care Clinic

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, having access to quality health care services is important to people in communities across the province, and constituents from Lesser Slave Lake are no exception. In April 2012 a pilot family care clinic was opened in Slave Lake to improve access to primary care and reduce pressure on the emergency department. Three years since opening, people in the Slave Lake area want to know if these goals have actually been met. My question is to the Minister of Health. What impact has the Slave Lake family care clinic had on reducing pressures on emergency care in the community?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Slave Lake health care centre is meeting provincial wait time targets, the most recent stats showing that 92 per cent of patients are discharged from emergency within four hours. Further, now that people have the option of using the family care centre, which is open from 9 to 9, fewer patients are going to emergency centres for nonurgent cases. From 2012 to 2014 the number of patients going to emergency has dropped on a monthly basis from 1,136 to 951. We're making some great strides there.

Ms Calahasen: To the same minister: if emergency concerns have been reduced, what other benefits is the FCC providing for patients and families in Slave Lake?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addition to expanding hours, that makes it easier for people, family care clinics offer the benefit of a multidisciplinary care team. Their teams include doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, mental health therapists, and other health professionals, resulting in better co-ordinated and more accessible patient care. Increased access to primary care in Slave Lake means that services are more convenient and that often patients get same-day access to their health care provider.

2:20

Ms Calahasen: To the same minister: given that we knew when we moved in there that the FCC would need more space, what are the next steps for continuing patient care needs for a bigger and better space?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The family care clinic has outgrown its current space. AHS is planning to move it to a larger place at the Slave Lake health centre. Having primary and acute care services available at the same location will make these services

more convenient for many patients. It will help to support and increase focus and attention on wellness for the health of patients and people in the region.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Maintenance Enforcement

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Justice and I agreed that maintenance enforcement plays an important role in supporting our children, and that's where our agreement stopped. I asked why so many cases were still in arrears, and the minister answered that it was on a case-by-case basis. Frankly, that just doesn't make any sense. So one more time: between 2006 and 2014 there has been only a 4 per cent improvement on collection of arrears. Does the minister or the program know why collection on arrears has barely improved?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to answer that member's question. The answer is because it's actually doing fairly well to begin with: 73 per cent regular payment rate, \$253.3 million net after refunds. That's \$253.3 million that maintenance enforcement collects every year.

Ms Blakeman: Minister, that is what they collect on a monthly basis. I'm talking about the arrears that are sitting there. MEP has been under budget seven of the last nine years. Why wasn't that money used to collect that outstanding half a billion dollars that should be for Alberta children?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, again, 58,109, that is the number of children that are impacted by maintenance enforcement. Again, this is a great program. It always can improve, but if anyone were to suggest that the maintenance enforcement program was failing, they would be incorrect.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Minister, the maintenance enforcement program works by monthly collection and by arrears, and there are arrears there. Given all of the pronouncements about eliminating child poverty, MEP sure looks like a good way to get money to kids. So where's the problem? Why is there half a billion dollars in arrears out there? Is it program organization? Is it political will? Is it a lack of incentives for debtors to pay up? Why can't you score this half-billion dollars for Alberta children?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much. I appreciate this member's passion for maintenance enforcement and putting money where it belongs, in the hands of working families. [interjections] At the same time, Mr. Speaker, some debts are simply uncollectable. [interjections] We have to understand that this . . . [interjections] I can't hear myself think over here. Again, 73 per cent regular payment rate: if you went to university, that would be a B. Of course, there's always room to do better, but this is a pretty good program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Economic Competitiveness

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a former drilling consultant I am fully aware of the instability in the oil and gas industry. However, due to the astonishing fall in oil prices, the oil and gas sector has experienced unprecedented layoffs and closures, leading to investment insecurity in Alberta. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Alberta has a very well-respected international reputation. What is your department prepared to do to keep us competitive in the global market in spite of these recent changes?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member correctly and clearly outlines a deepening challenge that we face as a province and our industry faces. I want to underline that the viability and sustainability of our oil and gas industry is not in question. We have world-class resources being developed by world-class companies, but we are certainly challenged and will have to be careful to maintain our competitive environment: a low-tax regime, regulatory certainties, stable government, all the advantages that Alberta provides. We will also have to work on market access to make sure we get world prices for our world-class resources.

Mr. Hale: To the same minister: given that we're seeing many job cuts and companies slowing down production in our energy sector, what is your ministry doing to alleviate the potential job crisis in the oil and gas sector and provide stability in this industry? [interjections]

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, it is essential that we maintain Alberta's tax advantage, as the hon. member from the NDP just pointed out.

This is indeed a challenge, and we will weather the storm. Our industry will weather the storm as we have in the past. Companies are now reducing their overall level of capital spending and their labour numbers, but significant investment is still continuing, and production will continue to grow while these companies go through difficult times. We expect to see about \$25 billion in investment go into the oil sands in this incredibly rough time period for the industry. So, Mr. Speaker, it will be a time of confusion. We will do whatever . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

We'll have to hear the final supplemental.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, to the associate minister of agriculture: given that agriculture is one of the most important economic drivers in the province and is world-renowned for homegrown and farmed goods such as our highly sought-after Alberta-born and -raised beef, what is your ministry doing to increase our agricultural economics at this time?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. We've got a number of programs at work every day to help agriculture in our province. One of them is ALMA, which is the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency, which provides ideas and innovation for our producers and our meat plants. We have AFSC, which provides lending to our agricultural producers, and insurance programs. We also have the rural economic development action plan, which is helping to work with the kids of our future as we move forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Calgary-North West.

Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that the board at AMVIC is not holding fair, open, and impartial hearings for consumers. We have now learned that the same private eye that the PC Party used to investigate a member of this cabinet has been made AMVIC's lead investigator. Minister, the board is holding improper investigations. How could you allow another party insider to be made lead investigator?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for raising this question and promoting Service Alberta's commitment to the consumer protection agenda, but I want to be very clear about a couple of things. The Minister of Service Alberta does not have a role in the hiring by any political party or, for that matter, any delegated authority. AMVIC is an independent organization, and the executive director of AMVIC is responsible for the hiring of investigators as well as all of their staff.

Mr. Strankman: It's about optics, Mr. Speaker. This PC Party placement is now the lead investigator at AMVIC when the board is already full of major issues. As lead investigator this gentleman will be a peace officer, but his role within the PC Party presents a major conflict of interest. To the minister: why did you ignore this conflict of interest?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, I assume you'll talk about the government policy side only.

Mr. Khan: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

Again I want to be clear that as a minister I'm not responsible for hiring at the government party level, nor am I responsible for the hiring policies of AMVIC.

Mr. Strankman: The minister's answers aren't good enough, Mr. Speaker. The decision to appoint this party insider shows contempt for Albertans. This minister has done nothing meaningful to address serious allegations at AMVIC, and he's not releasing a report into what really happened because he knows it will make this government look bad. To the minister: you have a job to do; you're not doing it. You don't have the ability to protect Albertans. Don't you think the Premier should appoint someone else?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure all Albertans that our consumer protection agenda is of ultimate importance to my ministry and to myself. As the hon. member points out, we have a draft review of AMVIC. We've tasked the board with coming back with some recommendations. We're prepared to work with the board. It's always been my intention to make that report public, and we will do so in due time, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

Inspiring Education and Curriculum Design

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 17 a member of my constituency in Calgary-North West wrote to me expressing concerns about the zones of regulation concept being taught at her son's school. Her son never had any issues expressing himself or with his academics or his behaviour, yet now he doesn't want to go to school anymore because he doesn't want to have to talk about his feelings in public in terms of what colour he feels like he is. Without question,

we do want to make sure that students are prepared for a changing world. My question to the Minister of Education: wasn't Inspiring Ed initially subject to flexibility?

2:30

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, zones of regulation, this concept, which is not part of my pedagogy, is not part of Inspiring Education. Zones of regulation are also not part of the current curriculum or anything that is prescribed through the provincial programs of study. Resource decisions and pedagogy decisions like zones of regulation are made at the local level.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Education: since the introduction of Inspiring Education in 2013 has there been a review of this initiative and its efficacy?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Education does not dictate teacher practices within the classroom. We respect our teaching professionals, and we value their hard work. Inspiring Education is a vision for education based on dialogue with Albertans to share their hopes, their dreams, and their aspirations for kindergarten through grade 12 education in the 21st century and beyond. We continue to use this aspirational document as we move forward in the development of a world-class education system.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Education: can you confirm that your office will look into the concerns of the parents of Calgary-North West?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I know I share with the member who is asking the question the deep and abiding desire to make Alberta's education system the best that it can be for all children, so I certainly would be happy to discuss with her any concerns she and her constituents have with Inspiring Education initiatives so that Alberta children can succeed and thrive in this 21st century.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Calgary-West.

Federal Building Redevelopment Plan

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today the Standing Committee on Public Accounts met with the Department of Infrastructure and the Department of Treasury Board and Finance. As I understood it, the topic of the residential component of the federal building, or, as it is more commonly known, the sky palace, was discussed. My question is: can the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts provide an update to this House on the meeting that took place this morning?

The Speaker: The hon. chair of Public Accounts.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for that great question. We did have a very productive meeting this morning, and the sky palace, to use the member's language, was discussed. The Department of Infrastructure went so far as to advise the committee that the residential component, or sky palace, was only cancelled on Monday, May 5, 2014. That would be more than a full month after Premier Redford resigned, for those who are keeping track.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. That's quite interesting. Thank you to the committee chair for that answer.

To the Minister of Transportation. You were not the Minister of Infrastructure on May 5, 2014, so why did you tell the House that you cancelled the project in 2012, when that clearly is not the case?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The information that was provided today at the Public Accounts Committee meeting is readily available. It's publicly available. It's information that actually came from an Auditor General's report. What we did is cited the information that's in the Auditor's report. This is a project that's long been gone. We're moving forth, building the infrastructure that Albertans need: the schools, the health facilities, the critical transportation infrastructure, not to mention our critical seniors' facilities.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, thank you. We're just clarifying some dates.

Once again, this government can't seem to keep their stories straight, and it gets a little nasty here. The Minister of Transportation gives one story. The Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour gives another. The former Premier gives another, and all we have to show is six shades of marble. To the Premier: are any of your ministers going to be held accountable? Will someone please tell the truth?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We provided information today that's already been made public for many, many months. The Auditor General of the province has actually looked into this matter. He's concluded on this matter. He's put a report out on this matter, and we simply provided information that he provided in his report to members of the committee. The fact remains now that we are focused on building the critical infrastructure that Albertans need to ensure that they have the absolute best quality of life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seniors' Care

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Senior citizens in Alberta move into the latter years of their lives with the expectation they will be treated with respect, dignity, and support. However, cases of neglect and abuse unfortunately do occur. To the Minister of Seniors. Funding for fire safety systems and the introduction of the affordable supportive living initiative are just the beginning in improving our system. What future initiatives is the ministry working on to improve the lives of our senior citizens?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for his question and for pointing out some of the great work my ministry staff has been doing. In addition to the capital and safety items that we've already announced, the Premier has tasked me with creating a provincial housing strategy and working to review our elder abuse strategy. We've also got our ministry working to help develop initiatives to increase awareness of proactive approaches to preventative cognitive decline. We've also been very

focused on initiatives that are going to help our seniors stay and age with their spouses and their families in the communities that they helped build.

The Speaker: Supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the constituents of Calgary-West have raised serious concerns over the accessibility of mental health programs for vulnerable citizens entering supportive living, to the Minister of Health: how does this government plan to address aspects of mental health care such as depression and anxiety as our population continues to age and move into assisted living?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My department and AHS are very aware of the mental health challenges faced by seniors, and supportive living is pleased to provide a mental health consultation service for people in these residences. In addition, Alberta Health Services' seniors health strategic clinical network has a number of initiatives to address seniors' mental health issues, and recently the SCN has had a major success, reducing the inappropriate use of antipsychotic drugs in long-term care facilities by 20 per cent. It's working closely with my department on strategies to care for people with dementia and their families and caregivers. As you know, dementia is something that is just growing exponentially in our society.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, back to the Minister of Seniors: given the unique situation that senior citizens face as they move through a transition between nonassisted and assisted living combined with higher levels of dementia and Alzheimer's, what are the ministry's thoughts on a dedicated and stand-alone mental health branch within the Ministry of Seniors to help navigate potential crossministerial confusion?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He's pointed out a very important issue. I appreciate that those things can be stressful for seniors, especially when there's a diagnosis of dementia. I can tell you that Seniors and Health are working together with other partners, including the Alzheimer Society, to develop a dementia strategy for Alberta. Which ministry takes the lead on this is not as important as getting the work done, work like the \$2 million that's been dedicated by Health to improve dementia care, including the creation of a new clinical advice line, that the government hopes to pilot this fall. As well, the number of Albertans with dementia is rising, as the Minister of Health said, and one of our priorities is to make sure they have the care that they need, which is why the dementia...

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I'll address the matter of questions to the chair of Public Accounts very soon.

Let us move on and complete this set of questions. Let's go to Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Thank you for your notes.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has the lowest university participation rate in the nation, all because this government funds the fewest number of seats. Further, as a result

of this government's chronic underfunding of postsecondary ed we find it increasingly only accessible to those who have won the lottery, either by 6/49 or by accident of birth or whether or not their parents have money. To the minister of advanced education. Despite our young Albertans being unable to afford postsecondary, word on the street is that your government is going to lift the tuition cap. Can you confirm this?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are no imminent changes to tuition. We're focused on a system that is accessible and sustainable. Alberta provides one of the highest levels of support to postsecondary institutions. Alberta universities obtain almost 58 per cent of their operating revenue from government funding. This is 5 per cent higher than the national average and 16 per cent higher than Ontario. Tuition from Alberta university students accounts for a lower proportion of operating revenues, 30 per cent, compared to other provinces such as Ontario, where it's 50 per cent, or British Columbia, where it's 41 per cent.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I get a little worried, Mr. Speaker, when I hear weasel words like "imminent," so I'll ask the minister a very pointed question. Have you told any members of our postsecondary leadership that you will be removing the tuition cap after the election?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I'm committed to working with all Campus Alberta partners to ensure that we have a plan in place for long-term, stable, and predictable funding. This is not business as usual, and all options are going to be on the table, and we have to get off the oil revenue roller coaster. This work is going to go beyond the spring budget. After the budget all Campus Alberta partners will be asked to help build a Campus Alberta system that is sustainable, accessible, and achieves excellence. I'll be engaging with students after the budget and developing a long-term plan.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I'm not asking for a long soliloquy about what postsecondary education is up to in Alberta. What I'm asking the minister: has he had discussions or has he told members of our postsecondary institutions that he will lift the tuition cap after this election? That's all I'm asking.

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, what I told our postsecondary students – we had a great meeting last week, and we talked about the importance of postsecondary education. I indicated to those students that there were no imminent changes to tuition in Alberta, and the students were very pleased to hear that. They are looking forward to engaging with this government going forward.

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

Mental Health Services for Postsecondary Students

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to continue along the theme of postsecondary education. I rise today to question if our government is doing enough to support the mental health of our next generation of Alberta's leaders and workers, our postsecondary students. Students are currently preparing and writing final exams and finishing up their final papers, and I can attest that it can be a

stressful time. My question is for the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. Are there enough mental health supports in place to properly help our students?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Scott: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health and I recognize the need to address postsecondary mental health. This is a serious issue across Campus Alberta, and it's an issue that was raised with me last week by the young people who attend our postsecondary institutions. We are working with postsecondary institutions and community partners to develop a provincial postsecondary mental health and addiction framework. The University of Calgary is playing a lead role in its development. Government has provided \$3 million a year directly to the universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge to expand Alberta's mental health services and develop models of care that can be used on campuses across . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's hear the supplemental, please.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. There is still a great deal of stigma when it comes to mental health. We've come a long way, but not everyone is comfortable with going into an office to ask for help. What is being done to reach out to the students who won't ask for the help they need?

Mr. Scott: Again, Mr. Speaker, it's not just government that's concerned about this issue. Student leaders are aware of and passionate about this issue and the mental health issues that they experience on campus. Funding has been provided to let student associations run outreach activities that they know will work. Twelve student associations ran awareness campaigns. Several of them brought in guest speakers, offered peer support, ran workshops, and all ASEC members but one have run special, fun activities to give students a chance to blow off some steam and learn about the resources that are available. I'm pleased to say that these activities reached more than 60,000 students across . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's hear the final supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. Addressing mental health concerns is not a one-year initiative, and then you walk away. How can students know you'll continue to stand by them?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, this government will not be backing away from mental health issues across Campus Alberta. As I mentioned, our government is working with postsecondary institutions and community partners to develop a provincial postsecondary mental health and addiction framework. There will be a long-term framework. I encourage this member to also bring his passion for this issue to our extensive Campus Alberta consultation happening after the budget. Together with our Campus Alberta partners we will ensure that our system is sustainable, accessible, and focused on excellence.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 102 questions and answers were offered today. That's a good average to strive for. We can do better tomorrow, I'm sure. In the meantime, let's take a 30 second recess, and then we'll continue with private members' statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Questions to the Premier

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, 17: that's the number of questions the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has asked the Premier on health care in the last two weeks. One: that's the number the Premier has bothered to answer. When she asked the Premier why he hasn't been answering her questions, he flippantly replied that it was because he felt his minister could handle it.

Well, maybe we should look at his record. Mould, asbestos, overcrowding, postponed surgeries, growing ER wait times, seniors waiting in hospitals for long-term care beds, profoundly inadequate mental health care: these are serious concerns, and Albertans deserve better.

Health care professionals call us to tell us that this PC government's neglect hurts the quality of care Albertans receive, yet the Premier doesn't answer. Families call us to tell us that their loved ones' surgeries are delayed because this government has the wrong priorities, yet the Premier doesn't answer.

Albertans deserve better than a Premier that ducks responsibility on an issue as crucial as their health. Albertans deserve better than decades of neglected hospitals. Albertans deserve better than disingenuous assurances that cuts can be made, thousands of positions eliminated without hurting the quality of health care received in this province even more.

This PC government has had a second chance and a third. In fact, they've had 43 budgets and 43 chances to get it right, but if they can't fix health care in the good times, if they can't fix health care in 43 years, why should anyone trust them to get the job done now? Albertans just can't trust the PCs to fix health care. They broke it, and every time they try to put it back together, they just make it worse. It's time to retire the PCs and elect a government that can do the job.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by Calgary-North West.

Retrospective by the Member for Calgary-Bow

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For 14 years I have had the great privilege of speaking for my constituents in this House and within government. In that time I've been gifted with so many dedicated and wonderful co-workers such as Allison Johnson and especially Colleen Winhold, with me since the beginning as my Calgary assistant, whose compassion for our constituents has been boundless.

I have also been gifted with so many opportunities to make a difference in people's lives along the way. Opportunity placed me as chair of the Seniors Advisory Council, allowing me to bring the voice of our seniors to government.

As vice-president of the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region I was able to give Alberta a strong crossborder voice with our neighbouring provinces and states. Bringing one constituent's vision to the government and thus seeing 2,000 acres at Poverty Rock rise to become part of Writing-On-Stone park was extremely fulfilling. But more fulfilling was working on the low-income review which led to higher AISH payments for those most vulnerable in our society.

Standing here before you, Mr. Speaker, and all my colleagues, I find myself awash in other memories, memories of the warmth and camaraderie of my fellow MLAs, memories of my constituents and

how profoundly they have moved and changed me, of baby Sierra and baby Brooklynn, who inspired me to advocate change in the philosophy of children's services to one of strengthening families rather than of apprehension.

Finally, the memory that'll stay with me forever: watching thousands of Albertans come down to Bowness to help their neighbours after the floods swept through our province, mud-caked faces, bright smiles, and hard work, a community in the truest sense of the word. That is what being an MLA in this great province means to me, community.

Mr. Speaker, it has been my privilege to serve my community to the very best of my ability, *and it has been a greater privilege to watch the constituents of my community working to improve the lives of all Albertans.** [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you. Well spoken; well said.

Let us move on, then, to the final private member's statement for today, and that would be Calgary-North West. Thank you.

2:50 Inspiring Education and Curriculum Design

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the introduction of Bill 18, the Education Act, in 2011 this province has seen the rollout of initiatives like Inspiring Education and curriculum redesign. Albertans have recognized that our education system needs to adapt to meet the challenges and embrace the opportunities of an ever-changing world. Through the Inspiring Education dialogue Albertans have identified a vision for the future where students are inspired to achieve success and fulfillment as engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit. We're so pleased that stakeholder organizations like the Alberta Teachers' Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, the Alberta School Councils' Association, and the Alberta School Boards Association have all demonstrated support for Inspiring Education and curriculum redesign.

Unfortunately, these innovative initiatives have not always been the original flexible programs they were meant to be. The original rollout of Inspiring Education included province-wide consultation that brought Albertans together to talk about the future of teaching and learning. The outcome was a broad policy framework developed to describe the overall direction, principles, and goals for education in Alberta.

The initiative was not meant to replace the pre-existing traditional method of learning but was meant to assist and aid in new, innovative ways to stay up to date with our current technology. Along with Inspiring Education, a similar initiative was created in curriculum redesign, and the purpose was to make sure it was continually being reviewed and improved to ensure our students are developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to be successful in the real world.

Although our original efforts were ground breaking, Mr. Speaker, I am afraid we are losing steam by not staying present with the concerns of Alberta education's front-line members. Those are teachers, students, and parents.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice, I believe you have a bill.

Bill 23

Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Denis: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 23, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2015. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of the bill, recommends same to the Assembly.

These changes relate to the province's civil forfeiture office, referred to as the CFO, and specifically to the operation of its fund and processes. I'll start by pointing out that these changes are in no way related to the victims of crime fund or the victims of crime units in our communities. To avoid future confusion between the programs, part of the proposed amendments would be to change the name of the act to the civil forfeiture and restitution act.

The proposed amendments will create a regulated civil forfeiture fund. In addition, the fund will now be able to cover expenses that the CFO incurs in obtaining the forfeitures. We are following the model of other provinces by permitting certain direct expenses to be paid from the proceeds of the forfeitures, which will allow the CFO to operate regardless of the province's budget situation. The amendments would also prohibit a person's objection to administrative forfeiture from being used against the person in a criminal trial and will permit the regulations to be made in the future, which will list offences of cause bodily harm or profit. Lastly, the bill makes technical and minor improvements to business operations.

This is a continuation of our common-sense, conservative approach to justice, and together these amendments will help the province's civil forfeiture office continue its valuable work in reducing victimizations by reducing crime.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a first time]

The Speaker: Before we proceed, could I have unanimous consent to revert quickly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well thank you to the Assembly, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a great privilege. I've seen two outstanding women enter the Chamber here, a mother and daughter dynamic duo, both from my constituency: an incredible teacher in Drayton Valley and now retired, Becky Prins, and her outstanding daughter Amy Prins, who joined me first as an intern. She was so outstanding, we hired her as a special assistant. Then I had the honour and privilege of her working with me as my chief of staff. I would ask that both of them please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I don't believe there are any others, so let us move on.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Let's start with Calgary-Cross, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

*The text in italics exceeded the time limit and was not read in the House.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of a letter I received March 4, 2015, from the Injury Prevention Centre, School of Public Health at the University of Alberta. They wrote to thank me for championing a private member's bill in 2001 that made bicycle helmets mandatory for Alberta's children. "You have been responsible for getting thousands of children to wear bicycle helmets and protecting many of them from life-changing head injuries." They are grateful for "the legacy of your work, nearly 15 years later, [as it] is a generation of cyclists who protect themselves and now their children" while enjoying cycling. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table, also, five copies of a news release I wrote, dated February 4, 2015. It highlights the successful programs that have enhanced and protected the quality of life for vulnerable Albertans over the past 20 years.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, I understand your tabling is not today.

Ms Blakeman: No. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other Tabling Returns and Reports?

Seeing none, I thank you. I think that concludes items other than points of order. We had a couple of points of order.

Let's go with the one that Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills raised at 2:01 p.m. Citation and point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

Mr. Saskiw: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising according to Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), and it is with respect to a comment made by this Premier. He alleged that members on our side were promoting debt in this province. I think this is more of a clarification, but I would just like to put on the record that it is this government that has put this province into almost \$20 billion of debt, and that's on the basis of spending on things like golf courses; brand new MLA offices, about \$400 million; hundreds of thousands of dollars for campaign ads; you know, carbon capture and storage, corporate grants to those companies. I think that when he impugns the opposition members, making statements that are clearly false – clearly, clearly, absolutely false – it creates disorder in this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask that you either have the member retract the statement or offer that clarification.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have got to say that if I'm so fortunate as to win a third election, I'm going to really miss this member. I really enjoy our legal banter, and I wish him well in whatever area of law he goes back to. But the one banter I have here is that truth is an absolute defence. It may be inconvenient if somebody actually goes and says something. We may want to cover it up. We might want to run away from it if it's against our own political interest. But I'll quote again a document that I'd quoted from a couple of days ago. One of the leadership candidates, Linda Osinchuk, had indicated: "We should be looking at selling bonds, Alberta bonds. And we can actually use this to create revenue." This is a prominent member of his organization who's talking about debt financing.

Again, what the Premier said, with respect, Mr. Speaker, was true. This is the Wildrose. It does support debt financing. I would just go and ask that this member realize that this is a point of clarification and not a point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're not looking to engage in a large debate on this. As you well know, points of order should not be used as an opportunity to extend debate.

Hon. leader of the Wildrose, why don't you rise and just bring this matter to a conclusion? It is more of a point of clarification, but I will allow you a brief moment to comment.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, if we're going to talk about leadership candidates, maybe we should go back to last June, when the now Premier of the province was a leadership candidate, and to all of the promises he made that he's now broken to Albertans. I think that's something that doesn't need to be clarified. You want to talk about truth. That's the truth. He made a bunch of promises; he's broken his promise not only to people in this Assembly but to Albertans.

The Speaker: And you can see why we don't get into this too much; nonetheless, those points are now on the record, and they have been duly noted.

This is clearly a point of clarification. I believe both sides involved here have clarified their positions, and now we are going to move on. So thank you for that clarification. That concludes the matter.

3:00

Statement by the Speaker

Questions to Committee Chairs

The Speaker: Now, earlier today, as you will remember, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek rose and asked a question to the chair of the Public Accounts Committee. I want to make it very clear that a similar circumstance as this has occurred here before. Yes, questions may be directed to chairs of committees of the Legislative Assembly about the schedule and agenda of such committees. For future reference you might want to visit *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 506. There are just a couple of sentences here, but I want to read them into the record because the minute something happens that is a bit unusual, I get notes and comments and phone calls and everything else, so hopefully this will address that. I'll be brief.

I quote from page 506 from the second edition, 2009, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, wherein it says under the heading Questions Concerning Matters Before Committees:

Questions seeking information about the schedule and agenda of committees may be directed to Chairs of committees. Questions to the Ministry or to a committee Chair concerning the proceedings or work of a committee, including its order of reference, may not be raised. Thus, for example, a question would be disallowed if it dealt with a vote in committee, with the attendance or testimony of Members at a committee meeting, or with the content of a committee report. When a question has been asked about a committee's proceedings, Speakers have encouraged Members to rephrase their questions.

And I might well have looked at doing that, other than that it was getting a little bit noisy. Believe it or not, it is difficult sometimes to hear the question being asked when there's the heckling and everything else that I admonished you about earlier today on two or three occasions.

Nonetheless, there is a great deal of leniency that is usually given for members who want to talk about events that have occurred in a committee meeting, but usually there are leniencies given when they are posed in the context of questions to the government. In that

respect I would invite you to visit the *Hansard* of May 1, 1997, page 319, where under the heading Speaker's Ruling, Questions to Private Members it states:

The gist of these rulings is that the purpose of question period is for members to hold the government accountable for its actions. Clearly, there can be no other finding by the Chair, as the principle of the executive being responsible to the Assembly is the cornerstone of responsible government in this country.

And the Speaker of the day went on to conclude by saying:

Secondly, questions may be asked directly of members who chair committees of the Assembly, but this would be a narrow range as these committees are not part of government. Certainly it would be highly unusual for these members to supplement answers by ministers.

So please remember that, and we'll be vigilant for any future circumstances such as that. That is the point of clarification from the Speaker's point of view.

With that having been said, why don't we move on.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 22

Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act

The Speaker: Let us move on to the next speaker on Bill 22. The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 22, the Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act.

This legislation is related to artificial tanning. It's a priority area under Alberta's cancer plan. Alberta has one of the highest usages of artificial tanning in Canada. Strong evidence exists linking artificial tanning and skin cancer. In 2012 599 Albertans were diagnosed with melanoma; 72 died from this preventable disease. Rates of melanoma are now increasing in Alberta; 700 new cases are expected in 2017. There is also evidence that youth are at a higher risk of skin cancer from artificial tanning than older adults, which is why youth are the focus of this proposed legislation.

The legislation would do several things. It would ban artificial tanning businesses from providing services to minors, restricting those under 18 from using artificial tanning. It would also restrict direct advertising of artificial tanning to youths under 18. Some specific examples would be advertising targeting minors as a main audience such as high school yearbooks or teen magazines. Another important part of the legislation would mandate warnings about the health risks of artificial tanning. Health warnings at point of sale would help consumers be more aware of the dangers of artificial tanning.

We're also proposing banning self-serve artificial tanning equipment. Unsupervised self-serve artificial tanning devices are common in other parts of the world but not yet here in Alberta. We want to get ahead of the curve on this one.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to note that this legislation does not apply to spray tanning as it does not emit cancer-causing UV radiation.

Government made moves years ago to protect youth from the dangers of tobacco. The skin cancer prevention act is another important step on the road to reduce cancer incidence in Alberta. This legislation will help us meet commitments under Alberta's cancer plan and protect the health of all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask this Assembly for its support in passing the second reading of Bill 22. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to stand up and give my initial support on the Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act. I was one of those people that – I guess I was older than that – wished I hadn't done what I did as far as artificial tanning because of the ... [interjection] Somebody is yelling. Unfortunately, I don't know how many times people in this House have to be reminded that I can't hear. All I see is a bunch of lips moving, you know, so it goes past.

Mr. Speaker, I was one of those people. I actually started off with the tanning because of a skin ailment, which I know is one of things that you can have a prescribed doctor's note for. I know that for people with psoriasis and that it was extremely helpful. But I eventually liked the colour that I was turning, and I thought: well, this is much easier to get done than trying to sit out in the sun for three or four hours, getting the rays. You know, you go 20 years ahead, or whenever they brought these tanning beds in, and it shows on your face. It just drives me crazy when I go past all of these Fabutans and see these young kids go in, and I think: "Oh, my God. What are you doing to your skin? Do you realize some of the things that can happen with skin cancer?"

It's a good move by the government. There are some things that I'm struggling with, and it's something that I'm hoping, if we have the ability to get to committee, that the mover of the bill, who's just moved second reading, will be able to answer. That's, of course, the enforcement aspect. We've just seen the distracted driving bill pass through third reading, from the Member for Calgary-East, and when I spoke in support of his bill, I also talked about the enforcement part and the need for more boots on the ground – if I can use that – more sheriffs, more police officers.

On page 4 of the bill it talks about the enforcement officers, inspections, and investigations.

The Minister may, by order, designate an individual as an enforcement officer or, by regulation, designate individuals within a class of individuals as enforcement officers for the purposes of this Act or the regulations.

I'm just not sure what that means.

I think everybody in the House has good intentions by the many, many bills that this government passes. I hit the paper about a week ago when Quill and I tried to enter a restaurant in Edmonton and were denied. Well, we all know that the service dog legislation in this province is one of the toughest, but unfortunately with service dogs, Alberta has the worst record. At that particular time – as someone who owns a service dog there are many rules and regulations that you follow. The first thing is to try to inform the restaurant that what they're doing is wrong, and then you leave quietly, and you let the association, the Lions foundation, know that you've been denied entrance. Then they write a letter, and then they ask you to go back after that. Education.

3:10

I can't imagine, when I was out last week just wanting something to eat, that I am going to end up phoning a police officer on a very busy night. So, I guess, how are you going to enforce this? Are you going to do the same thing if you see someone enter the establishment that's under age and that's going to go tanning? Do you phone an enforcement officer? Who are you going to phone? It says in here that "an enforcement officer may conduct an inspection or investigation with respect to any matter." I am trying to understand the process. I do understand the process that I have to go through with the service dog. It has clearly been articulated to me. I'm just not sure how you're going to enforce this, and I am

hoping that the minister – do you send a warning to the tanning salon?

You know, there are just so many things. I'm hoping that in committee there will be some questions because it's quite detailed. In fact, section 6.1 is about who is designated. Then it goes on: "An enforcement officer may conduct an inspection or investigation with respect to any matter for any purpose related to . . . [that]." It goes on: "An enforcement officer may, without a warrant, enter premises, other than a private dwelling." And it goes on to talk about reasonable grounds and things like that. So I think it's important to establish who that enforcement officer is, who the designate is, who you'd consider designating to be an enforcement officer as far as the fines, and things like that.

The other thing that I really would like some clarification on is prohibitions, nonapplication, defences. Under section 2 it says:

No person shall sell, offer for sale or provide artificial tanning services to an individual who appears to be less than 25 years of age unless the person . . .

And it has the prescription one that I had talked about.

. . . is satisfied that the individual is at least 18 years of age.

To the minister: is it under 18, or is it under 25? An adult in this province is considered 18. I guess I'm wondering why "appears to be less than 25 years of age" is in this piece of legislation, which is confusing to me, quite frankly, Minister. Are we saying that if I'm 24, considered an adult in this province, I can be stopped from accessing tanning, et cetera? So if you could clarify that for me, that would be extremely helpful.

I'm not going to take a lot of time because I'm sure that there are many other members that would like to speak on that, so I am looking forward to clarification on your enforcement because I think that's important. When you have businesses that are involved in a business that provides a service, I think that they need to know also.

Those are my short questions. Obviously, when we are in second reading, we talk about the intent of the bill. So I will look forward to committee, if we have the opportunity to get to that, to find out what you have to say about that. I appreciate the time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Do we have another speaker at this time? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of this bill. There are some questions that quite possibly the minister could bring in on the enforcement side, I think, in a sense, versus some authority from a provincial level, but opening up these tanning salons to liability from the public under a tort action might be more efficient on an enforcement level.

Now, I speak to this bill on a very personal level. As a person of very fair skin I have been battling with basal cell, squamous cell, and I've been subject to melanoma. I've undergone cancer surgery for skin cancer, most recently within the last couple of months. All of this is, I believe, a direct result of my exposure, particularly when I was in the tropics as a young man, not understanding the damages of what the sun can do. That is the whole intent of this bill. People, particularly young people, who are concerned about their appearance – and it's an odd thing. People with light skin want to have dark skin, people with dark hair want to have light hair – we have all these things going on in our society – and people with no hair want hair. Then people with hair shave their heads. I don't get it. But vanity is vanity.

This bill does a number of things. Not only can it protect our youths; it can save our health care system lots of money and lots of dollars. There's nothing better to save money in health care than

preventative health care practices. On the issue of skin cancer I will say this. My son, who is now in university, who is quite fair skinned, has never had the issues that I've had just because of education around this subject matter. People are learning, and this is the whole process that we're going through. The medical field has done tremendous work in dealing with skin cancers. You know, had they had sunscreen back when I was younger, I can tell you I would have used sunscreen. You watch families today protecting their kids. This is significant.

For the issue that we're dealing with today, if we can get this message out to our young people and enforce this bill we're about to pass to prevent the abuse of these skin tanning salons – and it is abuse. The science is there, the medical studies are there to show that this contributes to that. To me, it's a no-brainer in how we want to go forward to keep our medical care costs in control and how we want to go forward to educate people about taking more responsibility for their health. As these young people grow a little bit older, a little bit wiser, they generally get onboard, as most adults do, with trying to eat a little bit healthier and taking care of themselves. For anyone who has experienced any of these types of cancers, after a while it does get old, and you wish that you had taken preventative measures as a young person.

I will be supporting this bill, and I want to thank the government for bringing it forward. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available should anyone wish to take advantage of that. I see no one.

Is there anyone else who wishes to speak?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I won't be long. Yesterday, after the bill was introduced by the hon. member, we had an opportunity to listen to some individuals that have been impacted by skin cancer and tanning salons, and it was quite heartbreaking to hear the impact that it's had on their lives. I think that this particular piece of legislation will begin to go to the heart of it, where there are so many people under the age of 18 using these facilities to make themselves look more presentable or in some way better. At the end of the day, we need to make sure they understand the tremendous risk in doing this form of trying to make yourself more beautiful. I think that we need to enforce it every which way we can. The minister will use the authority that will be allowed under the legislation to take every step necessary.

You know, oftentimes today, as I get older, people look younger, so if you're 25 years of age today, you could look 25, you could be 25, or you could also be 15. We need to be very cautious in how we look at people and make sure we oversee anybody coming in that might have a potential.

I applaud the member for bringing this forward, and I support this. It is an excellent piece of legislation. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

I see no one wishing to take that up, so let us move to the next speaker. It'll be Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and speak to Bill 22, the Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act. I'll keep my comments fairly short. I just want to say to all members of the Assembly and to Albertans that the Alberta NDP do support this bill in its entirety.

3:20

A few facts that I'd like to share with members. The Canadian Cancer Society states that melanoma is one of the fastest growing preventable cancers, and research indicates that using indoor

tanning equipment during youth increases the risk by nearly 60 per cent. The National Cancer Institute in the United States says that teen girls make up a growing number of tanning bed customers.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Alberta Health estimates that 1 in 3 17-year-old girls in the province has used indoor tanning equipment. Of those that have used tanning indoors, two-thirds report having started before the age of 16. Even industry is onside with this. The Joint Canadian Tanning Association, JCTA, an industry group based in Kelowna, B.C., said that it welcomes the move, and the province's largest provider of these services, Fabutan, instituted similar bans at its own facilities last summer.

In the end, it seems the only question here is: what took so long? Other provinces, aside from Saskatchewan, have all passed laws like this. It's definitely the right thing to do.

I thank the member sponsoring this bill for bringing it forward, and I will be supporting it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I'll look for the next speaker. Call the question?

The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park to close?

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate everybody's comments and will address the questions from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek in committee, assuming we get there.

You took the words right out of my mouth, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that you call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a second time]

Bill 24

Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 24, the Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act.

Before us today we have a straightforward proposal to repeal the Public Sector Services Continuation Act, which was originally passed by this House in December 2013 but was never proclaimed or put into force. At the time this legislation was needed to act as a deterrent to illegal strikes in the public sector. It was intended to strengthen our labour laws by introducing higher fines.

Recently the Alberta government announced that it would be reviewing its approach to public-sector labour relations and that it plans to put in place an essential services model of legislation. Of course, maintaining public safety and ensuring that the public has access to essential services during times of labour disputes will be a key part of any new legislation that may be brought forward. Moving to an essential services model will go a long way towards that goal since it will reduce the likelihood of strikes being illegal in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, given this change in the province's approach to labour legislation it is clear that the Public Sector Services Continuation Act is not required. We have already begun reviewing the essential services models that are in place in other jurisdictions in the country, and following our discussions with Alberta public-sector employers, employees, and their representatives we plan to table new public-sector labour legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I recognize the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 24, which is repealing previous legislation. I just find it really interesting that the hon. minister would be tabling this legislation because according to the record in this Assembly he voted for the legislation previously. He voted for it; now he's voting against it. Which one is it? He just changed his mind very quickly. I'm wondering, you know, if the minister is going to provide some justification to this Assembly for his complete flip-flop in a very short period of time. He voted for it, and now he's voting against it. I look forward to the debate in this Assembly where he provides that justification for how things miraculously changed in that period of time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased, very pleased, to be able to get this opportunity to speak in favour of the repeal of what we know as Bill 45 because that was a really awful bill and extremely punitive to the labour movement and the collective bargaining process and, frankly, to working people. I mean, this government is clearly not a fan of the organized labour movement, but it should be because much of what we as Albertans see as basic working rights in fact came about as a result of action that the organized labour movement took.

I've managed to grab a few things that let us know where these came from, things like 40-hour workweeks and/or weekends off, whichever way you want to look at that; breaks at work, including lunch breaks, which came about because of organized labour and the collective bargaining process working for this; paid vacation or paid holiday time; family leave or medical leave; short-term and long-term sick leave; even in one case, which I'll come upon later, social security; minimum wage; a number of laws that prohibit discrimination in the workplace; overtime pay; child labour laws – the government has rather gone backwards in that one because I think they've changed it so that 12-year-olds can work in the food industry, so we'll have to get on that again – occupational health and safety laws have always come out of that sector; workers' compensation; unemployment insurance; in some cases pensions; wrongful-termination laws; age discrimination; in some cases whistle-blower protection; personnel evaluations and merit increases; sexual harassment laws; pregnancy and parental leave; military leave; the right to strike; public education for children; and equal pay for work of equal value.

These are pretty integral parts of our workforce today. They didn't come about because government decided to stand up and just do it out of the goodness of their heart. People had to work very hard to get this, both in negotiations and in some cases having to take to the street.

Let me reinforce here – and I've said this previously, but it needs to be said again – that people do not go on strike because it's fun. They go on strike because they believe every other reasonable avenue to get the employer to make changes has been exhausted. They go on strike to try and get the employer to come back to the table and negotiate in good faith. That's why people go on strike. It's no fun, especially in this country, where we have eight months' worth of winter and four months' worth of construction. You are almost always bound to be walking a picket line in the snow, which is, you know, really not fun.

These are people, in the public service anyway, who wanted to serve, who wanted to be working for the public, who are working for unions. In this particular instance, Bill 45 was very specifically directed against AUPE, which is primarily public workers for the Alberta government. This government really was not, I would argue, bargaining in good faith. They've already designated almost every – I mean, this one really gets me. It really brought it into high relief when the sponsoring member earlier was saying: oh, well, you know, we have to have all these essential services. At one point I met a fellow and said: what do you do? He repairs VLT machines. Oh. Okay. And he was an essential worker. I thought: okay. That whole concept of essential worker starts to disintegrate when the government is designating a lottery terminal repairperson as an essential service. I think that really clarified things for me. You know, I know that the government doesn't like having to step into public service strikes; no employer does. Neither do the people that are going on strike, but it is an attempt to try and get a settlement.

3:30

At the time this bill was brought in, I thought it was regressive and punitive, nasty. There was just a whole tone to the whole debate that was particularly crude. It was quite distressing. It was at the end of session, more or less where we are now although we've only been in for three weeks. Think about this, House leader. Just add another week onto this, and imagine how cranky people are going to be. I did warn you that three weeks is enough. Don't go for four weeks. But, no, you wouldn't listen to me. That was at the end of a particularly long stint in the House, and it was at the end of – well, you can tell by the numbers of the bills, 45 and 46. People had been in the session for quite a while, and we'd seen enough of each other.

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. We had. Well, the previous speaker used to describe politics as a blood sport, and I really felt that during this debate. It felt like a blood sport. It felt like a really nasty battle.

So I'm pleased, however this came to be. It's a bit like watching sausages being made. I don't quite want to know how the government came to this point or how the unions got them to this point of repealing this bill. I would like to urge the government not to bring in new legislation that is equally regressive, please. If we cannot negotiate reasonably with the people that we work with, then there is something seriously wrong with the system, and I think that's an indicator of it.

I do approve of this repeal of Bill 45. I'm glad to see that the government got there. As I said, I don't want to know how you got here. It does serve to show us and allows me to highlight some of the reasons why we should value organized labour, the collective bargaining system. The ones I just gave you, I think, were Canadian examples. I pulled some of the U.S. examples. Again, they talk about the weekend, fair wages and relative income equality, child labour, leading the fights for family and medical leave and, in the States, of course, health coverage, which was a big deal there until Obama-care came along.

Some of what's been worked on in Canada are things like mental health advocacy. I know that every year, coming up soon, actually, is the Jim Shewchuk award, which is the fundraiser that – oh, boy; I'm not going to get it – the coalition of civic unions, maybe, puts together for United Way. As part of that, at the beginning of it there's always a graduation ceremony for people who on their own time, as volunteers, have taken courses that qualify them to be counsellors in the workplace, particularly to identify and help people to move on, to get assistance, to get help around mental illness, alcohol abuse, and drug abuse. These are peers. This is a

peer support program that union folks volunteer to take and train in to work with their peers in the workforce.

We also can thank a number of the unions for fundraising and for supporting a number of the charities and volunteer-based associations that we have and for supporting legal defence. I've always been a donator to LEAF, which is the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, which is not a union; it's a women-based organization to fight constitutional challenges. But the same theory and dedication have come through the union movement, who has paid for a number of court challenges that have resulted in a better workforce for everybody, and I appreciate them putting their money toward that.

One of the examples, in the States anyway, was pay equity. We have on the books pay equity in Alberta, but as people pretty quickly figured out, pay equity doesn't help much, so they never used the phrase again. As just a gentle reminder to the minister, pay equity just says, you know, that you're going to pay all truck drivers X amount of money, and if there's a female truck driver, well, she'll get paid the same. What it doesn't recognize is that people tend to work in gendered clusters of employment, so you end up with a lot of administrative support – a huge number of administrative support personnel are women, but a lot of janitorial staff, particularly in the heavier sectors, are men. Well, saying that you're going to pay a male truck driver and a female truck driver the same is great, but it doesn't reflect the diversity of the workforce. It doesn't reflect that you have women in so-called pink-collar jobs who are paid substantially less than men that are doing more or less the same kind of job in a different sector.

Equal pay for work of equal value is about breaking down the jobs and assigning metrics to each that say: "How much responsibility do you have? Do you oversee people? How many? How much physical work is involved? How much strategic or thinking work does it need? What does your reading skill level need to be," et cetera, et cetera, et cetera? That's what makes it a more equal-paying labour force. I would strongly recommend that the government look at this again because this is largely the reason why we have such a huge income gap in Alberta, and we've just had a study come out that underlined that pretty graphically. Here we are, supposedly a wealthy province, with a major income gap, the largest in Canada, between working men and working women, and that just shouldn't be.

I'm sure that lots of my colleagues in here will have great fun and amusement in giving the government a hard time for reversing itself on this bill, but I'm glad they did it. I mean, I'm not going to give any great credit to the government for any light bulb going on, but for whatever reason they came to this decision to repeal Bill 45. I'm glad they did because I do believe in organized labour. I do support collective bargaining. I think that what the government attempted to do with Bill 45 was wrong. At the time I said that it was wrong, and at the time I also could foresee a court challenge coming. In fact, it did, and the government lost, as it should have.

It really startled me to see government ministers talking about people in AUPE without seeming to connect that when they went back to their offices, those were the very same people that they were saying weren't worthy of being paid and weren't worthy of negotiating with to bring them to the table. There was just such a disconnect there. It really started me, so I'm glad to come to where we are today.

On behalf of my caucus members in the Liberal caucus I indicate our support for this bill in second reading. We do not plan on bringing any amendments, and we will be here to support the swift passage of this bill, that will repeal Bill 45.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to speak to Bill 24, the Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act. I will try to be brief, but there's lots to share on this bill. First, it does repeal contentious Bill 45, which my colleagues and I fought vehemently against in this Legislature. It was an unprecedented attack on workers' rights. It was completely unconstitutional, which we shared with the Assembly on numerous accounts, although I will jog the member's memory to the fact that this was one of the bills on which the government invoked closure. So not only was it trying to ram through an unconstitutional bill; it tried to do it at breakneck speed by shutting down debate and discussion within this Chamber and Assembly. For that, shame on the government.

3:40

Yes, this is a step in the right direction. In fact, this is something that many of our friends in labour are celebrating. However, we should have never gotten here. The opposition warned the government numerous times of this, how it was in defiance of the Constitution and the Charter, and of course the government in its infinite wisdom needed to be reminded after the fact and dragged back.

I just want to highlight why we were so opposed to this, just in case there are members who can't quite remember Bill 45. It prohibited public-sector employees or trade unions from doing anything to cause or consent to a strike, and that was even talking about a strike. If they did, unions were charged \$1 million a day for strike threats, paid to a liability fund to recover employers' costs. Fines on unions were \$250,000 plus \$50 per employee, multiplied by the number of days the strike occurred. There were \$10,000 daily fines for individual officers or reps of a union, fines for employees equal to daily pay, and a \$500 fine for any Albertan organization for supporting a strike threat. You know, this was any employee who causes or consents to a strike; an employee who does anything considered a strike threat, which wasn't defined in the legislation, of course; a union that engages in a strike threat; a person who counsels anyone to do anything considered a strike threat; an employer that does not suspend the deduction or remittance of dues to unions; a person, employer, or union who contravenes an abatement order.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre in her speech was talking about: why did the government come to this conclusion? I have an answer. It was because of all of the work that public-sector and private-sector unions did: speaking out against this bill, holding rallies, and getting Albertans to speak up around the province. You know, I will note that it wasn't just the public-sector unions that this bill was affecting. This bill was so offensive that workers, unionized and non-unionized, around the province were saying: this is absolutely absurd, that you are trying to shut down speech. This is the irony, of course. I mean, the government has numerous lawyers – either all of them were sleeping, or I'm not sure what they were doing – who should have recognized that this was directly a Charter violation of their fundamental rights in our country. It was the workers and the people of this province, alongside my colleagues in the Alberta NDP caucus, who raised these concerns and spoke out against this.

I can't help but think that the timing of this repeal is more than coincidental, you know, as we're coming up to an early election call, election 2015, that's about to happen, and maybe the government realized: well, we shouldn't be chasing public-sector

workers and basically forcing them to turn on us; we may actually need their support. But I'll remind the government that they learned their lesson and saw how you treat them in this.

Going to the legislation, the legislation wasn't about wages or unions. It was about undermining the rights of Alberta workers and the safety of all working Albertans. In second reading of Bill 45 we called this legislation "an unnecessary and heavy-handed piece of legislation that goes too far." We raised the fact that Bill 45 "redefines strike in a way that it has never been defined in this province." It was my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona who said that.

This piece of legislation was absolutely a Charter violation, which has been affirmed by the Supreme Court in their decision in *SFL versus Saskatchewan*. In section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms it states:

Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:

- (a) freedom of conscience and religion;
- (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication;
- (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and
- (d) freedom of association.

The Supreme Court found that in Saskatchewan a similar bill violated 2(d), freedom of association.

But this legislation was also unprecedented because the following did not appear in other Canadian pieces of legislation or to the degree that it was proposed here in Alberta, and that was the strike threat, the abatement orders, or gag orders, and gag laws on employees and other Albertans who indicate that they support a strike threat. Now, gag law and Albertans: I mean, as far as this goes, section 18 of Bill 45 stifled all dissent. Essentially, it reminded me of the thought police here: \$500 daily fines to any Albertan who supports a strike threat, which includes any act or threat to act that can be reasonably perceived as a strike threat.

Section 73 of the Public Service Employee Relations Act states that the fine for an illegal lockout is not more than \$10,000. This government doesn't issue fines or penalties for fatalities or unsafe worksites or for corporations guilty of environmental destruction, yet this government has no problems with going after the men and women who place their lives on the line daily for this province and really are the backbone behind our public service and help us to be able to have the life that we do in this province. As I've mentioned, you know, unions would be charged a million dollars a day for a strike threat, which is absolutely absurd.

So I will be supporting this bill. The Alberta NDP supports this bill in its repeal. But I want to give credit where credit is due, and that's not to the government. The credit is due to the public-sector workers, the men and women who spoke out against this draconian piece of legislation to say that it was not only unconstitutional; it was wrong. It was an attack on workers and, essentially, an attack on all Albertans. Essentially, any Albertan could have been fined for discussing a strike threat. Again, the last time I checked, we lived in a country that protected freedom of speech, but apparently this PC government decided it would try to rewrite that legislation. So I'm very happy that this is a victory for Albertans.

Again, we know that it never would have come to pass because of the constitutional challenges in the Supreme Court, but once again this PC government has to be dragged across the finish line to do the right thing because, Lord knows, it wouldn't happen on their own. And I do question the timing of this again, conveniently right before we all head to the polls and Albertans head to the polls, in the hope of trying to glue together the tattered relationship that this government has with its public sector.

You know, in light of all this, Mr. Speaker, I found it quite rich that this piece of legislation came up shortly after the former Premier and numerous cabinet ministers thanked on a regular basis all the men and women for the work that they did during the floods in southern Alberta, risking their lives and reaching out their hands, their wallets, their hearts to help Albertans in need. It was the front line or many public-sector workers, from our EMS, police, fire, emergency crews to social workers, et cetera, and they are the very people that this government then turns their guns on.

Again, I'm glad that Albertans spoke out against it. Once again, I think that this was a victory not only for Albertans. You know, we were very happy to play our part. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting this bill, that never should have been introduced in this Legislature, and I truly hope that it never will.

If there is a message that I can pass on, it's that there still is great concern as far as public-sector pensions and legislation that will be coming. That will be coming after the election. So it will be very interesting. We'll keep a watchful eye on how that plays out, yet again another moment in Alberta's recent history where our men and women on the front lines spoke out against a bill that would have been a direct attack on them and their livelihood, and once again here we are where the opposition, in combination with working Albertans, has to shame the government into doing the right thing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:50

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of this bill, and I will differ from my previous colleagues speaking on it. It was inevitable that this was going to come here regardless of what happened in Saskatchewan. When this bill was first introduced, Bill 45, closure was passed and enacted before we could even get into second reading. It was quite sad that we would violate the democratic process like that and limit debate and end up here today repealing this. As far as I'm concerned, this is the fruition of bad governance, and I've seen nothing yet to show that we've changed the way we govern. We may have changed the manager in charge, but we have not changed the way we're behaving in the democratic process.

Regardless of what the unions thought of Bill 45, I don't have a problem looking at penalties for illegal acts and debating to make sure that the penalties of an illegal act, the fines, fit the crime, so to speak. There ought to always be deterrents. What this bill did was violate some very fundamental rights: the right of freedom of association and the right of freedom of speech. These are two paramount rights that make our democracy work, and we should never ever pass a bill that infringes upon those rights. Here we are today repealing this, yet we passed a bill just earlier this week where we gave a fish adviser the authority to enter onto people's property without a warrant, violating what I believe is due process of law. [interjections] Fish adviser, whatever. It's a nice title: fish adviser.

It's a sad state of affairs, to be perfectly honest. It's a sad state of affairs. What it shows us is the consistency that we have going on here with a government that constantly has to backtrack, yet it continues to violate the rights of its citizens by not being thorough when it introduces legislation and railroading that legislation through. That is what happened with Bill 45; it's what happened with the amendment on this fish bill that we passed with the fish adviser. It drives you nuts sometimes as you watch this happening,

but the sad part is that nothing is changing. We're continuing down that path.

The good news is that we do have a court system that can look at the constitutional aspects of some of these bills, at whether or not they're within the Charter or outside the Charter. This was warned early on, in the beginning, when this bill was brought forward, that it was highly questionable if it was going to survive a Charter challenge. Now, this bill never actually got that far. It never went that far. It was clear from what happened on another law that was very similar in another province that this bill was never going to go down and survive that Charter challenge.

Yet we still as a government here are putting through laws. These people are passing laws, railroading them through without legitimate debate, without the necessary debate, I should say, that would expose some of this and be open-minded to remove some of this from laws before they are passed. I suspect that we will be back here again with repeals of some of these other acts that violate issues dealing with property rights and individual rights before we're done.

I will support this bill. I was opposed to Bill 45 originally; I was opposed to Bill 46 originally. I just felt that they were overkill beyond reason. It violated due process of law, in my view. The idea that we would punish an individual for the acts of two others, even the idea that they would be discussing under their right of freedom of speech, under their right of freedom of association, if somebody were to overhear them discussing anything that could be deemed illegal, not that it was illegal but could be deemed illegal, a third party could be punished – that was never going to survive, in my view, and I'm glad the government finally came around and said: we've got to deal with this.

It was also the way they came around. Clearly, we are now in that election mode of preparing for the election. I know some of the members were heckling earlier as if they didn't understand it, but they should at least look at the supplemental bill we just passed. There's \$28 million in there for the election, and we passed that. Clearly, whenever that writ is brought forward and dropped, we will be into an election mode, and the government can go out and say: well, we repealed this. But were they going to do it of their own volition? Were they actually going to do it on the efforts of the opposition or even the efforts of the public? That's debatable. But it was clear that they had to do it because of what happened in the court system.

So here we are. You know, the government gets credit for it. They'll take credit for it in the election, but it was the fact that it was so egregious and such an offence to the rights of the citizens of this province that the higher courts were not going to allow it to stand in the first place. So it was inevitable we were going to end up here.

With that, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker.

If there are no other speakers, I'll offer the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour to close debate.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several things that the hon. members who spoke said I agree with. This is a victory for Albertans. This is their government and their workers coming together in a closer, more collaborative, more co-operative way and a strong indication that this government and this province are under new management. I believe that repealing the Public Sector Services Continuation Act will indeed be the first step toward a new

era and a new relationship with our workers and their collective bargaining representatives, their union representatives.

Mr. Speaker, this government wants to build a new spirit of co-operation with our workers and their representatives because they are a key element in this province. They are the ones that are going to enable us to weather the current economic difficulties and move forward in a sustainable manner. When Albertans get excited about the work done by their government in Alberta, they get excited about the work that the workers do.

For that reason I am proud to carry Bill 24, the Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act, and I ask and encourage all of my colleagues in the Legislature to support it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 24 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 20

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present for third reading Bill 20, the proposed Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015.

I would like to thank all members who participated in second reading and Committee of the Whole for their supportive comments. Bill 20 is an important piece of legislation that will fulfill the commitment by the Premier, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and Alberta's major municipal associations to bring forward legislative amendments on matters on which municipalities, business, and industrial stakeholders have reached consensus; demonstrate progress on the Premier's commitment to develop city charters; clarify administration of off-site levies; confirm existing policy decisions by moving them into the act or creating new regulation-making authority for various regulations; address several housekeeping items to support consistency, clarity, and readability. The MGA impacts every Albertan, Mr. Speaker, the private sector, and every ministry within government in one form or another.

4:00

Our government is committed to supporting communities. A key part of this is reviewing the MGA so that Alberta's municipalities have a strong foundation upon which to grow and thrive. Bill 20 is an important step in ensuring that the MGA continues to support strong, viable communities in the future.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 20 is an excellent example of collaboration with our municipal partners and industrial stakeholders, and I am very proud to support it. I would like to encourage all members to support Bill 20.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak at third reading of Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015. There are a number of changes in Bill 20 that we are very supportive of, and we fully appreciate the work that the minister, as I said last evening, and the department staff have done working with stakeholders to get agreement on these items.

The new rules around a closed meeting provide some guidance for councils around the province and will support clarity and

transparency for meetings and promote better communication with community residents.

Another change that Albertans have asked for is the codes of conduct for elected municipal officials. Adding some clear standards for the behaviour of our elected leaders will help decision-makers, councillors, staff, and citizens to better understand the role of the council and the expectations that we have of them.

However, we do have some concerns, as I mentioned last night as well in Committee of the Whole. Bill 20 has moved very quickly, and several of the provisions in the bill leave the meat and potatoes to the regulations. This means that when we get to the actual rules around annexation, amalgamation, and the codes of conduct, those discussions will not happen inside this Assembly, and citizens and opposition MLAs will not get to talk about the details before they become law. This is not governing with transparency, in our opinion.

It appears that this government has delayed all of the contentious aspects of the MGA review down the road and until after the election. Anything in this bill which could have caused any dissent will be handled safely during the fall and spring. The part that allows city charters does exactly this. Bill 20 allows the city charters to be created through regulation. These charters are enormously important pieces of legislation, and having them developed outside of the Assembly is lacking in transparency.

Yesterday evening the Minister of Municipal Affairs said:

We also heard during second reading, Madam Chair, debate, concern over the transparency of a charter being developed as a regulation that would be approved by cabinet before it would take effect. I want to be clear. This amendment will not alter that approach. If we were to require that charters could only be implemented as legislation rather than through regulation, charters would take considerably longer to develop, and this would not be in the spirit of the agreement we signed in the fall.

So this government has put its timelines ahead of making sure that there is good, thorough consideration of the charter in the Assembly.

We had intended to bring forward, actually, an amendment yesterday evening, and we weren't able to. For the record I'd like to read this amendment into the record today.

Mr. Stier to move that Bill 20, Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015, be amended in section 14, in the proposed section 141.4, by adding the following after subsection (6):

(7) Despite any other provision of this Part, a charter shall not provide taxation powers to a charter city that exceed the taxation powers available to the city under this Act.

Now, there have been several ministers of Municipal Affairs since the last election, and they have taken different positions on new taxes for big cities. One minister was clear that there were no new taxing powers coming. Another said in an interview that perhaps there could be new taxing powers if the city had held a plebiscite.

The city mayors have clearly said that they'd like to have some new revenue-generating tools. Given this history I think that everyone will benefit from complete clarity when it comes to this government's intentions. New taxation powers for our city would be a very impactful change, both for our big cities and for the pocketbooks of Alberta taxpayers, and it's important to be open about it. Our amendment looked for some clarity on this issue, and we don't have that clarity at this point, Mr. Speaker.

I hope that the minister can spell out the intent of the charter legislation with respect to taxation for this Assembly before this bill actually passes. As we've said from the beginning, Wildrose supports the concept of a city charter, absolutely. But the powers allowed to the future charters in this bill are very broad. The power of the

charter documents could be very far reaching, and Wildrose believes that these powers need more consideration.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I had spoken to this bill in second and had raised a couple of issues which were in fact covered partially in the amendment that the minister brought forward yesterday and which was subsequently passed. I understand what she's saying, that if all charters had to be negotiated as separate pieces of legislation, it would take forever, but frankly that's just not a very good excuse. This Assembly has far too many examples of passing legislation that's essentially shell legislation. It says that the minister can do whatever they want under regulation, almost anything they want under regulation, and then it's passed off, and it all happens behind closed doors, and that's just not appropriate when we're talking about a big-city charter or a city of Calgary act or a city of Edmonton act. It's not appropriate to have it in regulations.

Now, I will note that I think the city of Calgary has been very clear. They do not want this to be in regulations. They want a city of Calgary act. Good on them. I think the city of Edmonton has been less vocal; as far as I know, they may even be willing to do it under regulations. I'm not willing for them to do it under regulations because it's just not a wise idea if this is going to be the same government in place. What the government giveth, it can take away very quickly, actually, even as a sort of pre-election giveaway or takeaway.

We've had a number of things reversed recently by the Premier as pre-election goodie bags, and some people will be very happy with some of the things that he's done, but it does go to show you that if it's not in legislation in front of this Assembly, it can be reversed without any further discussion ever taking place. What's done on the Assembly floor has to be undone on the Assembly floor. What's done in regulations: poof. Whatever. There's no *Hansard*. There are no tape recordings. There's no live streaming. As far as I know, there aren't even minutes kept, so the ability of anyone to hold the government to account on deals they may or may not have made behind closed doors in changing regulations: nada. Boy, I wouldn't want to be a big city trying to get a big-city charter or even a small city trying to get a civic charter and have it so unstable that it could just be whisked away by an order in council or a ministerial order or an adjustment in regulations.

An Hon. Member: They wouldn't do that.

Ms Blakeman: Ha ha. Oh, one of my colleagues here is feeling kinder today than I am.

I think it's important that that section not be allowed to go by. I understand that the clause about the city charters is somewhat of a placeholder while they proceed with the actual negotiation on this. Okay. But I still think it's important that it come before the Assembly as an act.

The proposed charter would be published on a website. Yes, that's transparency, but, no, it's not transparency. To be debated in front of this House, where people can come and sit in the gallery and watch us do it or watch it live streaming: it's not the same thing.

The cleanup that happened around giving itself extra powers, it's in here in the amendment under section 14, "authorize the charter city to modify or replace, by bylaw, a provision of this Act or any other enactment, with respect to the charter city, to the extent set out in the charter," which was a fix that needed to happen, although

I'm sure that people I know in the city won't be happy for some of us having outed this one because the way it read, it actually did allow cities by bylaw to change anything in the MGA. No. So that has been clarified with additional language, specifically adding in "to the extent set out in the charter," which is a good thing.

4:10

There was also that council has to hold a public hearing before second reading of a bylaw that would be enacted in that particular way. That's fine. Most of them have public hearings anyway. Certainly, the cities of Edmonton and Calgary operate that way. I'm assuming that a number of the smaller ones do as well, but if they don't, then it's giving consistency across the board, and that is a good thing.

Oh, the one other thing was around levies. I've been flipping through here, looking, and I haven't been able to find the section that was specifically, I think, correcting or attempting to correct a problem with levies being assessed against the primary developer. Then if it wasn't all of the assessment that had to happen under the current laws, the city wasn't able to go back and get the rest of the money because the legislation did not allow them to go back and say: "Oh, and there's more." It just said once, and that was it. I understand that that has been addressed in this act, but, to be perfectly honest, I haven't found it yet, and standing here looking for it while I'm talking to you, I doubt I'm going to find it that way either.

I will say thank you very much for the changes here. I still think we've got a ways to go. There are some other things I'm looking for in the additional amendments and updating to the Municipal Government Act. I think there are certainly some things that can be done around zoning permissions, not only who but what.

For example, where cities are trying to say, "No; we want a certain number of homes, you know, 5 per cent of homes, in this development to be handicapped accessible or wheelchair accessible," my understanding is that they don't have the ability to do that now or to say that this will be affordable housing. I think there are some zoning questions, not only sort of what is developed but who it's developed for and some of those other restrictions that have to be offered to municipalities or particularly the larger municipalities that are trying to have some control over how the developments happen.

I know in the city of Edmonton we have a great commitment to not expanding any further and to creating more density in all parts of our city and not continuing to push outward all the time, frankly, outward on very high-quality, arable land. It's just wrong to plunk houses and acreages on land that should be farmed because that's what that land was there for. We are trying to do that. It is a struggle for people, but the city's ability to make all of that happen is sometimes restricted by what is and what is not in the MGA.

I look forward to the additional discussions. I understand that's another act that's coming in about a year. Mr. Speaker, you hear a lot from people about – well, to be honest, I use a swear word . . . [interjections] I know; I'm not going to, so relax – blankety-blank wheat fields, as though that's all there is to Alberta. That's not all there is to Alberta. Alberta is an urban province, and I'm one of the few MLAs in here that actually talk about Alberta being an urban province. Two-thirds of our people live in higher population areas. That includes towns. That includes cities. That includes smaller areas, smaller towns that have a higher density of people, and that's as it should be, but we have an imbalance. We put a lot of time and energy into looking at what needs to happen in rural areas and not a commensurate amount of time and attention and love and care into what is needed to make our cities safe and vibrant and livable and all of those things.

I mean, we have one Municipal Government Act, and we have – I don't know – how many acts that deal with life in lesser populated areas of Alberta? A lot. Even just in front of us right now we've got an agricultural organization bill, and that's quite common, where we have bills that are dealing specifically with life in less-populated areas but only the one bill that deals with what's happening in populated areas.

So I think it's important that we remember that we are an urban province. I go into this election with an aggressively urban agenda, and that's not to say that my colleagues in here are not worthy. Of course, they are. They're going to represent their constituents as well as they can, but so am I, and I'm going to start pushing back more and more and more to make sure that urban Alberta gets their fair share and is able to participate in the life of the province to the degree that they should.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Liberal caucus is in favour of supporting this bill with no amendments, and off we go.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've spoken to this bill at several stages, so I'll keep my comments short. Again, you know, I am glad to see that this bill coming forward was done through a consensus model, that organizations like AUMA, AAMD and C, the mayors of Calgary and Edmonton are on board with these. I do find it fascinating, though, that the easy stuff is taken care of first and done first. Essentially, I think Albertans could read between the lines: take care of the easy stuff, or the pre-election goodies, as I like to think of it, now, and then deal with the contentious items, those that, quite honestly, Edmonton and Calgary specifically have been asking for for a long time now, the tools, the resources, and the ability to provide the services and programs that two-thirds of the population of this province rely on.

I do look forward to the discussion on what tools the province will give to the cities, but quite frankly the current model is not working. Our cities are taking on record levels of debt, infrastructure debt, unable to keep up with the pace of growth that our province is experiencing. You know, a large part of that, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, is because property tax is a regressive form of tax, but it's also one of the only tools that cities have. Now, I know that Edmonton and Calgary have a few other tools at their disposal, but they are very few and far between. Quite frankly, the cities need new tools to be able to keep up, again, just with infrastructure demands and with the fast growth of our two largest cities.

The other thing that I highlighted last night, Mr. Speaker, which is important to reiterate, is the fact that many Albertans have to come into Edmonton or Calgary to find specialized services that they need, because their communities, whether they're bedroom communities to the two larger cities or if they live in other parts of the province – just because of population they need to come into Edmonton or Calgary to find services. The challenge with that: I mean, yes, it's great for the cities – you have more people coming in, spending money in their businesses, et cetera – but they're also using, you know, city streets, roads, sidewalks. There's the wear and tear issue that's going on, yet the city has no way to recoup some of the costs or dollars from those folks because they only pay property taxes in their home jurisdictions.

4:20

You know, Edmonton and Calgary are under a crunch. Like I said, they're facing record-high levels of debt. It is clearly

unsustainable. It's clearly not working and needs to be addressed. This is something that the two cities have been talking about for years.

Again, I'm happy to see a baby step forward in the fact that there is a placeholder for a charter in this bill. I had questioned last night, Mr. Speaker, the fact that it is referred to as a city charter and not a big-city charter, the province reluctant to acknowledge the very different roles that the two largest cities in our province play compared to other urban municipalities.

Now, I'm not saying that other urban municipalities shouldn't be given a more broad set of tools to use as well. I know that cities like Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Lethbridge, Red Deer are also growing at a very fast pace and are in need of new tools as well, but I think there is a difference between, say, the fifth-largest city in the province and the city of Calgary, you know, again, in their sheer size, in their growth, in their volume, in their use of city resources. I will be curious to see how these details are hammered out.

Again, I wish the government had something to bring forward at this time, which – they don't – is fine. We'll have to wait, but I will continue to be a voice, you know, lobbying for a fair system, one that does take into consideration the unique needs of different urban centres around the province.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting. The Alberta NDP does support this bill. I know we want to get it through fairly quickly – well, I guess we are; we're already in third reading – but I do, like I said, question the timing of this. It does look like pre-election goodies to me. I look forward to a very robust debate in the fall and next spring as far as when, you know, the next bill comes forward that has, I'm sure, more contentious items in it.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Are there other speakers?

Seeing none, I'll invite the Minister of Municipal Affairs to close debate.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll rise and move third reading. In doing so, I'll just make a couple of comments, if I could, and thank, first of all, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West for doing such an outstanding job carrying this bill – as a former minister he did a lot of work on this – and the staff that have worked as well. I also want to thank all the members in the House for the discussion and for the input.

I'd like to just make two comments if I could. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, on the question with regard to what sections the levies are in: section 71. For your reference sections 67 to 69 are areas that you can find that in.

As well, to the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod – I wasn't in the Chamber; I just stepped out for a quick moment, but I heard him – with regard to taxation powers. Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear that we have always said that charters are not about taxation powers for cities. Furthermore, the Supreme Court of Canada has already ruled that taxation powers can only be dealt with via legislation and specifically that taxation powers cannot arise incidentally in delegated legislation such as regulations. In other words, if there ever was contemplation of additional tax powers for cities, those powers would have to be granted to the cities through legislation approved here in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and subject to the full rigours of this House. Therefore, the input that was given: we hear it, but it's already been decided before in the Supreme Court.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would move third reading of Bill 20.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 20 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 24

Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak to some of the comments and questions raised earlier about Bill 24, the Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act. If I sponsor another bill, I promise to say it three times in advance so that I can say it more easily than I have been able to today.

Some of the comments today. I think we got one question from the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills: why the change? Well, several things have changed, Mr. Chair. Probably the first one, the biggest one, and the most important one is that this government and this province are under new management. Through that we intend to reset our relationship, improve our relationship with our workers and those that represent them, and because of that we made it known that we intend to bring forward essential services legislation. The other thing that has changed – it was raised by the hon. member from the New Democratic Party in his earlier remarks – is that there was certainly a Supreme Court decision in Saskatchewan recently. When you add all of these things together, it's certainly time to make this change.

Government is now reviewing its approach to public-sector labour relations, and we plan to put into place essential services legislation. We want to move forward with a new co-operative approach to public-sector relations, and, Mr. Chair, we've already started with that better relationship. I've started meeting with union leaders from several of our employee groups in a respectful two-way dialogue, that we intend to continue in that manner, asking them what's important when we go ahead with our essential services legislation. I've made it clear to them when we have spoken that any meeting that we've had won't be the last one unless they want it to be. In other words, the door is open for more input, more consultation, more advice, more comments, and that's the way that we intend for it to be.

So repealing the Public Sector Services Continuation Act is a logical step in this process. Mr. Chair, we're interested in working collaboratively with public-sector employees, employers, and employees' representatives through the collective bargaining process and providing Albertans with the services they need when they need them and doing so in a way that is fair and thoughtful to taxpayers and also to the Albertans that do the work.

We have already begun reviewing the essential services models of legislation that are in place in other jurisdictions, looking for best practices, and we plan to table the new legislation that will follow in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. Chair, with that, I will listen, and I'm looking forward to comments from members of the House, hoping for their kind support at the end of it all.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Questions or comments from this side of the House?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on the bill. Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 24 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

4:30

Bill 14

Agricultural Societies Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: Hon. associate minister of agriculture, did you have some comments to add?

Mr. McDonald: No.

The Chair: Are there other questions or comments? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to be extremely brief on this. I'm fully in support of it. I think it's excellent advancement for policy in the province and for the rural areas.

Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Speaking on behalf of my colleagues in the Liberal opposition caucus, I am in favour of this legislation. Speaking for myself, coming from a background of not-for-profit management, I was really pleased to see this because it is bringing in those agricultural societies, which have a very long and rich tradition in this province, and updating them in line with the Societies Act. I expect that this will help them in their governance and help them move ahead with some of the other advantages that were available to other groups but that they have not been able to take advantage of.

These are groups that do an enormous amount of work in rural areas; I mean, the curling rinks and the ag halls and in some cases, I think, even the exhibition grounds and the fairs. It's just a huge number of volunteers that are involved here. I think there were questions about liability, about governance, as I said, powers of the person, powers of the – no, I'm not going to get that word right. It'll come to me. It allows groups to borrow money, for example, or to purchase land.

I'm just really glad to see this, and I thank the minister for bringing it forward. Of course, we are in committee, but I will notify you that the Liberal caucus has no amendments to this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll make my comments brief. I just want to start by reiterating that we do recognize the importance, the significance that agricultural societies have and especially their contributions to our communities throughout the province. I also want to extend an appreciation to the minister's staff, who responded to me this morning as far as questions I had last night in second reading. Getting a response back was greatly appreciated, and my questions are answered. Therefore, I will reiterate that I'll be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other questions, comments, or amendments?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question.

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 14 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? So ordered.

Bill 19 Education Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Mr. Dirks: Thank you to all members who have offered their thoughts on this particular bill. I do want to respond to some of the comments that we received yesterday, and I thank you, all, for them.

As you know, the Education Amendment Act, 2015, does not in any way change the intent or overall policy objectives of the act. Let me just briefly comment on four issues that were raised. One was the reference to assessment language. One of the amendments in Bill 19 changes all references to “evaluation,” to “test,” and to “examination” throughout the Education Act to “assessment.” A concern was raised that this substitution reflects a change in approach. I can assure you that this is not the case. This amendment is simply to ensure consistency in terminology across policy and legislation.

Regarding the issue of residency, the topic of residency as defined in the Education Act was also raised. Again, I would like to restate that the purpose of Bill 19 is to provide increased clarity and accuracy to ensure alignment with other legislation. The policy surrounding student residency has been solidified in the Education Act, and the amendments in Bill 19 only serve to provide additional clarity and accuracy to the act. In this case, the amendment ensures that the term “resident” indicates that a student only has to reside in Alberta during the school year, and it is not mistaken for the residency requirements for voting or running in an election.

The questions raised in the debate regarding student residency were not relevant to the Bill 19 amendments but to the Education Act policy itself. That being said, I’ll take a moment to address concerns in this area. Under the Education Act student residency, not the parents’ residency, will be used to determine which school jurisdiction is responsible for providing educational programming to a student. This student-centred approach is one of the main pillars of the Education Act and evident throughout the legislation.

Yesterday the member raised concerns regarding this policy and the funding impacts it may have. From the government perspective, students will be supported regardless. In some cases funding may be directed to a different school board than under previous legislation. While this could have a nominal impact on school boards, I along with others at the ministry will work with our stakeholders to address any concerns that may arise from this change. In the end, however, we believe that this approach, which is consistent with other Canadian provinces, is best for the students.

Regarding trustee disqualification, the question was also raised about section 87(1)(c) of the act, which relates to the disqualification of a trustee. Again, as the member who mentioned this acknowledged, this does fall outside the scope of the purpose of this

discussion. No amendments proposed in Bill 19 impact this section of the act. However, I would like to provide assurance that there will be robust processes in place to ensure the integrity of the education system. We will empower boards to have appropriate processes in place to deal with a wide range of situations, including serious matters such as trustee disqualification or potential trustee disqualification. But, again, that issue does not have bearing on the Education Amendment Act.

Finally, with regard to Northland the topic of the Northland school division was raised. This situation is independent from any debate regarding Bill 19. That being said, providing all Alberta students with a quality education is of the utmost importance to me and to the ministry. We are working with Northland school division and local communities on improving student learning and ensuring effective governance of schools in that particular region. I thank the member in the Assembly for her good support.

I would once again like to thank all members who have offered their thoughts on and support for Bill 19, the Education Amendment Act, 2015. This bill will ensure that the Education Act, upon proclamation, will be effective in serving the long-term needs of Alberta students, and therefore I hope all members will join me in supporting this important piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I’m glad I did get an opportunity to speak briefly to this today while we’re in Committee of the Whole. There are a couple of things. Gee, I didn’t read the *Hansard* from last night, so I hope I don’t duplicate what other people have said, but I’ll tell you that one of the issues that I’m concerned about the minister just touched upon. I’m sure he and I have been so involved in the debate around GSAs. Both of us are aware of very uncomfortable situations with boards of trustees, where one or two members might be seen as the outliers or the other side of the issue or however we want to cast that.

I think it would be very unfortunate if we did not take care to put strong limitations but also appeal processes in place to ensure that a board of trustees cannot eject or disqualify, you know, one or two trustees because basically there’s a differing of ideologies or the way people approach things or how aggressive one side is over the other side in taking on new ideas or old ideas or whatever. I mean, it’s not hard to see. We can even see it here. You do end up with people kind of grouping up with like-minded people, and it can make it really hard for people that are sitting outside of that kind of in-crowd.

4:40

I feel really strongly that it’s the voter who is the boss, and if the voters elected that trustee or that MLA to be in place, it’s really not for anyone else to be removing that person. Now, I understand that there are extraordinary grounds, but they should be extraordinary to anyone looking at the situation. So we’re talking about severe mental illness, where, you know, someone doesn’t have control of their finances and of their daily living and that sort of thing. Anybody would recognize that. The test needs to be very high.

It can be tough in this province when every board, every agency, even outside boards and agencies have the majority of people who are appointed to it or that are active with it as members of an hon. colleague opposite’s family. It can be hard to raise issues and stick to your guns about things. I would know this. I think we need to be really, really careful here. I have always been deeply shocked and

distressed when I have seen members of cabinet on the government side dismiss a school board or dismiss or appoint an administrator on a town council.

You know, I believe that Albertans are quintessentially sensible, well-meaning, fair, and progressive people, and I really don't like going over their heads to say: no, no, no, we're going to get rid of that town council. I know it happens. I've seen examples of where things just got so out of control and it was so divisive that, literally, a town council couldn't serve their people. I know it happens. We put things in legislation to address those extraordinary circumstances, but we cannot make it so easy that those clauses can be invoked and proceeded with without a great deal of caution, and I would also say this for trustees.

I think we have to use a reasonable-person approach here. We have to be careful, one, that the minister doesn't have the power to wipe out a board of trustees – I just think that's wrong – and, two, that we don't set up a situation where the inside group can boot the outside group. That happens a lot. You know, you end up with those 6 to 7 votes – and it always comes out that way – or 9 to 3 or something like that. Gee, wouldn't it be convenient if they could just get rid of those three people? We have to be very, very on guard about that. So that was one rebuttal I wanted to give the minister.

Special needs: the section on page 4, section 8, amending section 19(1), alternative programs. My concern here is always around funding for special-needs students in schools. Actually, I was door-knocking on Sunday and had a special-needs teacher say to me: "So, Laurie, what are you going to do? What do you think is important? What would you recommend for the school system?" You know, I had some opinions, as I always do. But, really, what I was reminded of was how we fund mild and moderate special-needs students in our system. We tend to fund only the severe special-needs kids but not the mild and moderate. What happens is, as we are doing with the health care system – that's the other place that you see this modelled – that we tend not to be able to or not want to treat people in the beginning stages of something, so we tend to say, "Well, that's okay. You go home for the night. We'll send you home from ER," and then they get sicker, and they come back again at the point where they're really sick. Then they get into the hospital.

Ditto for the kids with special needs. They're not doing well. They're struggling. There are behavioural problems, blah, blah. Well, that's mild and moderate, but that can move into high special needs, and that's when they get the funding. So where's the incentive to try to work with kids to help them integrate better, to make sure that the supports are in the classroom so that teachers can teach and not be dealing with managing inclusion kids in their class, who sometimes can be hostage takers? That's a really dramatic term to use, and I know that. I don't mean to offend the parents, but that can be what happens.

I just want to make sure here – no; I can't make sure. I've been talking about this for 18 years. But, really, if we believe in education – and we as a public do. We all support education. We all pay taxes to education, even people that don't have children, even people that don't have kids anymore or yet. We all support public education because we understand that it's the key to the next generation. If we're going to do that and we want inclusive schools, we have to give the supports for that, and that support has been eroding quite a bit, so I just want to underline the importance of that.

I think what was being done here was that some schools, in order to provide these services, were in fact charging extra, specialized schools, alternative programs. It uses a particular teaching philosophy but is not religious education – making sure that they couldn't be charging extra for that, which is absolutely appropriate.

The other thing that I wanted to raise was education services agreements for First Nations students, page 6, section 13: "or a person authorized by the council of a band" after "Indian Act (Canada)." This is about Northland. The minister did talk about it a bit. I also pulled the Auditor General's special report on Northland school division. You know, clearly, the AG was very frustrated with the inability to enforce attendance. I wonder if this isn't somewhat of a cultural issue that is just not being addressed from a holistic point of view. I know that when my mother was teaching in the Northwest Territories, they really worked hard to make it a fun and cool and safe place to be to get those kids in school and keep them engaged. Mostly what this AG report is going over is that they couldn't even keep adequate attendance records, so there was no ability to enforce truancy. Now there's an old-fashioned word.

An Hon. Member: Very.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah.

I'm not sure that that's really at the bottom of what the problem is here. I know that this has been an ongoing heartache for people in education as they try to address this and to provide not just adequate but excellent education to kids that are living in the north and kids that are living in remote areas. Frankly, it's an issue that I have not seen any real resolution to. I understand that this was to make sure that the education service agreement standards applied to agreements between Alberta school boards and tribal councils or educational authorities authorized by council. The Alberta Regulations Act does not apply to an order made by the minister pertaining to the education service agreement, so I hope that isn't what the minister was talking about earlier. I was trying to grab my file and was not giving him undivided attention, so if he hasn't spoken about that, I'm wondering if he can explain why and what's behind that. If he did explain it already, I will just read it in *Hansard*, which I'm happy to do.

4:50

The rest of this. The dissolution of the school by the minister, appearing on page 11 under section 22, amending section 117, appears to have only two possibilities, which are, "The Minister may by order declare that any school division is dissolved," and on so doing, the board is dissolved and ceases to have any rights, powers, or privileges, and they can "establish a new school division in accordance with section 112." What's going on here? A lot of what I've seen in here is addressing particular schools and particular situations. In some cases I could sort of go through and call it the memorial, insert name of school here, amending section. I'm wondering what's anticipated by that particular section.

One last sticky note here. Why was the minister taken out of the petition section? Is that just a modernization? Petitions are a very long-held tradition to allow the people, the plain old people, to come forward and present a request to whoever is in power by doing that. I think that that very simple and very direct relationship or opportunity needs to be honoured, so I'm wondering why the minister has been removed from that. Now it just says: "when this Act provides for the doing of anything by petition or an elector wishes to present a petition to a board or the Minister." Now it would just be to a board. The petition must be in accordance with the regulations, so I'm wondering why the minister got cut out of that.

Right. Thank you very much. I appreciate getting responses to those questions, but other than that the Liberal caucus is in favour of this, and there would be no – let me double-check that – amendments.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: I'm just taking my time here because I'm not sure if the Minister of Education is choosing to respond to some of the Member for Edmonton-Centre's questions. Some of the member's concerns: I share those concerns, raised them yesterday evening, so there are some of them that are brought up.

I have a couple of specific things that I want to bring in. First of all, I do want to thank the Minister of Education for responding to my questions. I do think it's important, and I'm happy that he did. I wished all the time that for questions the opposition presented, questions around bills, the answers would be provided. Often they're not, so when they are, it is noted and appreciated.

I do have a couple of amendments that I plan to bring forward at this time. I'm just going to talk for a minute before I actually table the amendment if that's okay with you, Mr. Chair.

The first one is actually dealing with an issue that is occurring in Northland school division. However, you'll see shortly that the amendment deals with the issue of: when a board is dissolved by the minister and a trustee is appointed, I think it's really important that the length of time that a trustee can serve, an appointed trustee, before a board is re-elected needs to be limited and legislated. Right now the situation up in Northland school division is that the board was dissolved five years ago, so there has been a single appointed trustee serving for five years. Now, I'm not trying to point fingers at the trustee. I know that Northland school division is still struggling with school attendance, especially with chronic absenteeism, as I highlighted last night.

It is disappointing that part of the reason the minister at the time dissolved the board five years ago was because the Ministry of Education felt that the board wasn't doing as good of a job, in their opinion, as they could, encouraging attendance and improving attendance and completion rates and success in school. Now, I'm not about to stand here and either pass judgment on whether that was good or bad or otherwise, but the unfortunate part is that five years later, after a trustee has been appointed, we're still facing challenges, especially chronic absenteeism, up in Northland school division, so I think this needs to be addressed.

I'm sure there are members of the House that will have heard from residents up in Northland who are very vocal about getting local authority back, getting their autonomy back and their right to elect a board. That's something that I have asked ministers in Public Accounts in the past as far as when this will come to pass. When will the people who live in Northland school division be able to elect their board?

With that, Mr. Chair, I will give the requisite number of copies, the original is on the . . .

The Chair: We'll just pause for a moment, hon. member. You'll distribute those and send the original to the table, please.

Hon. members, this will be amendment A1, and you may speak to it, hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll read this amendment into *Hansard*. I move that Bill 19, Education Amendment Act, 2015, be amended by striking out section 15 and substituting the following:

Section 72(1) is amended

(a) by adding "for a maximum term of one year" after "official trustee";

(b) in clause (a) by striking out "section 71" and substituting "section 70."

What this essentially does is what I was speaking about, Mr. Chair. This isn't just about the situation up in Northland school division although that is our clearest . . . [interjections] Thank you.

That is our clearest example of when a trustee has been placed in lieu of an elected board. So the purpose of this amendment isn't just to address the issue in Northland school division; the purpose of this amendment is for the future to ensure that . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, can we keep the side conversations down, please? Thank you.

Proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you. The purpose of this is so that in the future if a board is dissolved and an official trustee is appointed, we limit the amount of time that the trustee can serve. Part of it, Mr. Chair, again, is my concern that at the moment, with the legislation as it stands, there is no limit to how long the official trustee can serve. The concern is that it's been five years; the people of Northland school division are wanting their powers to re-elect or to elect a board of representatives as opposed to one that's been appointed. This amendment ensures that they can elect a trustee and that there is a time limit placed on it. I felt, Mr. Chair, that it was reasonable to put a one-year maximum limit, which should be sufficient time for a school division to sort out the challenges that they face.

5:00

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll take my seat, but I will urge members of the Assembly to support this amendment.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Speaking to the amendment, the hon. minister.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the concern of the member opposite. I do think, however, that this would be an imprudent amendment to make. In the Northland situation we are moving forward with a process that will eventually result in an elected board of trustees, and to simply say that you're restricted to one year or any terms as such would likely hobble the ministry and may not be, in fact, the best decision at a particular point in time for a board that has an official trustee.

So I will not be supporting this particular amendment and would urge members to likewise not support the amendment.

The Chair: Thank you.

Other speakers to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It does beg the question, and while I have the minister here, I would love for him to comment. When will, then, Northland school division be able to elect a board of trustees and move past the appointed official trustee? If the minister could comment, it would be greatly appreciated.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dirks: We are in the process of consultation at present, which has just started, as some of the members know, that will lead, first, to a preamble for a new act that will govern that particular division that needs to come into being. Once that act has been passed by this Assembly, then the process of election can begin. I cannot give you a predicted time frame as to the conclusion of that. We'll have to see where the consultation on the preamble to that act goes, and then we'll be in a position to have some indication as to how expeditiously thereafter we might be able to bring draft legislation to this House. I wish I could provide more definition, more clarity for the member, but it will be a process of consultation that we have to go through first. We are committed to move in that particular direction.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the minister for his response. A couple of questions that the minister may or may not be able to address at this time, again, dealing with this amendment. I am curious, as are many Albertans who live in Northland school division and, truthfully, folks who live throughout the province, as to why this process has taken so long. We've had five years of an official trustee who's appointed versus an elected board. Again, this is where this amendment is coming from, to ensure that in future we're not dragging our feet as far as trying to resolve issues.

The second question is more of a point. You know, the board was dissolved in part because of how the ministry felt that students were falling between the cracks, that there were some major issues and areas of concern going on in Northland school division. My concern today is that the most recent Auditor General's report came out and indicates that, you know, again, chronic absenteeism is still extremely high in Northland school division. In fact, one-third of students are experiencing chronic absenteeism.

Now, obviously, we know and the Auditor General noted that students can't learn if they're not present. If they're absent, they're not going to be learning the material that they need to and developing the skills that students need to develop in order to continue along their educational pathway and be successful. The dissolution of the board and the appointment of the trustee was supposed to curtail some of this absenteeism and, essentially, be a solution or part of a solution, and the reality is that it hasn't. In fact, the absenteeism, again, is about 900 students out of 2,700 who are chronically absent.

Now, I would recommend to the government to be looking into reasons for absenteeism, which the Auditor General couldn't through his report identify, but I'm sure it would be a combination of things, from distance in transportation to potentially looking at the socioeconomic situation of families, looking at value of education, looking at, again, how they're connecting, what practices are being employed.

Now, I don't doubt for a minute, Mr. Chair, that the individuals, the teachers, the staff at these schools aren't trying their hardest because I know that they wouldn't be there if they didn't care about the education and the future of their pupils, but clearly we have a problem here. Again, I don't think having an appointed trustee continue on has necessarily had the outcome that the ministry, I think, had hoped. Questions are: why has it taken so long? I appreciate that the minister has only been the Minister of Education for several months and not five years ago, but again we do have the same government in power, that's been there when the elected board of trustees was removed and this one was appointed.

The purpose of this amendment, again, is to move forward in a timely fashion. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Are there others?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Back to the bill. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I shall attempt to amend this bill again. You know what? I'll send these up to the table before I begin.

The Chair: Please do.

This will be amendment A2, hon. members.

Please proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This amendment, I'll read it into *Hansard* here. I move that Bill 19, Education Amendment Act, 2015, be amended by striking out section 3 and substituting the following:

3 Section 4(1) is amended by striking out "in which the student resides" and substituting "in which the student's parent resides."

The purpose of this, quite frankly – and I spoke to it last night, Mr. Chair – is the concern with the changes to the residency requirements and the impact that that will have on school boards and school boards' abilities to provide special programs. The example that I gave last night, if there is – okay. Let me back up before I get to the example. When we switch from a parent to a student residency requirement, it's going to be a lot more difficult for boards to ascertain, to prove where a student lives. Parents have bills, they have records that are much easier to assess where the parent lives. A student could say that, well, they're staying with a friend who happens to live in that catchment area. So the concern of some of the school boards is that they're going to be over capacity because, quite frankly, a student could enrol and claim that they're in a catchment area, and now the school will go over capacity. That's the first concern.

5:10

The second concern. The example that I gave last night I think is a very prudent example. For example, the Alberta School for the Deaf: that school costs a significant amount of money to run and to operate, obviously, more so than a standard school, but that programming is very important, and we want to ensure that all students have access to high-quality education. But that school costs Edmonton public school board a lot more to operate than it does another school.

The challenge with the change to the residency requirement. If a student comes from another jurisdiction – let's say they come from Fort McMurray, where the parents live. The student comes to the Alberta School for the Deaf. Edmonton public would go to Fort McMurray or Wood Buffalo public school division and ask them to share the cost of the student going to the Alberta School for the Deaf because the funding that the government currently gives school boards is not adequate for the cost of specialized programming like the Alberta School for the Deaf. So EPSB would recoup the other half of the cost. They would share the cost with Wood Buffalo public school division.

If we moved the residency requirement to where the student dictates, and the student from Wood Buffalo, you know, moves to Edmonton, their residency is Edmonton, EPSB does not have any way to recoup some of the costs of operating that school. The concern is that if this happens, in numerous examples, EPSB will simply not be able to afford to run a specialized school like this because they're not even recouping their cost. What that means is that they're drawing money from other schools. They're using money to pay to ensure that those specialized programs continue to run.

You know, as much as I appreciate the minister's intentions by saying that the government will ensure that schools get the funding, I can tell the minister right now that specialized schools do not receive the dollars that they need to operate. The school boards that operate them are using money that should be going to other schools, to other programs in order to pay for them because there simply is not enough money in their budget.

My concern is that – and Alberta School for the Deaf is just one example of a specialized program. They do exist throughout the province. But they're very, very important, Mr. Chair. Part of the reason they're extremely important is because, again, we want to ensure that every student in Alberta, regardless of ability or disability, has the opportunity to receive the highest quality of

education. In order to do that, we need to provide and boards need to provide specialized services. But those specialized services cost money. At the moment this government is not investing enough money into education.

You know, we have examples of schools running massive infrastructure deficits. Interestingly, in Public Accounts this morning the Minister of Infrastructure was quite excited to talk about how the government has decided to put \$100 million toward the infrastructure deficit. However, when you look at the current infrastructure deficit, between Edmonton public and CBE, Calgary board of education, it's about a 1 and a quarter billion dollar infrastructure deficit. CBE is getting close to a billion dollar infrastructure deficit in their schools. Edmonton public is at about \$250 million. So when you hear of an injection of \$100 million versus a shortfall of \$1.25 billion, yeah, we're still significantly short. That's only two school boards in the province. Granted, the two largest boards in the province; however, only two out of a significant number.

This amendment, the intention of switching back to the parent residence, is because of the concerns that I have as far as ensuring that boards will get adequate dollars to operate and offer these specialized programs. For that reason, Mr. Chair, I will encourage members of the Assembly to support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Other speakers to the amendment?

Mr. Dirks: I appreciate the member's concern. However, Mr. Chair, Bill 19, as presently stated, is a student-centred approach to the main pillars of the Education Act. It supports that. From the government perspective I did indicate earlier in my comments today that students will be supported regardless, and that's what we want to see for all students. This particular approach on student residency is consistent with other Canadian provinces, so I do not believe that the amendment would be an improvement, and I would urge members not to support it.

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment?

Ms Blakeman: I was listening carefully to both parties, hoping that there would be clarity. It's interesting because – I think it was actually called the Alberta School for the Deaf at one point – it used to be the only school that was directly under the minister's control. It was the minister's school, and I wonder now if that wasn't partly because of the specific requirements of that school for specialized funding, let's call it.

I am concerned because I represent a downtown riding. I would like to hear from the minister something a bit more specific about how the students would be supported in a school like the School for the Deaf so that we're reassured that the school itself is not pulling finances off the school board, which is the point that my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview was trying to make and that dovetails with one of the issues that I was raising to the minister earlier, about the funding for special needs.

So, one, I am wondering if either one of you can tell me how many of these schools there are in the province and, two, if the minister could give me the Coles Notes on how these students get – oh, my God. You're not talking about voucher funding, are you, Minister? Okay. That was a good face. Well, sorry. It just occurred to me that you were talking about student-centred learning, and then as I'm trying to work my way through that, I'm thinking: "Oh, yes. Okay. So funding is following the student." Whoa. That's code for a voucher system, where. . .

Ms DeLong: It already does.

Ms Blakeman: Well, not quite in that way. Thank you for the participation. I'm always thrilled when I engage people, even if it's just to have them look at me and go: "Don't you know that already happens? What's wrong with you?"

To be fair, that's not my understanding of it. The voucher system that I'm talking about is the one where the parents are, you know, kind of given: this is the amount of money that you have, and you can send your kid anywhere you want, and the money will go with them. That's a slightly different voucher system than what we're talking about, is it not, Member for Calgary-Bow? Gotcha. So I'm sure that you'll be helpful in correcting me on that one because that is my bottom-line concern on this, that we're not changing the system from the way that we understand it to something like that dreaded voucher system, which I hope you have a different definition for.

But I am also interested in how many times this happens because I think that sometimes we get too caught up in a particular situation that we're sympathetic to, and then we end up doing a monster change for not very many people, and that's not always appropriate. So I'm hoping that I will get some answers from people about this particular situation. If I could just get some idea of how the minister thinks the funding would not be a problem in this particular instance.

Thank you.

5:20

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was hoping that the minister was going to jump up because the Member for Edmonton-Centre took the words right out of my mouth as far as how specifically and precisely – if this amendment does not go through and if we leave the wording the way it is, where it's up to a student where the student resides, how do we ensure that school boards do in fact get the dollars they need? I can tell the minister right now that the programming cost to run the Alberta School for the Deaf is more than what they receive per student and that it is the school board that is making that decision because it is a priority to offer that programming. The point is that they are taking operational dollars from other schools, from elsewhere in order to operate the school.

I do believe that these specialized programs are necessary. We should be delivering them and offering them to students throughout the province, absolutely, but they definitely need to be funded and adequately funded. I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that they are not. I can tell you that that's not just coming from school boards. I speak to teachers around the province regularly and can tell you that there is a shortfall of funding. We've got class sizes continually going up. Classroom complexity is constantly growing. We're dealing with, again, I mean, students of varying needs in a classroom. You know, quite frankly, if we want to ensure that students have the best possible education, we need to fund it.

I do hope that if the minister does not have a response at this time, he would in all seriousness provide a response, you know, not just an assurance that funding will be in place for specialized programming but details on how much funding and how he can ensure that that funding will go to the school boards and go to those specialized programs. Again, a simple solution to this is for funding to revert to going to the residence of the parent as opposed to the student.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Other speakers?

Mr. Dirks: In fact, Mr. Chair, it's not a simple solution. In fact, it greatly complexifies things to do exactly what the member opposite is suggesting. Whether or not there is adequate funding provided for unique, one-off school situations such as the members have been referring to is a matter of debate and discussion and analysis and so on. In fact, we really do want an Education Act which is student-centred. Funding follows students. Where the student lives is where the funding should go, and that particular board will then be responsible. It's not some other board in some far-off locale in the province, geographically speaking, that is now going to be somehow responsible for funding. I do think that we have calibrated the language of the act appropriately and, as I indicated, would not be supporting this and would urge all members to follow suit.

The Chair: Thank you.

Other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Last comments. This is one example that I've provided; this is not a one-off. There are specialized programs that only exist in certain centres, that do not exist in all schools throughout the province because of a capacity and an ability to provide specialized programming or specialists in certain schools.

You know, I appreciate and I accept the minister's comments as far as: it's not necessarily a simple solution. But my concern is that with the way this bill is currently worded, boards are going to have to take more and more money out of other areas in order to continue to operate and fund specialized programming. That just puts even more of a burden onto a system that has already been running very, very thin and doesn't have enough dollars for all of the programs that they'd like to offer and to get the ratios down, as far as student to teacher.

Thank you.

Mr. Dirks: I appreciate the issue that the member opposite is raising. I just think that it is an inappropriate solution to ameliorate the matter that you believe is a real matter. I think that it would be the wrong way to ameliorate that particular kind of unique, one-off or two-off or three-off problem, however many there may be. Completely redefining student residency would not be the best way. In fact, it likely would be a very imprudent way to seek to ameliorate that particular issue, so I would just encourage the member to come at it in some different way, perhaps when, you know, funding estimates are being considered or during question period, to raise it as an issue that could be considered at that time. I don't think that it's really solving a problem. It perhaps is creating more of a problem at the end of the day, and I offer that respectfully to the member opposite.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there others speaking to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Back to the main bill. Are there other questions or comments on the main bill?

Shall the question be called?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 19 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? So ordered.

Bill 21

Safety Codes Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This act was first passed . . .

An Hon. Member: Agreed.

Mr. Casey: Agreed? Good idea.

This act was first passed in 1994. It's been 20 years. Very few amendments have been made to this act since. This is a great opportunity to update the act, to modernize the act, and to make some really valuable changes that are needed in the industry today, so I'd encourage everyone to support Bill 21.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there questions, comments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I do thank the member for bringing this forward. I appreciate what this bill is intending to do as far as its goal, but I do have some concerns. To start, the idea of improving the safety standards for things covered in the act like elevators, gas systems, electrical systems, et cetera, is a good thing, and as long as we're ensuring that standards are moving forward and making everyone safer rather than moving away from regulation, it's a positive thing.

The bill does seek to automatically align the safety standards used by the province with some of the most respected national and international standards or standard-setting organizations such as the Canadian Standards Association or the National Research Council, which I am quite happy to see. But there are a couple of concerns with the automatic alignment of standards as it's laid out in the bill.

First, there are significant loopholes under which the Minister of Municipal Affairs can almost unilaterally halt the application of some standards by delaying their use beyond a few years. If the standards have been signed off on by panels of experts, then why would we want to delay their placement into the standards of our province any longer than we need to? By placing these types of decisions around the acceleration or delay of the standards in the hands of cabinet, I fear that the real concerns that members of this Assembly might have with regard to the immediacy of the need for these standards or legitimate reasons they should be delayed in the Alberta context could actually be ignored.

5:30

The establishment of the safety codes authority, the SCA, in the second section of the bill is interesting. Now, while it's good that costs for actions the province takes in smaller communities without their own designated safety codes authorities will be offset by the greater access to fees, I mean, there is a possibility of an extra level of authority that could hamper the accountability of the system just as we have seen in our health system through the imposition of AHS. However, I do appreciate that in some of the smaller municipalities, this, I believe, is intended to assist them.

Now, it also appears to me that one of SCA's main roles is to ensure that private permitting agencies get paid. I'd like some clarification if possible on the exact integration of the public and private spheres that are going into this bill, into the legislation.

At the end of the day, Mr. Chair, it does seem like a decent development, but again I'm just curious why there's a need for an additional body when these are tasks that the province has been assigned to take care of since 1993. Again, if there is a cost savings, I would like to be aware of it or, again, look at the reasoning behind it.

As for the administrative penalties being added to the list of tools at the disposal of those tasked with enforcing safety standards, just a few questions and a little bit of a concern here that the administrative penalties, which can be rescinded or reduced by officials, could be used in situations where institutions either put people in grave danger or whose negligence actually caused harm to individuals. So while these may be useful in some instances as a tool to increase general compliance, I'm wondering if these tools might be used to reduce the generally applied maximum penalty for contraventions of safety codes. If that's the case, then clearly there is a concern there. I'd like to know more about how this is going to be applied moving forward, and I want to ensure that, obviously, those Albertans and those people who put their lives and communities at risk are properly held to account for their failure to properly recognize standards and to follow them.

The fourth and main thrust of this bill, which allows municipalities to make their own bylaws on code issues, I think, again, is a positive step. I mentioned that last night. Municipalities should have the power to take steps to manage things, like private sewage systems, that could pose risks to their communities. I like to see authority placed back into the hands of people at the local level, who are closest to it.

With that, I hope it is possible to get some answers to my questions. In general I do appreciate the intent and spirit of this bill and what it is going to accomplish, but I've tried to highlight a few of my questions and concerns.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Questions or comments from others? Maybe we'll get the Member for Banff-Cochrane to respond, and then I'll come back to you, hon. member.

Mr. Casey: Just very quickly on the private permitting with the permit fee, what has happened previously is that the minister was responsible for administering the Safety Codes Act in unaccredited municipalities. They would contract with an agency to provide that service, so an accredited agency. That accredited agency would then hire safety codes officers and so on to administer at the street level. Unfortunately, what has happened in the past is that agency that is contracted: the only real authority that the minister has had to deal with that agency for compliance has been the contract. When there have been issues with those people, sometimes they were getting the money, either going out of business or leaving, and then the person actually on the ground doing the work was not getting paid.

The way this will work now with the safety codes administrative authority is that the fees will in fact be paid to that authority, and when the work is completed, that authority then will directly pay back to the safety codes officer. So, in fact, it really does enhance the whole process. It also enables one body to be way more accountable. That body will be able to do the auditing there, so the safety overall will be greatly enhanced in all unaccredited municipalities.

As far as the automatic alignment of the codes goes, you really do need a mechanism because currently once those codes are approved, we will then adopt them automatically, but there is a one-year time frame to allow everyone to adapt to that code. In

certain circumstances there are portions of that code that need more work and a longer, detailed discussion, and that allows the minister to postpone some of the portions of the code. It isn't that the minister will step in and do away with parts of the code or interfere with the technical side of this, but what it does is that it allows us to adopt the code after one year but to make certain exceptions to it if there are areas that need further work.

As far as the administrative penalties go, the administrative penalties are really to be used in a case where there are ongoing concerns with a company or a contractor. Currently we only have the courts to deal with, so we issue an order and then we have to go to prosecution with that. The administrative penalty is meant to be high enough that, in fact, you encourage people to comply, right? It's really more immediate. The easiest thing to think about is a fire code violation, where you have an establishment that exceeds their occupancy load night after night after night. They accumulate a whole list of orders and sort of notifications from the safety codes fire officers, but in fact there's very little immediate action that is taken. This allows that administrative penalty to take effect, and every day that they are out of compliance, they could be issued a \$10,000 fine, up to a maximum of \$100,000.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, and I do thank the member for clarifying. Just a couple of quick questions. I do appreciate the explanation of this system, of actually making it simpler and making companies more accountable to a body. That does make sense to me.

With the example that you gave as far as a situation where the minister may either accelerate or slow down the application of some standards, I appreciate that's the intention. It's just that I get nervous when we through legislation continue to give the minister more authority and the ability to make some unilateral decisions again. I know the current Minister of Municipal Affairs would never think to act outside of the best interests of Albertans. But future ministers: who knows? So, you know, it's making sure that legislation isn't overly restrictive, but at the same time it doesn't give carte blanche to the front bench or to the minister.

Then my last question I think you answered, but my concern, again, is the administrative penalties. Could they or would they supersede the existing maximum penalties for contraventions of safety codes, and will those two align? Again, I don't want to see – and I appreciate with an administrative penalty that the intention is to be a deterrent, but if that levy or fee or penalty is far less than the maximum penalty for contraventions of safety codes, including if it is outside of just a monetary punishment, I mean, for breaching or wilful negligence of safety codes, I wouldn't want to see that company only being given a tiny administrative fee. So I'm not sure if one supersedes the other or if they're going to be in line with that. If the minister could comment, that would be greatly appreciated.

5:40

Mrs. McQueen: I think I can help out with that piece. You can either do an administrative penalty or prosecute. You can't do both. I hope that helps. You can't do both, and it in no way affects the maximum penalty for administrative penalties, so clarity for you on that.

The administrative penalty is only issued by the minister's appointee. Prosecutions can be carried out by a local authority. So just to put some clarity around that for you, okay? Perfect.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, boy. This is one of these acts that is always really hard to describe to constituents when they phone in and they have concerns or questions, because it all tends to get sort of muddled up: safety codes, fire codes, who's the inspector, who do

they report to, who gets in trouble with whom? So any clarity on this is appreciated.

To my reading of this, there are four sections, four points that this bill is attempting to address: the timely adoption of safety codes, the administrative penalties, bylaws, and the administration of it, which is what they were talking about before. I just want to talk about the last two, which are the administrative penalties, which I think is a very good idea – thank you very much – because I know that there have been problems in that area, where it's too little or too much. As a result, sort of nothing ever really works because in order to levy the big penalty, there's so much of a test. There's such a high threshold that you have to meet in order to make sure that you've been fair in putting that forward, because it's like a court case, that it doesn't happen very often and people – let me be careful here – and companies appear to get away with stuff, which really lowers consumers' faith in the system. Yet this is a system that is set up to make sure that they should have faith in something.

I think the administrative penalties are great because they are a kind of middle ground and they can be done for things like repeated noncompliance, that the sponsor was talking about, and that kind of middle ground of persistent and annoying: not a huge thing, not a small thing, something in the middle. So I'm pleased to see that.

I can't say that I'm thrilled to know about private sewage disposal systems being out there in the world, because that's a little bit of a scary thing. So I'm just as happy to see that there are some controls being put in place to allow municipalities to control these. I guess we shouldn't be surprised because, you know, we used to have government-owned – you know, I really believe in publicly owned utilities and service deliveries, garbage collection and things, but the rest of the world doesn't agree with me there. It shouldn't be a surprise. We've got private garbage collection and recycle collection and, in some cases, water delivery, so I guess we shouldn't have been surprised that there was private sewage. But that is an area that does have a public health component to it, and I think it is very appropriate that the municipalities would get control over that. So thank you for that.

The second piece that I noticed was the addition of barrier-free standards. There it is at the bottom of page 2, adding in, which we didn't have before:

This Act is to be interpreted in a manner consistent with the principles of barrier-free design and access to allow persons with physical and sensory disabilities to more easily and safely access and use buildings, facilities and services to which this Act applies.

Please also make this housing. It does include housing, but I just think we need more housing. There's 5 per cent of the population that is in need of barrier-free-access housing, and we don't build anywhere near enough of that. We make them cope with something else, which is not right, in my opinion. It's very nice to have that put into the definition and expectations.

The fact is, you know, that this is hard to do, to get industry, organizations, municipalities, and safety code stakeholders – that's the name – to get them all to agree that this is what needs to happen. I'm surprised that this is as thick as it is for this bill. I can't imagine trying to mediate your way through that one. Given that those are the people that are really dealing with it and it's also both sides of it – I'm always looking to see whether there's a fair balance in who's been involved in creating, and if there's a good ability to kind of fight it out, I'm usually pretty good with the results.

I'm okay with this. The Liberal caucus is okay with it. There'll be no amendments.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers, other comments?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 21 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 22

Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll just reiterate quickly what the intent of the bill is. It'll ban businesses from providing artificial tanning services to minors, prohibit advertising for artificial tanning directed towards minors, mandate health warnings in artificial tanning facilities, and prohibit unsupervised, self-service artificial tanning equipment in public places. We know that skin cancer is linked to artificial tanning, an especially high risk for our youth, whom this is primarily aimed at.

I just want to address a couple of questions that came earlier from Calgary-Fish Creek. It was with respect to enforcement: who would enforce? This, Mr. Chair, would be very similar to the enforcement practices and the designated enforcement officers that we do with tobacco and alcohol. The penalties are outlined in section 9(1).

The member's other question was with respect to whether the regulations or bill would apply to banning tanning for people that are under 25. Just to be clear, it bans tanning for youth under 18 years of age, but the requirement for the checking of ID is for individuals that appear to be under 25.

Hopefully, that clarifies their questions.

With that, I would just ask that all members of this Assembly please support this very important bill. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there other speakers, questions, comments?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 22 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would move that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

5:50

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure tonight to rise and report that the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 24, Bill 14, Bill 19, Bill 21, and Bill 22. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We can't have false information being perpetrated around here, but it is close to 6 p.m., and I would therefore move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:51 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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9718 – 107 St.
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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, March 25, 2015

Issue 26

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 28th Legislature

Third Session

Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Speaker
 Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont (PC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
 Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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 Campbell, Hon. Robin, West Yellowhead (PC)
 Cao, Wayne C.N., Calgary-Fort (PC)
 Casey, Ron, Banff-Cochrane (PC)
 Cusanelli, Christine, Calgary-Currie (PC)
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 Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
 Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)
 Vacant, Battle River-Wainwright
 Vacant, Spruce Grove-St. Albert

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 25, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray. Heavenly Father, help us to understand the needs of others and to speak up for those whose voices may be in the minority, and guide us always in our deliveries on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups. Let's go to Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Young: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise today and introduce to you and through you 35 visitors from Lendrum school. They are joined by their teachers Ms Andrews and Ms Aucoin as well as parent helpers Ms Andrew and Mrs. Banham. I had a wonderful opportunity to speak with them today and saw them at Read In Week, and they wanted to know what colour my socks were today, so they really appreciated my Read In Week talk. I ask them all to rise today and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members a group of 98 visitors from Richard Secord elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. They comprise four grade 6 classes. They're an exceptional group of students. I'm very, very proud to have them in the Legislature. I'd ask all members to join me in giving them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: Are there other school or education groups?

If not, let us move on to other important guests. We have at least 15 on the list, so I would ask you to be as brief and succinct as possible.

Let us start with the Associate Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. I believe you have two separate introductions. Please proceed with both of them.

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a young Albertan who shows great leadership in her community and has been recognized for her outstanding contributions to Alberta's 4-H. Jess Verstappen of High Prairie is a 2014 recipient of the 4-H Premier's award. Miss Verstappen spent five years as a member of the Coyote Acres 4-H Club in High Prairie, where she has held all the positions, from president, vice-president, and treasurer. She has served as a role model for her community and her 4-H club, and I have no doubt that she has a wonderful future as she heads into her pursuits in environmental sciences at Lakeland College. Miss Verstappen is accompanied by Leila Hickman, one of our specialists in ESRD, and they are in the Speaker's gallery. I'll ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction today is from the town of Fox Creek. I have the mayor and their council here. I'd like them to

stand as I call their names. Mayor Jim Ahn, Robin Gervais, Jim Hailes, Chris Stadnyk, and Roy Dell. They're in the members' gallery, and if we could give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I have some very special guests in your gallery. The last time I introduced them to this Assembly, two were toddlers, one was an infant, and another was inside his mommy's tummy, and, in defiance of the laws of aging, one is somehow even more beautiful today than she was seven years ago. I'd ask if they would stand so I can introduce them. My oldest son, Derek, is 10. Then there's Bryce and Spencer, both eight. Joshua is almost six years old. And, of course, there's my angel wife of almost 14 years, Anita. Also, one of my greatest heroes, my father, Robert Anderson Sr., is here.

As all hon. members know, our families sacrifice so much for us to be able to do what we do. For me, most Sunday nights these last seven years ended with goodbyes, hugs, a few tears, and promises of coming home to spend a few hours with them between events. It meant Anita having to look after four little boys possessed with the same very agreeable DNA that I possess. Well, no more. Thanks for everything, Mom and Dad. I love you, Anita, and, boys, I'm coming home for good, and we're going to savour the rest of our lives together.

The Speaker: Thank you for that.

Let us move on to Calgary-Fort, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. With great pleasure I rise to introduce to you and through you to all our members my guests seated in your gallery, Mr. Hung Tran and Mrs. Lan Tran from Winnipeg. They plan to move to our great province of Alberta. They are parents of my daughter-in-law Mimi Tran, who was here campaigning for the ban on youth tanning, so thank you, Minister of Health.

Also, another guest is the first piece of conceptual art from my wife and me when we work together. William Cao is the chief legal counsel of a national company in Calgary.

Another very special guest, who gave me the permanent highest promotion to the rank of grandpa, our grandson Dylan Cao is here on his sabbatical leave of two weeks from kindergarten at the University of Calgary.

I call on my guests to stand up and receive the warmest welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by Calgary-Cross.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two very special introductions today sitting in the Speaker's gallery. The first is Carmen Remenda, who was the executive assistant to not only myself but Dr. Taft and the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. It's her 10-year anniversary on April 18 of serving the Liberal leaders in the Legislature. Carmen, I thank you for your service to democracy and to myself and to all the leaders. I'd ask Carmen to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, a very special guest. It's my mother. Her name is Santosh Sherman. My mother wanted to come here, on what may be the last time I have a chance to address the Assembly, to personally thank you for visiting our home at the time when my father was passing, almost four years ago today. My mother was a young, eight-year-old girl when the partition of India happened, and

her grandfather was the best friend of Lord Mountbatten when they negotiated the partition.

She came as a young immigrant woman to this country in 1972 and had a baby here and raised four boys. She was a seamstress. As you all know, she sewed the uniforms for the Lakers and the Edmonton Oilers when they won all their cups in the early '80s. Also, Mr. Speaker, anything I am as a man, as an individual is because of my mother, who is a very strong woman and individual, who has raised me and always taught me to be hopeful and positive and optimistic. I would ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I believe you have another introduction. Please proceed.

Dr. Sherman: Just departing comments. I came here as a young child with a dream to come to this country. I never thought I would live the life that I've had: on one hand, being a member of government, an independent member, and I've had the opportunity to serve as leader through now the fourth Premier. It's been a true pleasure for me to work with each and every one of you elected members on all sides and serve under you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you so much. Thank you to Alberta, and thank you to everybody who supported me. God bless you all. [Standing ovation]

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly my husband, Lanny Fritz, who is seated up in your gallery. Lanny and I, as you know, first dated when we were 15 and 16, and we're very proud of our two beautiful children, Holly and Matthew. My husband has had an exemplary career in law enforcement. He retired from the Calgary Police Service after 28 years of outstanding service, and he just recently retired from the University of Calgary as the director of campus security after 17 amazing years. Honey, you've been holding my hand for 50 years now, and you've never let go. I love you, and I'm so glad you're here today. Please stand.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week our Premier introduced the members of the Métis Women's Economic Security Council to this House. Today on behalf of his leadership it is truly my honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Legislative Assembly the members of the First Nations Women's Economic Security Council. These councils were the brainchild of the Member for Calgary-Varsity and were established by then Minister of Aboriginal Relations, now Finance minister. Both councils have done an exemplary job, and as a result our government is accepting the recommendations of these two councils, which are aimed at improving social and economic outcomes for aboriginal women in Alberta.

These strong women of the First Nations Women's Economic Security Council are with us today, and I ask that they stand as I call their names: Co-chair Grace Auger, Co-chair Koren Lightning-Earle, Dr. Andrea Kennedy, Angela Grier, Anna Wowchuck, Barb Wendt, Brenda Joly, Cindy Provost, Darlene Plamondon, Janice Tanton, Karri-Lynn Paul, Kathleen Laboucan, Kim Shade, Dr. Lana Potts, Leah Bear Chief, Marggo Pariseau, Nicole Robertson, Peggy Richardson, Rita Marten, Tanya Schur, Theresa Bear Chief. Mr.

Speaker, they are standing in the members' gallery, and I ask that this House give them a very, very warm welcome.

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, followed by the Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. An emotional day as we say goodbye to people. It's my privilege to introduce through you and to you two very special people in my life. The first one is a young man by the name of Evan Menzies, who is our director of communications. He's probably one of the best directors of communications I've ever had the privilege of working with, and it's been an honour and a privilege to be able to work with him.

The second one is Jennifer Wainwright, who works in my Calgary office, who is our guru on Health and has made me successful on the Health file and being able to hold the government accountable.

I want to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives of some of the 40 students who were awarded the Persons Case scholarship this year. They'll be joining us in the House at 2. This scholarship was created to honour the Alberta women who fought and won the right for women to be deemed persons under Canadian law in 1929. The Persons Case scholarships are awarded to students whose studies will contribute to the advancement of women and to those who are studying in nontraditional fields.

We are honoured to have some of them with us today. Please join me in welcoming, first, Ruby Littlechild, MBA in community economic development, former leg. assistant for the Member for Lesser Slave Lake; Quinn Boser, B.Sc. in mechanical engineering and biomed co-op; Rebecca Taylor, MA in sociology; Darcie Kutryk, diploma in architectural technology; Hailey Ross, social work diploma; Salma Elmallah, B.Sc. in electrical engineering; Emily Dutton, BA in women's and gender studies; Leandra Shade, B.Sc. in electrical engineering; and, of course, Wendy Joy, the manager with the women's equality and advancement unit and co-chair of the Persons Case scholarship. Congratulations. Please join me in welcoming them.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the Minister of Finance.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a few special guests. This week is school break in Calgary, and my guests had a visit to the Legislature on their must-do list. Seated in the members' gallery, from Calgary, are Jeff Gaulin and his two children, Jonah Gaulin, who is a grade 7 student at John Ware junior high school, and Audrey Gaulin, who is a grade 5 student at Nellie McClung elementary school. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, followed by the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Ed.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you my press secretary, Kevin Zahara. Kevin has had a diverse career, being elected to town council in Athabasca when he was 19 years old and elected twice in Edson. He was also one of the youngest radio DJs in the country and continued his career in radio after serving on council. He is dedicated to his community; he is an avid volunteer. I had the pleasure of officiating at his wedding last July. Kevin has spent many hours working on Budget 2015 with the rest of my staff, and I want to thank him for his dedication. I want to thank his wife and his daughter for allowing him to work late into the night. I'd ask Kevin to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education, followed by the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all of my colleagues four members of the Alberta Economic Development Authority Board, whose annual activity report I will be tabling today. This board consists of senior-level executives who are leaders in their communities and whose depths of knowledge and expertise will continue to serve our province well. I'd ask that they rise as I call out their names to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: Mr. Jim Carter, former president of Syncrude Canada and now serving on several boards and on the Premier's Advisory Committee on the Alberta Public Service; Mr. Andy Calitz, CEO of LNG Canada, a Shell-PetroChina-KOGAS-Mitsubishi joint venture, prior to which he was responsible for new business developments and strategic investments; Mr. Yasmin Jivraj, president and co-owner of Acrodex, a leading provider of strategic IT services for numerous Canadian businesses; and Marc de La Bruyère, principal and chairman of Maclab Enterprises. He has served as a board member of several educational, community, and nonprofit organizations and also on the Premier's advisory council on the public service. With them is Robert Fernandez, executive director of the Alberta Economic Development Authority.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If we could all give them a warm round of applause.

I do have one additional introduction.

The Speaker: Please proceed with your second introduction.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the member from the constituency of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Natasha and Greg Dunbar and their daughter Bailey. We are very privileged to have this family here today as they are joining us for a very important reason. Last year 13-year-old Morgan Dunbar, Natasha and Greg's daughter and Bailey's twin sister, took her own life after being the victim of bullying. The Dunbars are resilient and have been strong in their healing process. They have created a new foundation called Morgan's Mission to raise awareness about cyberbullying. They are here today to meet with government officials to discuss cyberbullying, mental health, and suicide prevention support. I would ask Natasha, Greg, and Bailey to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we have two more introductions. Let's see if we can get them both in, starting with the Minister of Energy, followed by Calgary-East.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through to all hon. members of the Assembly

Mr. Scott Wenger, who has joined us in the gallery. He's a great representative of his company, Suncor, and a great ambassador for the oil and gas industry in Alberta. I'd ask him to rise and receive the traditional welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a dear friend of mine, Mr. Arman Chak. Arman is an Edmonton lawyer, a bencher of the Law Society, an active member of the community, a dedicated volunteer, and much, much more. Arman is seated in the public gallery. I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

We have about 15 seconds left. Is there anyone else with an introduction quickly? I see none.

Hon. members, before we start Oral Question Period, could I just remind you of the memo I sent out yesterday regarding photos that will be taken in Chamber tomorrow. Please review that because there are some photos during the procession entrance, another one right after the prayer, and then during the budget speech.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Let us begin. Thirty-five seconds for each question, 35 seconds for each response.

Let us be led off by the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Health Care Funding

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night Albertans saw two campaign-style TV ads. One was the typical liberal tax and spend message, and the other came from the leader of the third party. The Premier believes taxes are the answer. He calls it a health levy, but it has nothing to do with health care. It's a Kananaskis golf course tax, a pay raise for upper management tax, a billion-dollar corporate welfare tax, a fine china for the Premier's office tax. It's a PC waste and mismanagement tax. Why won't the Premier just call it what it is?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, it's hard to know what to make of that. This is a difficult time for our province. We all know this. It is, however, also a hopeful time for our province as we stick together as Albertans. One cannot help but be moved to listen to the Member for Calgary-Fort speak about his responsibilities as a grandfather or the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark speak about his responsibilities as a son or the Member for Calgary-Cross speak about her responsibilities as a spouse. It's time for all Albertans to pull together.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've heard that Redford hope message before.

The Premier says that Albertans will have to start paying for health care. Who does he think was paying for it all along? We already spend as much on health care as B.C., who has more people and gets better results, but instead of reining in PC waste and excess, this Premier believes more taxes are the answer. It's not, Premier. The answer is acknowledging the sins of this government and governments past and reining in the spending that created the most bloated government in Canada. Mr. Premier, why won't you do that instead of raising taxes on hard-working Albertans?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, this government will deal with the challenges that we face on behalf of Albertans. We will deal with the recognition that people in this province are losing their jobs. There is not a person in this Chamber that is not touched by someone in this province who has lost a job at this point. We're cognizant of that. We have a fine health care system. It needs to be improved, and we need to work on eliminating waste. We have excellent front-line workers. We also have an exceptional minister that is hands on, that is doing a phenomenal job in this department.

Mrs. Forsyth: No, Premier, it's not Albertans' fault; it's your fault for spending like drunken sailors.

The Premier talks about a 10-year plan, but it may as well be a hundred-year plan. We've seen three-year fiscal plans and five-year health plans before, and because they never acknowledge that government waste is the problem, they never work. Now new taxes will enable more of what we've seen before: more spending on golf courses, sky palaces, management, and perks for your friends. It's a PC waste and mismanagement tax. Why won't the Premier admit that this government's spending is the problem and save Albertans from the biggest tax hike ever?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are too many inconsistencies and incorrect statements in that statement to respond to all of them, but let me just be clear. This government will deal in a responsible way with the finances of this province. We will protect the interests of Albertans and their children and their grandchildren, and we will emerge from this stronger than we are today with or without the help of the opposition.

The Speaker: Second main set of questions. The hon. opposition leader.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's be clear. The tax increase will damage economic growth. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business says that the idea of this new tax is not something businesses would look forward to, saying that, and I'll quote, the government should be able to recognize that taking money out of the economy for health care premiums is especially going to make tough economic times even more tough. Now is not the time to introduce new taxes on Albertans. Premier, will you back down from the most dangerous tax when Albertans are hurting the most?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear that we are not going to entertain a health care premium that was done in the past. That was a regressive tax, and it was hard on low-income wage earners. I'd just ask the member across to stay tuned for the budget tomorrow.

Mrs. Forsyth: Minister, it's a tax.

Raising taxes when times are tough shows a serious lack of imagination for economic and fiscal policies. It's unoriginal and short sighted and will hurt our ability to grow the economy. What takes real courage is looking in the mirror and staring back at the fine china, the MLA palaces, the billions in perks and pay for managers, and getting your house in order. Premier, please. Will you stop this tax and finally get serious about cutting the layers of PC fat across government while protecting front-line services?

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear that we are looking after front-line services. We've made it very clear to Albertans in our talks across the province that we'll look after our core services in health care, in education, our most vulnerable, and our seniors. We will do what we have to do to streamline our

programming and reduce our spending in a very pragmatic and practical manner so that we do not put this province into recession and we do not kill jobs for Albertans.

Mrs. Forsyth: Minister, you're killing jobs for Albertans because you couldn't keep your fiscal house in order.

Here are the facts, Premier. While Albertans are hurting, PC politicians and managers have never had it so good. While you drain billions on golf courses, fine china, new MLA offices, and corporate payouts, you are asking Albertans to pay more. This tax will mean less for the economy and more money for misguided PC priorities. The idea that you can tax your way back to prosperity is not how we built this great province. Premier, please. On behalf of Albertans will you step back from this awful, misguided policy before it's too late?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's awful rich coming from the Leader of the Opposition, her comments about fine china and spending. I would suggest that the government has been very clear in talking to Albertans that we're going to take a three-lever approach with the situation in phases. We are going to get our budget in balance moving forward, and we're going to do it in a very constructive and a very pragmatic manner to make sure that we don't put any undue hardship on our working poor or our most vulnerable. We will make sure that we have a budget that is in the best interests of Albertans moving forward over the next 10 years so that we are in the best position of any province in the next decade.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Provincial Fiscal Position

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At a time in our province's history when we most need strong, clear, courageous leadership, we now see where the Premier stands. First he blamed the fiscal crisis on oil prices, then he blamed Albertans, and now he's trying to throw past Premiers under the bus. Everyone is responsible except him. Given that you were elected to office for years before becoming Premier, including serving as federal Minister of Industry, why didn't you sound any alarms that Alberta should get off the resource revenue roller coaster? Why were you hiding?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to reassure the hon. member that what he will see tomorrow is, to quote himself, "strong, clear, courageous leadership" from the government, and I hope that he supports us.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, what we saw last evening was Albertans witnessing a remarkable example of armchair quarterbacking. He blamed Premier after Premier for putting Alberta in this fiscal PC mess, yet at no time in the decades that this Premier was a member of the PC Party did he speak up to the leadership of this party. To the Premier: whose interests were you protecting by saying nothing? Whose interests?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, I travelled the province with the Premier during the leadership review in the summer. I've been by his side since he became leader in September. I can tell you that there's nobody in this House that has more integrity or has a better vision for the province of Alberta, and our 10-year fiscal plan will show that moving forward.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The coming election has nothing to do with Martha and Henry's families and has everything to do with this Premier's self-interest. He is calling an early election to reassert his grasp on power and hide the deep cuts he has planned for after the election. Will the Premier admit that you're hiding again from Albertans and not revealing the difficult fiscal decisions you're going to make after the election?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I suggest the members stay tuned for the budget tomorrow. You'll see a very detailed five-year plan and a 10-year vision for the province. He will see that this Premier will make the tough decisions to make sure that Alberta is in the best fiscal position it can be for the next decade moving forward.

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

2:00

Health Care Funding (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier admitted that his PC government is planning to reintroduce Alberta's health care premium. This waiting room tax is a tax on families while profitable corporations get off scot-free. Albertans know very well that there's a crisis in our hospitals, and they also know that freezing the health care budget will make that crisis worse. To the Premier: why are you asking Albertans to pay more so that they get less, health care in particular?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, to correct the hon. member, I did not say last night that we would reintroduce the former health care premium. That is not the suggestion that was made. All Albertans expect and deserve to have excellent health care. We deserve to have fine health care workers, front-line workers. That's what this government is focused on. We will eliminate waste and inefficiency in the system, but we intend to preserve the quality of front-line health care services for Albertans.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the government's own budget survey a mere 28 per cent of Albertans said that they wanted a waiting room tax while a clear majority supported rolling back the reckless PC corporate tax cuts. The Premier and his PC government continue to ignore the voices of ordinary Albertans. Again to the Premier: if you're not going to listen to a single thing they say, why did you waste the time of more than 40,000 Albertans with your budget survey?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have consulted with Albertans; we've listened to Albertans. There's, again, not a single member in this House who is not affected by the fact that there are Albertans in this province losing jobs. We worry about that. We worry about it for young people; we worry about it for young people who are graduating from universities and colleges. We will not introduce a job-killing tax, where every single point results in the loss of 8,900 jobs in this province. That might be the policy of the NDP; it's not the policy of this party.

Ms Notley: Instead you're introducing a whole job-killing plan.

Mr. Speaker, pay more; get less: this Alberta looks more and more like a big bank every day. Pay more with the PC's waiting room tax; get less with a frozen provincial budget that won't account for 80,000 new Albertans, inflation, or the sorry state of our health care system right now. To the Premier. Your government

is ignoring what Albertans want, you've allowed the crisis in Alberta's hospitals to get worse, and now you're asking them to accept fewer services and pay more for them. Why should Albertans accept this?

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, you know, I get a little tired of listening to the opposition fearmonger about the crisis in the health care system. I spent six months in the health care system. I'm here today because of it. I spent more time in hospitals, labs, and clinics than any member in this House has. We have excellent front-line workers, we have excellent doctors, we have excellent specialists. We should be proud of our health care system and proud of this province.

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

Electricity Regulation

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: You have the floor.

Mr. Anglin: It takes more than two years to connect the proposed project to Alberta's electricity system. Some projects take up to as much as three years. Industry groups, consumer groups, and all stakeholders agree that streamlining the regulatory process could easily save consumers \$40 million annually. Given that we could save consumers money, why does this government refuse to correct the regulatory process governing our electricity system?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have an efficient regulatory system. This member spent the first part of his career here arguing that we didn't have any regulation, and now he's arguing we should have less regulation. It's a little confusing sometimes. I'm sure we all share the same sentiment.

Mr. Anglin: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A point of order, the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, during that last response.

Let us hear your first supplemental.

Mr. Anglin: Did you get my point of order on that? Thank you very much. I want to argue that one.

The AESO's, Alberta Electric System Operator's, role and responsibility have not changed in the 15 years since deregulation, yet its annual regulatory budget and cost to consumers has skyrocketed. Why is the AESO's annual budget ballooning out of control?

Mr. Oberle: The AESO's budget is not ballooning out of control, Mr. Speaker. They're dealing with a significant number of projects as we build out and add to our generation capacity and transmission capacity in this province, and they've had to respond to that.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nearly 15 years ago this government began its implementation of deregulation. Since that time the cost of regulation has risen from \$13 million a year to \$150 million a year. To the minister: why have these regulatory costs of a deregulated market ballooned over 1,100 per cent?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, in that same time period Alberta constructed a power system and a grid the size of Saskatchewan for not one penny of public debt. The correct comparator here, the one

that Albertans should be interested in, is that our price of power is the lowest it's been since we deregulated.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Health Care Funding (continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2008 this same government eliminated health care premiums. Now we hear that they'll be breaking that promise tomorrow. Flip-flops are now so common in this government that they're hardly news. Will the Premier talk about these health fees, and will it be another flat tax that will hurt working Albertans and charge a single mother making minimum wage the same as a bank vice-president?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member knows better. Stay tuned to the budget tomorrow.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This Premier is once again ruling by opinion polls and not doing what is best for the province, ignoring the elephant in the room, the unsustainable revenue structure, and distracting Albertans with this on-again, off-again health premium. Why are you waiting till after the election to tell Albertans the real truth about how deep the cuts will be?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, we have a budget scheduled for tomorrow. I think the address is at 3 o'clock. The member should stay tuned, and he'll get the answers he's looking for.

Dr. Swann: Well, given that the health levies and premiums have been ruled out not only by this government but seven other governments in Canada, when will the government stop misleading Albertans and bring in a fair tax structure?

Mr. Campbell: Same answer as before, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Let's move on to the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Highway 732

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the summer of 2014 the town of Fairview, in my constituency, completed a rehabilitation project on Highway 732, that goes within the town limits. This project included new water and sewer lines to replace failing infrastructure. Highway 732 bears heavy traffic. The overlay on this dug-up highway was replaced with uncrowned asphalt patches at the completion of the project and is now failing, leaving the road in very poor condition. To the Minister of Transportation: with the work completed on Highway 732, will the department address the needed paving issues on this section of the highway, as they indicated they would?

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to this hon. member for the question. He's a great advocate for his constituents, and his strong voice will be missed in this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my department is aware of the issue in the town of Fairview, and my department has been working closely with the town to evaluate this stretch of road. We are in the process of hiring a design consultant right now, and there are plans to hire an engineer this summer to re-evaluate the conditions of highway 732, or 113th Street, after this year's spring thaw.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when the paving is done on this section, will the department install wheelchair ramps along this section of highway, particularly at the intersections where the school crossings exist?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, wheelchair accessibility is something this government and my department take very seriously. It's critical that Albertans with disabilities have safe access to sidewalks, especially at school crossings. I'm pleased to inform this member and his constituents that the design for this project will include wheelchair access.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good news.

Again to the same minister: will the department also be performing repairs during this project to replace the curbs and gutters that have basically disappeared along highway 732?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, any paving project along 113th Street in Fairview will include the necessary curb and gutter work. My department will continue to work closely with the town to determine the extent of the work needed, and the project will proceed as provincial budgets allow.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Calgary-South East.

2:10 Government Spending at Fiscal Year-end

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's hard to believe that this Premier is adamant about raising taxes while members of his cabinet blew through \$104 million in March madness spending. Millions for fine china, napkins, golf shirts, glassware, linen, and cutlery: these are PC priorities. The Infrastructure minister couldn't explain this spike in spending. Minister, if you don't know where or why or how this money was pushed out the door, will you do the right thing and call on the Auditor General to fix this mess?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let us be clear that this member is speaking about last year. We have been very clear that our focus is to ensure that we are minimizing our spending, focusing on the economy, protecting the savings of Albertans, protecting the jobs of Albertans. That's our focus.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the eve of one of the largest tax increases in history Albertans expect some accountability for this type of excessive waste. If the Premier's office thinks new fine china, glassware, and cutlery are a necessity when times are tough, Albertans deserve an explanation. Wildrose thinks that \$104 million in extra spending is a waste. Will your government commit

to putting a fresh set of eyes on this spending to protect Albertans from dangerous tax hikes?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and his party should know that a year makes a lot of difference, and he shouldn't really be confusing Albertans by comparing last year's spending to what's taking place on my watch as Premier.

Mr. Saskiw: Mr. Speaker, if the government doesn't take \$100 million in spending every March seriously, how can Albertans expect and know that they need to pay more taxes? I'll give the minister one last chance. Will he call in the Auditor General to inspect this spending, or will the Wildrose be forced to require an investigation because you won't do your job?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite continue to live in a fantasy world, where they like to impose their ideas of reality upon the rest of us. The rest of us know better. The fact remains that there's no fine bone china. There are catering services, that are required once in a while at McDougall Centre for up to 200 people, and catering-style cups and plates were ordered. Stainless steel knives and forks were ordered, nothing fancy, nothing fine bone. I would suggest that the members opposite please get the facts right.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's move on to Calgary-South East, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Cancer Treatment

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak about a constituent that I've come to know through my constituency office and the events that I've held in my community. She's a devoted wife, a loving mother, and she has stage 4 cancer, which has spread to her bones and liver. Many Albertans fight with all their will to combat this terrible disease. Her treatment regimen consists of drugs which are not available in Canada yet like Perjeta. If she wishes to receive these drugs, she must travel out of country, which is a physical and emotional strain on her and her loved ones. To the Minister of Health: she's not covered through the health care system, particularly for the drug Perjeta, again adding further costs to her and her family. Mr. Minister, how often do we review treatment plans and best practices to our approach to cancer so that we can provide more in-province . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's hear from the minister now.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, first of all, our hearts and prayers go out to the family. I can't speak to individual cases, but we have a strong evidence-based decision-making process for determining which drugs can be used and which can't. Drugs new to the market are covered by Health Canada and approved by Health Canada. Our benefit list is updated monthly when required. Cancer drugs included on the list are provided at no cost to Albertans. You know, Albertans can be assured that we are employing the best practices when it comes to cancer care. I also want to inform this hon. member that the new uses for Perjeta are under review at the national level by the pan-Canadian oncology drug review.

Mr. Fraser: To the same minister. As you mentioned, the situation is heartbreaking, and our hearts do go out to that family. We also

know that there are similar stories throughout the province like my own: the loss of my mother, my mother-in-law, my grandmother, and the cancer that's in my father now. Can you tell me, Mr. Minister, that we have a robust and comprehensive plan to beat this disease once and for all?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Yes. I thank the hon. member for the question. I don't think there are many families in this province who have not been touched by cancer. We have Changing Our Future: Alberta's Cancer Plan to 2030, which is the government's plan to reduce the risk of cancer, increase cancer cure rates, and reduce the stress for cancer patients. We'll accomplish these goals by working with partners on various initiatives, including research, screening programs, and providing emotional support to cancer patients. Alberta Health Services' latest report on cancer rates shows that our screening and prevention efforts are having a positive impact.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, can you just tell Albertans how through the Alberta government they can navigate this terrible disease, whether it's through websites or information?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we have an excellent service, provided by patient navigators, that helps Albertans with cancer find the resources they need. Patient navigators are at the cancer centres across the province to help cancer patients make informed decisions and understand and prepare for the treatments. Patient navigators also improve co-ordination of care by working with other health care providers and helping patients access financial resources and community supports. We do all we can.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Carbon Emission Reduction

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Incentives are designed to change behaviour, and putting a price on carbon to change behaviour has been tried and triumphed elsewhere. This government can bury its head in the sand, but failing to do something other than manipulate figures has had and will have serious consequences for Alberta's environment and its main industry. B.C. has an effective carbon tax, the EU, Norway, so to the Premier: why don't we? Why don't we have an effective carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta was the first jurisdiction in North America to actually put a price on carbon. We have \$15 per tonne with a 12 per cent intensity. We also are committed to slowing our emissions, and we're doing a great deal in this province. We were the first jurisdiction to do that, setting realistic targets, and we're meeting those targets.

Ms Blakeman: Don't talk about that \$15 levy again. It's just embarrassing.

To the same minister: given that Keystone has taught us that pipelines just will not get built until the environmental protections are embraced as the number one factor – and I know that this government desperately wants pipelines – what will the government

do to repair and advance Alberta's environmental efforts and position Alberta as a leader, not some two-year-old kid lagging far behind?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very glad that the member brought up our carbon fund. She may find it embarrassing, but both Saskatchewan and the province of British Columbia are duplicating ours, B.C. under LNG and Saskatchewan modelling ours. We have a great system here in Alberta, that keeps the economy strong while taking care of the environment.

Ms Blakeman: Everyone is paying the carbon tax in B.C., not just our oil and gas companies.

To the Premier. This Premier has a 20-year history with pipelines, yet none of them got built. Is he ready to do something now? Are you ready to shut down coal-fired generation, put a real price on carbon, target 30 per cent more on non oil and gas energy, try feed-in tariffs for solar and wind? Are you ready to try anything at all? You might be more successful.

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member does an injustice to Albertans because she denigrates the system that we have in this province, that people come from all over the world to admire and to follow in terms of their own carbon policies. Frankly, last week the minister beside me announced that Alberta would be a partner of choice with the World Bank, where we lead the world in terms of reducing emissions and venting and flaring of methane. That's the kind of thing that we're achieving as Albertans. The hon. member should take pride in it and celebrate it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Foreign Qualification Recognition

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I often hear stories from my constituents who are underemployed and overqualified for their jobs. They have an education and a background in areas like dentistry and junior accounting from their country of origin, but when they come here to make a life for themselves in Canada, their qualifications are not recognized, and they find themselves serving tables and driving cabs. My question to the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: with so many Canadians who have come here from other countries so overqualified for their jobs, what is the minister doing so this . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

We'll have to hear from the hon. minister now.

2:20

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As always, we try to help Albertans and Canadians to find work first, but when people come here with qualifications from other places in the world, the very best thing we can do for Alberta, which is also the best thing we can do for them, is to get their qualifications recognized so they can practise in the field of endeavour where they've been trained. There's a lot of work to be done. We work with professional regulatory organizations to co-ordinate that. There's a lot of work to be done, and it goes on. The hon. member is right to point out that this is an issue.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the foreign qualification recognition plan was launched more than six years ago, why have we not seen progress in recognizing those individuals?

Mr. McIver: Well, I'm going to take a little issue with my colleague on this one. We actually have made progress. I can tell the hon. member and you, Mr. Speaker, that since 2009 we have invested nearly \$4 million in grants through our foreign qualification recognition innovation fund to support 50 projects to improve and streamline the assessment of foreign qualifications. Examples are the College of Dietitians, who work with the University of Alberta on four web-based bridging programs so that somebody doesn't have to redo their whole training but can, rather, just fill in the blanks of where they need upgrading; also, the physiotherapists and many other professional regulatory organizations.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Final supplemental.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: given that despite this progress the number of professions included in this plan is very low, why is this program not accessible to more professions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right. We need to include more professions, and I'm happy to report that it is being done. In the pan-Canadian framework that I mentioned, there are 10 new targeted occupations identified, including midwives, psychologists, carpenters, welders, and electricians. Our government continues to work with the professional regulatory organizations to bridge those gaps, to make sure that in those places where people can't get recognized, we can help them do that, and the work continues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Corporate Taxes

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In this government's own budget survey 69 per cent of Albertans supported large, profitable corporations paying their fair share. The PC government, led by a former vice-president of a big bank, is set to ignore them. It's clear that this PC government cares more about corporate bottom lines than about the people of Alberta. To the Minister of Finance: why don't you make sure that everyone is paying their fair share before hitting Alberta families with cuts to vital programs and health care charges?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that everybody does pay their fair share in Alberta. This government is about creating jobs. It's about creating investment in the province. We are going to make sure that we have the lowest tax regime in Canada so that people continue to come here and invest, corporations both large and small, and we will continue to do this to make sure that this province is successful moving into the future.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, if you laid all the economists in the world end to end, you still wouldn't reach a consensus, and they are depending entirely on one economist for their proof. Given that this government has already cut corporate taxes by over one-third, the lowest in the country, can the minister tell us why, if lower corporate taxes create jobs, these companies have laid off tens of thousands of hard-working Albertans in the last several months, including 14,000 in February alone?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member just made the argument why we won't raise corporate taxes, because they are laying off thousands of workers in the province. We know that we want to continue to create jobs, so we're not going to raise corporate taxes. It's that simple.

Mr. Mason: Well, it's overly simple in this minister's mind, Mr. Speaker.

Given that in 2012 the state of Wisconsin elected a Republican governor, who laid off thousands of staff, slashed the public service, and cut taxes on rich corporations, and given that in the same year Minnesotans elected a Democrat government that did the opposite and given that today Minnesota far outstrips Wisconsin in economic growth and job creation, can the minister explain how Jack Mintz's far-fetched economic theories square with the practical realities of these two states?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, to compare the states to a province is like comparing apples and oranges. For example, one thing: we have publicly funded health care that we will not apologize for; the states don't. We've talked to more than just Jack Mintz. We talked to economists from the major leading banks both in Canada and the United States, and they have all said to us to take a very prudent approach moving forward with the budget. We're going to do so.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Jeneroux: Mr. Speaker, I meet with many of our partners in the postsecondary system. Just yesterday I was at my alma mater, the U of A campus, and I can tell you that like many others, they are nervously awaiting tomorrow's provincial budget. Advanced education is a necessity in navigating today's job market, but it isn't cheap. Students that I've spoken to are concerned that tomorrow's budget will lift Alberta's tuition cap, and they're also concerned that their voices may not be heard in discussions about Campus Alberta moving forward. To the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. I want to clarify: have you heard the students' concerns about removing a tuition cap, and will you commit to involving students in the postbudget discussions?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Ed.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have heard the students' concerns. I met with students last week, and I heard their concerns about removing the tuition cap. I can tell you definitively that there are no imminent changes to the tuition cap. Our postsecondary budget consultation with Campus Alberta partners will focus on ways to make the system sustainable, accessible, and focused on excellence. Campus Alberta's student leaders will play a large role in that consultation. It's crucial that they have a big voice at the table, and they will.

Mr. Jeneroux: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's mandate letter to the minister specifically directs this minister to create and implement a plan for long-term, stable, and predictable funding. Can the minister please tell me when this plan will be complete?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier said in last night's address, Budget 2015 will take immediate action to deal with our fiscal challenges in a balanced way, protecting core services and maintaining Alberta's tax advantages. The budget will

also look to the future and bring forward a 10-year plan for this province. Campus Alberta is a big part of our future, and we know that institutions are better able to deliver when they have long-term, stable, and predictable funding. This will be a big part of the conversation that government will have going forward and part of our postbudget discussions with Campus Alberta.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. There have been lots of talks with the Campus Alberta system in the past, but can you clarify, Minister: is this just another exercise, and what can you tell students about why this time is different?

Mr. Scott: Thank you again for the question. We don't have the luxury of just talking for the sake of an exercise, Mr. Speaker. We need to get results. The Premier and Alberta's government are focused on a system that delivers excellence. This consultation process with our partners will develop a five-year plan for Campus Alberta. The result of this plan will be a system that is firing on all cylinders, a system that is sustainable, accessible, and focused on excellence. All ideas will be on the table, including funding models, revenue generation for institutions, improvements to student aid, and ensuring that apprenticeship technical training is better aligned with labour demands.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you were almost superseded by your leader, but I'll recognize you at this time.

Education Funding

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, last night the Premier told us that he intends to cut the Education budget further by holding the line on spending. Eighty thousand people are expected to move to Alberta this year alone, and while it's true that they don't bring schools with them, they don't bring teachers or support staff either. To the Minister of Education: will the minister explain how he can hold the line on spending and still expect to provide the teachers and support staff that our children need to be successful?

Mr. Dirks: I'm very pleased the member opposite has asked this question. I value every opportunity to speak about our stellar education system, one of the best in the world, Mr. Speaker. The reason why it's one of the best in the world is that we invest about \$38 million per day right now, and we'll just have to wait for the budget tomorrow to see what our investment will be going forward. One of the reasons why we have such an outstanding education system is because of the very high-quality teachers in our system. We can be proud of every one of them.

Mr. Bilous: CBE shows that per-student funding has been declining for years. Given that classrooms are already bursting at the seams and given that kids are not getting the one-to-one support they need due to a shortage of staff, to the same minister: even if this government finally makes good on its new-school promises, how will they staff these schools with a hold-the-line budget?

2:30

Mr. Dirks: Goodness me, Mr. Speaker. He talks about us, that even if we made good on our promises. Has he not been listening to how many new schools we have been opening in past months, how much great progress we are making on building the new schools, the 232 new school projects, which are a priority for this government and for all Albertans? He ought to be saying in this Assembly that this

government is doing amazing things when it comes to funding education. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you have the floor.

Mr. Bilous: I guess the promise was to hammer signs in the ground.

Mr. Speaker, given that kids with special learning needs do not have the help they need because there simply aren't enough assistants or support staff and given that class sizes are continuing to balloon, to the same minister: how will this PC government possibly support the kids of 80,000 new Albertans when they can't even support our existing students?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, one of the strengths of Alberta is our education system. That's one of the reasons why people move to this province. They want to be part of experiencing for their children a wonderful, world-class education system. We do value every student, and we particularly value those who have special needs. We provide school boards with \$38 million a day. We trust them to make wise judgments about how they're going to allocate those dollars so that all of our special-needs children are going to be appropriately educated.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Ambulance Service Availability

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ambulances are an essential part of our medical system. When I or my constituents are in an emergency situation, we rely on an ambulance to get us to a hospital as quickly as possible. I am concerned about the so-called code reds. How can we accept a situation in a province such as Alberta where there are no ambulances available? My first question is to the Minister of Health. How is this an acceptable result of the most expensive health system in Canada?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. A code red means that at a point in time – it might be for two minutes or two seconds – an ambulance isn't available. This year we've had some difficult times, and I appreciate that, but I want to be very clear that it does not directly endanger a patient, and it does not mean any ambulance is not going to be delivered to a site. Be very clear about that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. To the Minister of Health: given that any incidence of a code red is cause for concern, is this exceptionally high incidence recently a sign that Alberta Health Services is failing?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health Services is doing all they can in very difficult times. This government has in the last little while increased the number of opportunities in long-term care beds, continuing care, and supportive living, and as a result of that we've been able to move people out of the system, into these facilities, to open up opportunities within our acute care beds. It's difficult times. We're working hard to ensure the system operates well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Fenske: Thank you. To the same minister: it's a broken emergency service, Minister. What are you doing to fix it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, code red is a dangerous issue, but it is very short term, as I indicated earlier. It's two minutes or two seconds. The fact of the matter is that we're making strides though creating more opportunities for paramedics to do more things at the site. They don't have to move people to the hospitals, which will free up our ambulances. We've also recently announced our rural health care plan, which is going to direct that all of our rural ambulances will not be able to stay at hospitals but must return to their home site on an immediate basis. We're doing, I think, an exceptional job in ensuring that all of our people are taken care of.

Education Concerns

Mr. Hehr: Five years ago this government let go school board trustees in the Northland school division because of poor student attendance and a lack of progress being made in educating our kids. Essentially, this government took responsibility to fix what was clearly broken. Fast forward five years. Unbelievably, this situation has gotten worse. The Auditor General reported that as many as one-third of our students in this district are chronically absent. To the minister: how come your ministry has made no progress in educating our kids in the Northland school division?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, when I became minister or very shortly thereafter under this government's new management, I became aware of the situation in Northland. Of course, we would want all of our students to be attending school regularly. It's a matter of deep concern to me that a report has come forward indicating that there is a significant number of children who are not regularly in attendance at school. I've met with the Auditor. We've had a good discussion on this matter, and we have every intention of working with the official trustee to ensure that we are putting a good plan in place to ameliorate this attendance problem.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, the report notwithstanding, this government knew five years ago that there was a problem. That's why they got rid of the school board. Nevertheless, what has your department done? We can see absolutely no tangible evidence of your moving forward on this file. Have you inquired what the heck your department is doing to fix this education system?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, one of the solutions to the Northland situation is to have an elected board, which will provide solid governance in that division. That's very important. As a new Minister of Education that is the direction in which I am moving, and I certainly welcome all members to support us in that regard.

Mr. Hehr: Public education has not been a priority since I arrived at this Legislature. We have no full-day kindergarten yet, class sizes have skyrocketed, and we have 1,500 fewer teachers in our classrooms as a result of not keeping funding levels where they were. Schools have been promised and not been built. Can the minister admit that there have been victims as a result of us not fixing our fiscal structure, and they have been our school-aged children?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I take umbrage at the member opposite's suggestion that we are not building schools. That's the first thing he said that was mistaken. In this Assembly we have been talking about the largest school build project in the history of Canada: 232 school projects, new schools, modernizations, renovations in virtually every school division across the province. So I do hope the member recognizes once and for all that this government is leading when it comes to school infrastructure.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Government Revenues

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Member for Red Deer-South asked an important question to the Minister of Finance about corporate taxes, and we've had several other questions today on corporate taxes. We all heard the canned response, but unfortunately I'm not convinced. [interjections] Sorry. To the Minister of Finance. We know we're all in this together. We know that everyone has to share . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry; we'll have to hear from the Minister of Finance now. The time has elapsed.

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't feel like we're all in this together right now.

Before I go on – I won't have another chance – I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for his service in the Legislature. I've had the chance to work with him as a critic. He's always been a very honourable individual. He's got a great sense of humour. I wish him the best in his future endeavours.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, I'm sorry, but your time has elapsed as well, so let us move on to the first supplemental.

Mr. Casey: Maybe I'll just ask my first question, then, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Finance: what possible reason can there be for not considering an increase in corporate taxes?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I've been pretty clear on this. Maybe the member is a little older than I thought he was, and his hearing has gone, so let me say it one more time. A 1 per cent increase in taxes means that we're going to lose \$6 billion in investment in this province, and we'll lose 9,000 jobs. This government will not introduce measures that are going to kill jobs. Corporations are small and they're large. Many of our small corporations are employing just a few employees. We will do what we want to do to continue to make sure that Albertans work in this province and continue to pay taxes and make this the best province in the country.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that increasing government revenues is essential, will the minister not consider reintroducing the old health care premium system as one method?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I thought I was pretty clear on this, but let me be very clear again. We are not – and I say we are not – introducing the health care premiums that Albertans have paid in the past. They were regressive, and the system had administration costs. The measures we take in the budget are aimed at protecting the most vulnerable, our working families, while fixing our fiscal foundation. Clearly, Albertans have stated that they are not in favour of the old system, and we will not be introducing it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

2:40 Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AMVIC is still holding improper and potentially illegal investigations, and this government

simply doesn't get it. Some of these board members are not qualified. They're PC Party insiders. Their best qualification is that they're friends of the old minister. To the new minister: will you stop defending this clear case of patronage, do your job, protect Albertans, and clean up the board?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure you and this House that all appointments in Service Alberta follow a process in which candidates are vetted closely by the department. All appointments for agencies, boards, and commissions are merit based. I want to assure you and this House that the public appointees on AMVIC are there because of merit, sir.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister defended appointing an insider as the lead investigator at AMVIC, and later the old minister defended the merit and integrity of his board to the media despite the fact that AMVIC is well known for leading improper investigations. Now we've learned that the lead investigator resigned over this clear conflict of interest. Further, we're getting information that another insider from this board has resigned due to the same conflict of interest. Minister, even the insiders can see the problem. Why can't you?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, this hon. member keeps insisting upon a peculiar line of logic, that if somehow, some way a person in Alberta happens to know a member of the Progressive Conservative Party or perhaps voted for a member of the Conservative Party or shared an elevator ride with a member of the Conservative Party, they should not be eligible to serve on our agencies, boards, and commissions. If that was the case, we would certainly be depriving Albertans of a tremendous amount of the talent pool in this province.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, despite recent resignations this government board is still full of friends of the old minister. Yesterday he became, and I quote, visibly angry when a reporter asked him about the credentials of his friends at the board. Minister, now that you've had some time to think about this situation, please tell me: what specific skills, qualifications do these board members have that other Albertans who applied for these public positions don't have?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I feel like I've answered this question every day in this House this week. I'll give it another shot for the hon. member. What I'll say is that the folks who populate the board of AMVIC are hard-working professionals. They're passionate and dedicated Albertans. They have legal backgrounds. They have accounting backgrounds. Alberta is lucky to have them on the board.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

The bell has rung, which means Oral Question Period has now concluded. Today we heard 108 questions and responses, so thank you for that. In 30 seconds from now we will hear the first of six members' statements.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: We have two minutes allocated for each person speaking here. Let us begin with Calgary-Cross.

Retirement Farewell – Calgary-Cross

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's hard to believe that 22 years ago I became the MLA for Calgary-Cross as a member of

Ralph's team. I've been honoured to serve with five Premiers, over 200 MLAs, and to be at the cabinet table for 10 years. As I look around this beautiful Assembly, I am overcome with incredible emotion that I feel at having worked with each of you. You really are my second family, and we've had many successes together, all of us. As minister of housing and urban affairs I was proud to develop and implement a 10-year plan to end homelessness in Alberta. Many said that it could not be done, Mr. Speaker. Today we've housed over 10,000 people.

Premier, like you I believe that aboriginal people need our support and encouragement. As the minister of children and youth services I hired Alberta's first aboriginal child advocate as well as the first aboriginal deputy minister to lead a new stand-alone division that I created for aboriginal children and youth in care. I also established the Alberta Vulnerable Infant Response Team, and we have over 750 infants and children that have received the supports they need to survive.

I want you to know, Mr. Speaker, that I'm thankful to many people. I am thankful for the wise insight and counsel of my constituency board and my constituency assistants. I sincerely thank as well the hundreds of friends and volunteers who supported me in my six successful campaigns.

My life really has been blessed with a loving family and many dear friends, and I'm grateful and thankful to them all. It is exciting as I look forward to retiring from public life and enjoying more time with my incredible husband, Lanny, and our children.

Thank you, my friends. I will miss you, I will keep in touch, and I'm wishing you all of God's blessings in the future with this wonderful Premier that we have today.

Thank you, all, very much. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you for those heartfelt words.

Let us move on to Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Airdrie.

Provincial Fiscal Policy

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, with a growing energy and focus on the task of bringing modern, progressive, and fair change to Alberta, I can say that in fact nobody in our caucus is retiring, so I'll have to forgo the moving goodbyes today and instead focus a bit on the issues at hand.

At a time when Albertans are worried about their jobs, the Premier wants them to pay an extra tax out of their own pockets for health care. The PCs aren't offering better health care or shorter wait times in emergency rooms; instead, they want the health care system to endure more cutbacks and have Albertans pay more, too. Anyone who has sat in a hospital with a loved one waiting for care knows that the Premier's revenue proposal is nothing more than a waiting room tax. This government wants Albertans to pay more and get less while they give away billions to the most profitable banks and corporations. PC priorities are not Albertans' priorities, and they're not ours either.

We've heard the Premier say that we need to tighten our belts 'cause we've had the best of everything until now, but Albertans know that that's simply not true: not when people are waiting over 70 hours to be admitted into emergency rooms, not when hundreds of kids' surgeries are being cancelled at the Stollery children's hospital because there simply aren't enough recovery beds. In prosperous times the PCs have allowed the services that families need to fall apart. They've failed to take us off the boom-and-bust revenue roller coaster, and they've failed to save for a rainy day. Now they expect working- and middle-class Albertans to foot the bill. That's not leadership, Mr. Speaker.

Last night the Premier asked Albertans to settle for less. He wants to balance the budget on the backs of Alberta families while his corporate friends keep their generous tax breaks and their luxury golf courses. That's not the kind of leadership Albertans need or expect.

It's time for a new kind of leadership that puts Albertans ahead of special interests, the kind of leadership that makes sure Albertans get a fair deal, and that's the kind of Alberta the NDP will ensure we build.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Retrospective by the Member for Airdrie

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, as I stand for possibly the final time in this House, I do so with a heart full of gratitude. I'm grateful to my family and to the constituents of Airdrie for giving me the opportunity to represent them. All of us in this Chamber, of course, have different reasons for becoming MLAs. For me, I wanted to make sure that when my four boys are grown and must decide where they want to live and raise their families, they choose Alberta. I want them to be able to inherit a province of limitless opportunities and the highest quality of life. In short, I want them to call Alberta home with the same love and pride that I do. That's what I've been fighting for, and it's why my heart is so full today, because finally, after seven exhausting years – and they've left some scars – what I and so many other Albertans have been fighting to see happen is actually going to happen.

2:50

Tomorrow our Premier will unveil a long-term plan that will see our province placed firmly on the path to a sustainable and balanced budget, a debt-free future, the lowest tax regime in the country, and a heritage fund that will ensure that the Alberta advantage is protected long after our energy revenues are gone. Don't underestimate the importance of what this means. This plan is a critical turning point for our province. Following through with it will bless the lives of our children and their children for decades. We must not blink, not even for a second. We must follow through with it this time. We owe it to our children.

Alberta is the best place in the world to live and raise a family. May we ever keep it that way is my humble prayer.

In closing, I want to share the end of my favourite poem.

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you for those heartfelt comments as well.

Let us move on to Red Deer-South, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Retrospective by the Member for Red Deer-South

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, seven years have gone by in a heartbeat, yet I struggle to summarize in two minutes. I want to start by acknowledging the contribution of family in our service. The support of my wife, Jackie, our children, and family has been integral to performing duties every day since 2008.

I have always held the public service in high regard. I leave with the knowledge that the women and men serving Alberta act with passion, talent, and energy. They deserve our thanks every day. Throughout Alberta I have supported and worked beside individuals

whom I admire. I treasure their generosity, insight, and friendship. To my constituency, legislative, and ministerial staff: know that your contribution makes a positive difference in the lives of Albertans every day. Thank you. To all members of this Assembly: I have been proud to share in your empathy, compassion, and action to support the vulnerable, the ill, the elderly, and all Albertans who rely on us.

My work has been an incredible experience, from child intervention policy to youth homelessness to visitability and more, and has reinforced why government must continuously strive to support all Albertans. My assignments as parliamentary assistants in two portfolios, as a legislative secretary, and as the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations all led me to the same conclusion: when we lead as Albertans, we succeed as Albertans.

Albertans are committed to global leadership in environmental sustainability; to enhancing our reputation as a great place to invest and do business; and to welcoming those who aspire to raise their families in a province that values hard work, creativity, and an entrepreneurial spirit. I cherished the responsibility to take our message to the world.

My city, Red Deer, is a place where vision, ambition, and collaboration lead the way, and I am honoured to have served.

Thank you, Red Deer. Thank you, Alberta. [Standing ovation]

4-H Premier's Award Winner

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going anywhere, but I would like to take a moment to recognize the achievements of a very special young lady from High Prairie, in my constituency, Ms Jess Verstappen, introduced earlier. Ms Verstappen was chosen from among an exceptionally strong group of candidates to receive this year's 4-H Premier's award. This is no ordinary award. The Premier's award is the highest honour for Alberta's 4-H program and is given out to a 4-H member who shows exceptional leadership, communication, and personal development skills.

Jess exemplifies everything that is extraordinary about 4-H youth in this province. She is a remarkable young woman and is committed to being a steward of our land and supporting Alberta's rural communities. With a strong agricultural family background Jess has been a member of the Coyote Acres 4-H Club in High Prairie, where she held numerous positions, including president, vice-president, and treasurer. Jess has participated in 4-H activities across the province, including selections, regional winter camps, provincial sheep shows, and regional summer camps. As a Premier's award winner Jess represents Alberta at numerous 4-H events here and across North America.

I'm sure all members will agree with me about how fortunate we are to have our province represented by such a fine young ambassador and how fortunate we are to have such a wonderful 4-H program in Alberta; 4-H is the longest running youth organization in our province, approaching 100 years of shaping the lives of youth and adults in Alberta.

By following the 4-H motto, Learn to Do by Doing, members take part in activities that meet their interests, increase their knowledge, and develop their life skills, which help members become successful and accomplished members of society. Agriculture is vital to our province, and the 4-H program helps to develop tomorrow's leaders. Our government is proud to support this important program for our province's youth.

Please join me in congratulating Jess Verstappen on this great honour and acknowledging all 4-H members and leaders who make this program such a great success.

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

28th Legislature

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are heading into a spring election. Long-term members of this Assembly have been giving their farewell speeches, others are already campaigning. So what has changed since the last election? Well, we have a new Premier with a new slogan: We Are under New Management. It sounds great. It's a good slogan. I suspect it feels good, too, for those who were so disappointed with the last group of managers. The Queen's loyal opposition has been decimated since the last election. It was decimated without a vote, and the people responsible for violating that public trust are welcome with open arms into this team of new managers.

Here is the problem for all Albertans. We added a couple of new members to the management team, and then we added a bunch of floor-crossers who exemplify the maxim that integrity doesn't pay as well as self-interest. The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that not much has changed with this management team. There is a new boss, but he's trying to fix a government with the same people and the same political machine that corrupted the government in the first place.

Nothing symbolizes this problem greater than the \$10 million taxpayers will give to a golf course. When we asked to postpone that misguided spending, the minister of environment said, "That doesn't make . . . financial sense." The Minister of Energy said, "It is a prudent investment for [this government] to repair this golf course." Now they are all saying: we should re-evaluate this spending, but please just ignore the fact that we refuse to withdraw the expenditure.

Mr. Speaker, this government wants us to believe it's changing its mind, but that's the same mind that whistles when the wind blows through it. I apologize if the government minds are insulted, but just as they passed into law this absurd paid position called a fish guardian – it would be laughable except this fish guardian can now enter and search private property without a warrant. This is a tragic violation of property rights.

So as we head into next month's election, Mr. Speaker, I only hope Albertans do get the message and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you. I regret the time has expired, and we must move on.

Hon. Government House Leader, you have caught my attention.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would request unanimous consent of the Assembly to continue past 3 p.m. notwithstanding rule 7(7).

[Unanimous consent granted]

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader and Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now would like to give oral notice of the intention to introduce Bill 25, the Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Amendment Act, 2015, which will be sponsored by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: We have several, so let's keep these as brief as we can, please, in the interest of time, starting with Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the Minister of Health.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Premier I'm pleased to rise today and table the requisite number of copies of the Métis and the First Nations women's councils on economic security 2014 reports and recommendations and government of Alberta responses.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the five requisite copies of the Health Quality Council of Alberta's annual report 2013-2014. This report was submitted to me in accordance with the provisions of section 24(1) of the Health Quality Council of Alberta Act, which requires the HQCA board to table an annual report each fiscal year to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. In the report you will find an overview of the HQCA's accomplishments and activities in the past year. A condensed version of the report is also available for viewing on the HQCA website.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, followed by the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices and in accordance with section 4(6) of the Election Act I would like to table five copies of the report by the Chief Electoral Officer titled Report on the October 27, 2014 By-elections in: Calgary-Elbow, Calgary-Foothills, Calgary-West, Edmonton-Whitemud. Copies of this report are being distributed to members today.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to table five copies of the Alberta Economic Development Authority's annual activity report. This year's activity report celebrates 20 years of the Alberta Economic Development Authority providing sound advice to the government of Alberta. Since its inception the authority has proven to be a responsive, informed, and committed partner. Over the last two decades it has provided advice and insight on a broad range of economic issues, including productivity, innovation, transportation, carbon capture, market access, to name just a few. Over the past year the authority has been active in benchmarking Alberta's competitiveness in relation to other jurisdictions and deeply involved in the province's innovation systems and water strategies, among other timely issues. I encourage all members of this House to read this report.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table a letter and a petition from the concerned citizens of the hamlet of Enchant and surrounding communities, 75 signatures asking Alberta Transportation to lower the speed limit on highway 526 in the vicinity of the hamlet. The five requisite copies have been made.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a publication by the Alberta Teachers' Association entitled Who Will Teach Us? It provides a snapshot of the effects that the Premier's deep cuts will have on the K to 12 education system in Alberta. The Premier said that his government will hold the line on education investment, which will directly contribute to skyrocketing classroom sizes and a lack of teachers within them. I table this document in the hopes that the government will not just hold the line when it comes to the future of our students and children in this province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of an e-mail I received from my constituent Adrienne Webb outlining the difficulties that she encountered in getting approval for a service dog and some suggestions to improve that process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My optimism has paid off, and I, indeed, have located the tablings that I was looking for. The first tabling that I have is an e-mail from Leah Dal Ponte. She has written about the wild horse cull and capture. She's quite frustrated at the lack of response to her letters to government, and she personally is heartbroken, ashamed, and feeling helpless that all of her entreaties were ignored.

The second tabling, also an e-mail, from Maureen Hurly of Calgary is also about the wild horse cull, making the point that there is no Disney ending for these wild horses, that the government has been unclear about the official position of whether they're genetically different or not, and that the sensitive landscape that the horses supposedly damage is full of ATVs, cattle grazing, oil and gas activity, and logging activities.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes our Routine except for points of order. I believe we have one that was expressed at 2:04 this afternoon, and it was expressed by Rimbeby-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. Please proceed with your citation and your point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I raise my point of order on 23(h) and (i), in all due respect to the Minister of Energy, and the allegation that I have somehow prior to coming into this Legislature or even in this Legislature advocated for more regulation in the electricity industry when I am absolutely on record – and he knows this – that I was absolutely opposed to the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, otherwise known as Bill 50. I opposed this when I debated that minister in his own riding some six, seven years ago, and he knows that. Now he raises the allegation to impugn my reputation, and that is just not – not – acceptable.

Mr. Speaker, I was opposed to those two HVDC lines because this government was spending a billion dollars more per line, for an extra \$2 billion, and got nothing for it. I'm on record, and he knows that. He knows I'm on record to – you want me to stop, I can tell, but I want to really wax him on this one, Mr. Speaker.

I will tell you that he should retract that statement. I am not on record anywhere asking for more regulation. I'm on record opposed to that legislation and every regulation attached thereto.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader briefly, please.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, that's very difficult to follow. First, on behalf of the government caucus I wanted to thank this member for his service the last three years. I'm not rising on a funeral announcement here, but I just wanted to indicate that despite that his comments have nothing to do with regulation and despite the fact that he wanted to run as a PC candidate this election, I'm going to withdraw the comment on behalf of the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Speaker, this one is on me.

The Speaker: Not unlike the eighth wonder of the world. Thank you.

Well, hon. members, we've had a withdrawal. It's really a point of clarification. I believe, hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, you would be satisfied with the withdrawal and with the fact that you had a chance to clarify your position, so we don't have to get into any other ruling on that. That is noted, and that particular point of order is now closed.

With that, let us move on.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 24

Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to move third reading of Bill 24, the Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act.

Bill 45 was passed by the House in December 2013 but was never proclaimed and never put into force. Since that time a new government with a new Premier, who has put this government and this province under new management, has come into place. Earlier this month the Premier announced that the government would be reviewing its approach to public-sector relations and that we would put in place an essential services model of legislation. That work, Mr. Speaker, is now under way.

Mr. Speaker, given this change in the province's approach to labour legislation it is clear that the Public Sector Services Continuation Act is no longer required. Maintaining public safety and ensuring the public has access to essential services during times of labour disputes will be part of any legislation that is brought forward. New legislation will also align with the recent Supreme Court of Canada decision regarding labour legislation. We have already begun reviewing the essential services models of legislation that are in place with most other jurisdictions in the country, and we plan to table that legislation in the near future.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, this withdrawal of Bill 45, the repeal, indicates, we hope, a new period of mutual respect and co-operation with our employees and their representatives, and I hope that all members of the House will join me in supporting this.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 24, the Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act. Of course, I just wanted to point out, again, that less than a year ago this member voted for Bill 45. Now he's voting to repeal it. So he voted for it before he voted against it, and I just wanted to make sure that he was certain this time that he wants to get rid of it.

I think it's very important here that – you know, you need consistency and certainty when it comes to labour relations, and the fact is that there were a lot of members on the other side that voted for this legislation who are now voting against it. So I guess, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to point that out.

We look forward to further debate on this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with interest to speak on Bill 24. Certainly, I take a great deal of satisfaction in seeing that this bill is being repealed. We know that we fought a very hard and long battle last winter in regard to Bill 45. I think it's always a good reminder to know where these things come from so that we can learn and that in the future it doesn't happen again.

Quite frankly, what happened in regard to Bill 45 was a very sort of callous attempt to make an attack on the ability to negotiate and to strike if need be. The government saw an opportunity to exercise power on this issue in Bill 45, and indeed it was beaten back quite handily. So while it was never proclaimed, certainly it always kind of sat there, simmering in the background as a symbol of something that needed to be gone.

Always we know, Mr. Speaker, that there's a tension between workers and management. It can be a constructive tension that creates better working conditions, safer working conditions, creates opportunities for better pay, for more equitable distribution of the production of wealth that we have in this province. It allows us healthier working conditions in the widest possible way. You know, that never usually comes out of just everyone agreeing around a table. It sometimes is the product of tension. So we recognize that tension, and we recognize that, ultimately, more sane and reasonable, I think, circumstances have resulted from that.

But if we didn't fight this Bill 45 in the first place, we wouldn't have got here at all. Indeed, the rights and the freedoms that were in jeopardy with Bill 45 were won by previous generations of people who chose to fight for the capacity of free speech and for the right to bargain collectively, the right to organize together to improve wages, health, and safety in working conditions for all Canadians. Certainly, as Alberta New Democrats we weren't afraid to stand up. I would venture to say that without thousands of Albertans standing up against Bill 45 and remaining united in standing against Bill 45, we wouldn't be here today repealing this same odious and difficult bill as well.

We know that there has been a Supreme Court order on this kind of behaviour stemming from similar circumstances in Saskatchewan, so we would know that Bill 45 was, in fact, illegal anyway and needed to be repealed. You know, circumstances being as they may, we're happy to see it repealed here today. We will take it as a symbol of our solidarity with the working people here in the province of Alberta, the power of us to stand together, to fight for more equality and social justice, for better working conditions, for fair wages, and to know that we can utilize that power to generate laws that protect working people in this province and that push back against unjust legislation such as Bill 45.

So on behalf of all working people and on behalf of the Alberta New Democrats we certainly will stand behind this bill. It's a very fine, fine day. Hopefully, we can pass this thing today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is now available. Should anyone wish to speak on 29(2)(a), please let me know. I see no one.

Are there any other speakers? I see none.

The hon. minister to close debate.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will rise to close debate because I believe that repealing the Public Sector Services Continuation Act will be the first step toward a new era in a mutually respectful, two-way relationship with our public-sector employees and those that represent them in bargaining.

To the House leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition I would say – and this would be the second time today that the hon. member has been reminded – that a lot of things can change in a year, Mr. Speaker. The very best and brightest of his caucus is now on this side of the House since last year. The government is under new management since last year. In fact, through a Supreme Court of Canada decision not very many weeks ago the actual labour law in this country has changed.

Add all that together with our Premier and our government's genuine desire to go forward in a mutually respectful, positive way with those who do the great work every day that Albertans love, who provide the services that Albertans are so very proud of, about 213,000 men and women who get paid, you know, through the taxpayer and through the decisions of this government. Those people are important, and this is an important way for our government to say so.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll close and respectfully ask members of the Assembly to vote in favour of this bill.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 24 read a third time]

Bill 12 Common Business Number Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today at third reading to discuss the Common Business Number Act. This bill will ensure that Alberta has a business-friendly environment by reducing red tape and improving services for business. Adopting the common business number will expand opportunities for our government to simplify business registration processes, modernize and improve service delivery, offer secure services online, and improve program compliance.

With that, I move third reading of the Common Business Number Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the Alberta New Democrats do support this bill. Creating some correlation between different systems using common business numbers is a good idea. We know that this is something that has been done in other provinces; notably, the New Democrat government in Manitoba did so. You know, it's always important.

I just want to point out that always when we talk about red tape and so forth – right? – you move regulation from one place to

another, not necessarily just removing it from all sectors of any given business community or sector. You do need regulation to ensure a level playing field, to ensure that people are not cheating and so forth. Where does regulation belong? This is something that we should all reflect on, I think, here in this Legislature. With the sort of glib concept of, "Red tape is bad, so cut it; make it, you know, a free-whatever-market thing," then the regulation will simply move from a public entity such as this House here to a corporate level. We saw on so many occasions that where government ceded their responsibility to regulate, then larger companies and corporations will do so, but they do it without the democratic element that we provide here in the House.

It's just a word of caution. It's something I've been reflecting on. This is a good bill, certainly, but let's not forget that our primary responsibility is to in fact make regulation in order for good governance to take place here in this province.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to speak to this bill. It's a good bill. It seems to move us forward on making things easier for businesses to continue to be successful and also cuts out some of the bureaucracy and allows a common business number, that has been seen to work in other provinces. I will note that Alberta seems to have been a little bit slower than other provinces in moving in this direction. I would encourage us to continue looking up best practices where they're available and to move a little more swiftly on it.

3:20

Just commenting on what the hon. member just stated, you know, we often do look at regulation and see it as a bad thing. Then, on the other hand, regulation is often what protects us. It gives us safety in standards and the protections that we hope for when we purchase goods, when we go through processes, when we build homes and the like. Regulation is often the stuff that's necessary to ensure a level playing field, to ensure quality standards and the like. I, too, understand that. We should always look at that as our responsibility to protect the public and to ensure that there are quality goods and services being provided and that they're not getting sold a bill of goods.

In any event, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I applaud the government for moving forward on this initiative.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

I see no one. Are there any other speakers?

Mr. Khan: Just really quickly, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to first extend my gratitude to the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park for doing the heavy lifting with this bill. He's done a remarkable job on this. I also want to thank the opposing members for their speeches. As they said, this is a good bill. This will create efficiency. This is something that the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education has promised his stakeholders in terms of reducing red tape. It's a very good bill. It will deliver a benefit for our business community in Alberta, particularly our small-business community.

Again I just want to extend my gratitude to the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park for his exemplary work in bringing this bill forward. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

I see no one. Is there anyone else who wishes to speak?

If not, could I call on the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park to close debate?

Mr. Quest: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of quick comments. I appreciate the opportunity to work on this. Just in response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder and the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer about regulation, I did have the opportunity to lead the small-business strategy for Alberta, what will become the small-business strategy for Alberta document, and what we heard from small business, really, wasn't so much about regulations and what they were. It was their intent, of course, to comply. What they really asked for is easier access to that information. We're moving towards that. This is also something else that they expressed a strong interest in. So I'm very pleased to have had the opportunity to carry this bill through the process.

With that, I would ask that you call the question.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, that closes the debate, and the question has been called.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 12 read a third time]

Bill 14

Agricultural Societies Amendment Act, 2015

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and speak on behalf of the minister of agriculture and move third reading of Bill 14, the Agricultural Societies Amendment Act, 2015.

Since 1886, Mr. Speaker, before Alberta existed as a province, agricultural societies have been working to enhance the agricultural industry and improve awareness in our communities. Over the years the role of agricultural societies has changed with the changing times, expanding beyond the scope of agriculture to include the services provided and enhancing the quality of Albertans' lives. Today the province has over 300 ag societies administering over 3,000 activities every year, overseeing the operations of close to 700 community facilities. From farmers' markets to fairs to curling rinks they are touching the everyday lives of people in their community. Our agricultural societies have evolved, and the legislation must continue to evolve with them to ensure that meeting the needs of these communities is served.

Bill 14 is about just that, Mr. Speaker. The Agricultural Societies Amendment Act will modernize the legislation, ensure that it aligns with the Societies Act, ensure that all agricultural societies have effective bylaws in place, and recognize that large and small agricultural societies are flexible in how they can be structured to their unique needs.

The amendments, for example, broaden the language to recognize that agricultural societies serve more than just agricultural communities. The legislation clarifies the responsibilities of societies to incorporate under the act, including their ability to enter into contracts; to purchase, to own, and to dispose of property and assets; and to enter into indemnity.

The provisions will also address issues like maintaining the members' registration and registered offices, a process for major discussions and decisions along alignments, dissolutions, liability protection of the society's director.

Mr. Anglin: Say that three times.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. It's always nice to have help out there.

A key part to the amendments also involves removing some of the overly prescriptive items from legislation. Instead societies will now have the flexibility to address items like membership fees, eligibility within their bylaws, and what can be tailored to meet their needs. To ensure good governance, Mr. Speaker, minimum requirements for bylaws will be outlined in the regulations, and new amendment bylaws will be vetted by the department.

Amending any legislation is done with a great deal of care, attention to detail, and the Agricultural Societies Amendment Act is no different. In drafting the amendments, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development worked closely with the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies. All members were invited to take part in consultation meetings, and approximately 200 people participated through this, Mr. Speaker. As a result of these changes, many agricultural societies will update their bylaws and will have three years to comply with this. The Agriculture and Rural Development department will work closely with agricultural societies and the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies to provide ongoing support to facilitate these changes.

I want to thank all of my colleagues who participated in the discussion of this bill, Mr. Speaker. Good questions were raised during debate, and I want to address a few of these points. The first is concerning why provisions for amalgamation have been added. While agricultural societies did have the ability to merge, there's no clearly defined process currently outlined in the legislation. We want to make sure that agricultural societies have a well-defined process to follow. The new provisions, which reflect the procedures outlined in the Societies Act, outline a clear, consistent process should societies wish for whatever reason to amalgamate. For example, societies may have changed recruiting and retaining volunteers and maintaining their infrastructure to choose to consolidate their resources with another society to benefit both organizations.

Another point was brought up during the debate, Mr. Speaker, around the removal of the governance guidance guarantee in the act. The current act allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council to provide a governance guidance guarantee of an agricultural society's borrowing. This outdated clause is not one that has been used frequently by societies. There are currently no loan guarantees under the act, and there has been no intention to offer any guarantee in the future.

We met with the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies early in the process to discuss all the proposed changes, including the removal of the guarantee. AAAS indicated that there is no issue for their members.

Mr. Speaker, this is the last general comment from the debate that I'd like to address. There were some concerns expressed on moving the provisions to the regulation instead of having them remain in legislation. Moving some of these provisions to regulations helps the legislation remain relevant so we don't have to reopen the act to change every minute detail. It allows the act to serve its intended purpose, to provide the high-level framework for the continued successful operation of agricultural societies in Alberta. There will be a formal process to change regulations, and the changes will be made in consultation with the societies. These changes give us the ability to react, to change the role of the agricultural societies in our rural communities, and to be more flexible to their needs as they evolve.

I recognize the important role that agricultural societies have in Alberta. I think that we should all have the common goal of supporting our local organizations and helping them improve the quality of life in their communities. I'm confident that these amendments will update the legislation to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of our agricultural societies and of all Albertans.

I urge the members of this Assembly to support the legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

3:30

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the Alberta New Democrats do support this bill. I think it's very important to maintain flexible and modern regulation in regard to agricultural societies. Agricultural societies provide a very important pivot point for not just economic development in rural areas but also social and community development. As the hon. member pointed out, several agricultural societies even precede the formation of this province and indeed helped to form some of the very earliest forms of governance and community development, that still carry on today right across this province. We know as well that the regulations need to accommodate for the changing and expanding roles that agricultural societies have in different communities around the province.

As I travel around from place to place, a number of societies stand out in my mind. Camrose is a perfect example of one that's evolved tremendously to provide a whole universe of entertainment and community development. It's in close proximity to the big show, the jamboree, that takes place in Camrose. It's quite a sophisticated, large, nonprofit organization that deals in many millions of dollars. It's important for them to have that flexibility to move into new markets around festivals and casinos and all the other things that they do. That's important, too.

I know that our support for agricultural societies here, from the Legislature outwards, is very important, too, because of course we see a very changing dynamic in terms of population around the province. Some communities are rapidly losing their population, but at the same time it's very important that they don't lose those social and community structures that can help to gain back and create a nucleus for growth in the future for communities around the province.

Certainly, I'm happy to see this legislation being updated and modernized through this particular bill. I'm very pleased for it. In my own family, in fact, we have a long history on my mother's side of participating in agricultural societies in Vermilion, Alberta. I know that from several generations of our own family on my mother's side and then even myself when I was growing up and working with the Vermilion Agricultural Society and so forth, it really helped to not just make Vermilion the great town it is today but also helped in my own development and sense of community as I grew up.

Thanks for the bill, and certainly the New Democrats will support it.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals will be supporting this bill. It seems to move agricultural societies in an updated fashion that will allow them to do much of their good work, both on the economic side and the social and community development side, in a much more robust fashion. It's a good bill, and I'm looking forward to seeing what more good comes from our agricultural societies. As was noted, they've been with us from the very beginning and will continue to support and foster good community spirit throughout this province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I see no one.

Are there any other speakers?

If not, hon. Member for Little Bow, do you wish to close debate?

Mr. Donovan: I close debate, Mr. Speaker, and call the question.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 14 read a third time]

Bill 19

Education Amendment Act, 2015

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the Minister of Education to move third and final reading of Bill 19, the Education Amendment Act, 2015.

This is legislation that through a series of amendments will assist in ensuring that the Education Act, upon its proclamation, is successful in focusing education on the student, supporting educational choice, and enabling school boards to be more collaborative and responsive to their students' needs. Therefore, I hope you will join me in supporting this very important piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have a great deal of commentary on this. I think that some of my colleagues have spoken on it already. Yes, the Alberta New Democrats are choosing to support Bill 19. However, I think there are a number of issues that just need to be illuminated here in regard to this bill. I know that because this is an amendment act, it curtails our capacity to go back to different aspects of the Education Act that have problems.

Certainly, I think that there are three areas that I just wanted to focus in on, first of all in regard to the definition of residency requirements for students and then in sections 2 and 3 of this bill, where they focus on the student rather than the parent. You know, it's just really important that when we talk about residency and the money that follows, especially, students with special needs, we have very careful consideration of areas that probably provide more special-needs education and that the money is properly following the student that requires that special-needs education. I think that probably my colleagues used the School for the Deaf as an example. There are others as well. It's just really important that we make sure that certain school boards don't get shortchanged – right? – based on the fact that they do provide more special-needs education, that other places around the province maybe don't have – and we're, of course, happy to share because that's what we should do – and that the money is there to look after the student when they move to a different place.

The other issue that I wanted to point out was in regard to the capacity for school boards to perhaps vote out a member of their board if they are deemed to be somehow not in compliance with a code of conduct and so forth. You know, this is very problematic because, of course, you can use this any number of ways. Remember that trustees are elected through a municipal, democratic process, so it's very important that we do not empower boards, specifically, to have some code of conduct or a hammer that they can hold over an individual member and potentially take out that member, who has been democratically elected to serve. You can imagine some facsimile of that here in this House, where you would have some capacity to take out other members, to vote somebody out of the Assembly. I mean, that would be obviously illogical, and we wouldn't entertain that, but then we're having some version of it, I see, unless I'm reading this wrong, with trustees being allowed

to use a code of conduct to vote out an individual member that was otherwise democratically elected into that position. So I just wanted to point that out.

Then the other issue that I wanted to just touch on quickly, Mr. Speaker, is in regard to the minister's capacity to dissolve school boards and then appoint members. I think we talked about that a bit this afternoon in regard to the Northland school division. You know, it's just been going on too long, right? That happened at least four or maybe – I don't know – five years ago, when Northland was dissolved. I think a short-term limit for the interim appointed, nonelected board should be put in place to ensure that we don't have something like what just happened with the Northland school board, where we had five years of appointed trusteeship. The issues that I think maybe precipitated the dissolution of that board in the first place are only getting worse, right? With the problems with absenteeism and low graduation rates, retention of workers and teachers up in the Northland school board, the problem has only festered and carried on over these last five years.

3:40

I'm not saying that that's just simply a result of the dissolution of that board and the choice to have an appointed board for five long years, but certainly I think it probably contributed to that. Sometimes we make regulation here to protect us from ourselves, and I think that in this case having the limitation of one year of an appointed board upon the dissolution of an elected board by the Minister of Education would be more reasonable and maybe wouldn't have us in the position that we are in today, with this overdue, difficult situation in Northland.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will take leave. Certainly, as I say, the Alberta New Democrats will vote in favour of Bill 19.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals, too, will be voting in favour of these amendments. We, too, noted the residency concerns and ensuring that money is properly flowing from various school boards, from residences to the location where the child is getting the support they need.

Also, there is a concern out there by many board trustees about the potential for a trustee to be removed under these codes of conduct and, if they're being the so-called sticky wicket or the like, maybe being forced out of their position even though they're democratically elected to do their job. I think the minister needs to keep apprised of that, ensure that democracy is served and that people are able to do their work and carry out what they've been elected to do.

The third thing is also, simply, the situation in Northland school division. There is an amendment that deals with the trustee and getting duly elected boards, that we have to have a function that tries to fill that capacity. Now, I'm not certain, but I probably agreed with the government's decision when they went into Northland school division when they saw the problems that were arising out of that district. I'm very disappointed that very little progress has been made in trying to get kids educated in that community, and I think we can do better from that. Having an amendment that actually reflects getting the proper people in place to support the community and getting the proper resources to that community is imperative.

I will close by sort of saying: look, we have an Education Act, we now have some amendments, we have an Inspiring Education document, and all these things are well and good, Mr. Speaker, but if we don't commit the necessary investments to our public education

system, well, it all amounts to, I guess, a hill of beans. You know, you really have to put investments into getting our kids as much education as possible to be ready for the challenges they will face as they grow older and get out into the workforce and raise families and want to become part of the actively engaged citizenry.

I will note that, in my view at least, our supports for public education when I came into this Legislature were higher on a per-student basis, we were doing more robust things, and our education system seemed to be better supported by this government than it currently is. My hope is that we turn the corner and can see it again as an investment and get busy with providing early childhood learning opportunities and investing in education. I note that 25 per cent of the children now in the Calgary board of education are English as a second language students, and we must ensure that they're getting ready and prepared for, I guess, life in Canada. It's not easy to do that with less money. You have to be ensuring that they're getting the help and support they need.

In any event, as mentioned, we'll be supporting these amendments, and we look forward to this government investing in public education. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I don't see anyone wishing to take up that opportunity.

Are there any other speakers?

If not, the hon. minister to close debate.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we close debate, and I thank the hon. members for all of their excellent comments.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 19 read a third time]

Bill 21

Safety Codes Amendment Act, 2015

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to move third reading of Bill 21, the Safety Codes Amendment Act, 2015.

I'd like to thank all members who participated in second reading and Committee of the Whole debates for their comments and wide support for this bill. I would also like to thank the staff of the Department of Municipal Affairs, who have worked very hard to put this bill together, as well as the Safety Codes Council, the safety codes co-ordinating committee, and all their many subcommittees that contributed to this bill.

Bill 21 will provide for the timely adoption of codes and standards, will strengthen the administration of the act in unaccredited municipalities, will provide greater flexibility for municipalities to deal with the development of private sewage-disposal systems, and will strengthen the current compliance tool kit under the act by making administrative penalties available.

Mr. Speaker, these changes will strengthen Alberta's safety codes system, and I would ask that all members support Bill 21. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there other speakers? I see none.

Hon. member, do you wish to, then, just close debate and we'll go on with the vote?

Mr. Casey: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 21 read a third time]

Bill 22
Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to bring forward Bill 22, the Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act, for third reading.

The dangers of tanning and the risk of skin cancer have already been highlighted extensively during debate on this bill. Melanoma, skin cancer, is a preventable form of cancer, but unfortunately it's on the rise in our province. Research shows that the use of tanning equipment, especially before the age of 35, increases the risk of melanoma by 59 per cent. We also know that nearly 20 per cent of teens under 18 have already used artificial tanning equipment. What's more, one-third of 17-year-old girls have visited a tanning salon, yet only 3 per cent of parents believe their teenagers have used artificial tanning.

Mr. Speaker, projections show that nearly 700 Albertans will be affected by melanoma skin cancer in 2017. The hope is that through Bill 22, the skin cancer prevention act, we'll start to see these numbers decrease. Nine jurisdictions already have legislation in place that imposes some form of age restriction on artificial tanning. Bill 22 is our opportunity to catch up with others who've already taken action to protect our youth. This legislation will also help adults make informed choices about this risky practice. When passed, Bill 22 not only protects our youth; it also educates our adult Albertans about the dangers of UV radiation through required health warnings.

I'm very pleased with the broad support that this bill has already received, not only from health advocate groups but by members of this Assembly. Bill 22 also has support from the association representing about one-third of the businesses offering tanning services.

In terms of enforcement Bill 22 was drafted to support a variety of options, including a process to investigate Albertans' complaints about businesses that they believe are breaking the law, test purchases by secret shoppers who are under 18 years of age, and escalating fines for businesses caught breaking the law multiple times. The Minister of Health will appoint enforcement officers once regulations are developed, and regulations will be developed with input from stakeholders.

The bottom line is that the government has the responsibility to protect youth from harmful activities and provide adults with information on health risks to help them make informed choices. I would ask that all members support Bill 22.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:50

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals will be supporting this legislation. It seems to be a proactive move in lessening skin cancer and moving us forward into an age where we can eliminate obvious dangers to people in this province. It's one that we wholeheartedly support. I hope that we can look forward to more proactive legislation of this kind. We often here in Alberta tend to move slowly on these things. I note that we were the last province, I think, to introduce seat belt legislation, the last province to finally ban smoking in restaurants, and the list goes on and on. We should try to move a little bit quicker on this public safety/public health file. We don't always have to be laggards on these things.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, those are my comments, and we can move on.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the Alberta New Democrats do support this legislation as well. We know that the prevalence of skin cancer in our society is troubling, and I think this should be part of a longer, more concerted effort to help to inform and change behaviours around exposure to dangerous forms of sunlight as well over the next number of months and years. In other jurisdictions around the world such as Australia, you know, they made it a big national effort to work in educating the public around exposure to sunlight and to dangerous levels of sunshine. Also, tanning beds around our own country and across different jurisdictions around the world have already been severely curtailed.

You know, I would hope that we could perhaps create a culture where people, even after they're 18 years old, just would choose not to use something like this because of the dangerous effects on skin such as melanoma. It's a step that we can take. Certainly, I know that not long ago these same tanning people were marketing to kids: "For high school grad get a tan" and all this kind of stuff. We've, I think, perhaps slowed that process down. We'll eliminate it by passing this bill. Like I say, there are a whole other range of educative things that we can do to have the public maybe not choose to use this kind of service at all, even after they turn 18, and that we're properly protecting ourselves against the dangerous effects of exposure to sunlight in general.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available for anyone who wishes to chime in.

If not, are there other speakers? The hon. Minister of Health, please.

Mr. Mandel: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I won't be long. I want to recognize and thank the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park for bringing this forward and sponsoring this bill. It's a very important bill, especially when we realize the challenges and problems it creates for so many people 18 and under. When we had the first presentation, first reading, we had people here from across the province who had experienced the challenge they've faced as a result of being in tanning beds too often, the melanoma and the cancer that they've developed. It's very sad. We hope that this bill will help to eliminate any kind of involvement of those under 18 years of age in the tanning salons but also have tanning salons recognize inside their facilities to those that are coming in that there are dangers with tanning beds. We would hope that all members would support this bill. It's vitally important to do this. We think this is a great step forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I see no one.

Are there other speakers?

If not, the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park to close debate.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Health for the opportunity to carry what I think is an important bill. It protects our youth. It educates adults. It will result in a lower number of skin cancer incidents. I'd also like to just point out, as I mentioned in the opening comments, that the associations representing some of the larger groups that offer indoor tanning already have restrictions around youth tanning and so on,

so this will level the playing field and ensure that everybody does the same thing.

With that, I would ask that you call the question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The debate has been closed. The question has been called.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 22 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 23 Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2015

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy and Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to rise on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to speak to and move second reading of Bill 23, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2015.

The proposed amendments in this act will change the operations and funding model for the civil forfeiture office, or CFO, as I'll refer to it, Mr. Speaker. The proposed amendments will create a regulated civil forfeiture fund. This will improve transparency by setting out what money goes into and out of the fund. One of the things that will be permitted to be paid out of the fund is the expenses incurred in obtaining forfeitures; that is, the cost of obtaining and managing forfeitures will now be paid from the forfeitures themselves.

These amendments will also change other business processes, including prohibiting a person's objection to administrative forfeiture from being used against that person in the criminal trial; permitting regulations to be made which would list offences that cause bodily harm or profit; changing the current name to the civil forfeiture and restitution act to avoid confusion with the Victims of Crime Act; and making technical and minor improvements to business operations. I'll provide some details about the proposed amendments, Mr. Speaker.

The legislation will establish a civil forfeiture fund and clearly set out what money becomes part of the fund and what the money can be used for. To put it simply, proceeds from forfeited property will be paid into the fund. The fund will then be available to support grants for community-based crime prevention or victim programs, comply with court orders to return property to individual victims or innocent third-party creditors, pay the expenses spent storing and selling property, and recover certain operational expenses.

Mr. Speaker, an expense recovery model will allow the CFO to pay the government's cost to obtain forfeitures from the proceeds of the forfeitures themselves. This is not a new approach. Every other province with a civil forfeiture program permits some or all operational expenses to be paid from the proceeds of forfeitures. This expense recovery model will make the program sustainable and reduce the need for Albertans' ongoing fiscal support.

I want to stress that grants will be preserved under this business model. I also want to stress that the victims of crime fund and the funding of victim services units in our communities will not be affected. That is a completely different fund and program. The civil forfeiture program is a relatively new tool to keep Alberta communities safe. When it started, it needed taxpayer financial support. However, the program is now operational and has

demonstrated, Mr. Speaker, that it will be able to recover its expenses and also continue to provide grant funding.

I reinforce that this is only a matter of recovering direct expenses. Proceeds from forfeitures will not go to general government revenues. The fund's current reserves will ensure that we can maintain annual average grant levels as we make this important fund self-sustainable. Regardless of the province's fiscal situation this funding model will allow this successful program to continue its work to reduce crime, help victims' programs, and protect third-party property interests, Mr. Speaker.

Another proposed amendment to the act will prohibit a person's objection to an administrative forfeiture from being used against that person in a criminal trial. The proposed amendment provides a clear commitment that civil forfeiture is not used to undermine the criminal process, Mr. Speaker. Civil forfeiture information has never been used in a criminal case, but this is a proactive provision to allay potential concerns.

4:00

A further amendment to the act will permit regulations listing offences that cause bodily harm or profit. For example, a regulation might be considered in future listing child sexual exploitation as an offence that causes bodily harm. This would mean that property used in committing this type of offence could be subject to civil forfeiture proceedings, Mr. Speaker. This amendment to regulatory authority will not change the program's scope but will open the possibility of increasing clarity and enhancing responsiveness to victims' needs.

The final amendments will be used to pursue technical and minor improvements to business operations. Mr. Speaker, these amendments will help the CFO continue to reduce victimization by producing crime fund programs that support victims. The program enhancements will ensure that the program continues to protect Albertans by taking the profit out of crime and taking away the property needed to commit crime, essentially turning bad money into good money. Albertans deserve and want safe communities. These amendments will help to achieve that.

Thank you for your attention.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, this is an interesting bill, that deserves some merit and proper scrutiny. You know, I have to say from the outset that it's under a very sort of tight timeline that we are dealing with it. I think we just got briefed on this yesterday, maybe, something like that, so it takes a while for us to go through and make sure that we talk to different people in the community that can help us to understand how any given bill affects the larger society to which it's directed. You know, in the fullness of time I think the Alberta New Democrat team will be able to work through this in a reasonable and constructive way so that we can produce something that will serve the larger society in the best possible way.

This is the way I'm seeing it anyway, that the present Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act allows for the civil forfeiture office to ask the court, any given court, to restrain, seize, and then, later, forfeit property, okay? An order restraining property prevents it from being sold, like a freeze, basically, until a final ruling about whether it should be returned or disposed of. So the civil forfeiture office has to prove – tell me if I'm right about this – based on a balance of probabilities, that the property, first of all,

was acquired by illegal means or, two, used to carry out an illegal activity that was likely to cause bodily harm or illegal gain, okay?

This bill that we have before us here this afternoon proposes to modernize the legislation surrounding civil forfeiture to enable it to recover expenses from forfeited property and operate on an expense-recovery basis – okay? – somehow bringing this up to date to fully use the money that can be recovered from a forfeiture, which sounds reasonable. The fund is associated with the civil forfeiture office and then would be a regulated type of ongoing fund, I suppose. A person's objection to forfeiture could no longer be used against them in a criminal trial, which seems fair. Concerns for the party in terms of the forfeiture office and language being used in legislation, I think, are something to consider.

It's very important for us to put victims central in the justice system. We all recognize that. Every effort, I think, must be made by government to properly support programs and services for victims, and this is an evolution that, I think, has been a positive one here in this jurisdiction and across the country.

It's very important for the whole process, however, to stay within the legality and the process of one being tried and being found guilty or not and that the handling of the property follows that due process as well. That's the issue or the sticking point that we have to be very careful of because, of course, you know, a person has their property seized before the trial takes place.

We know that in other jurisdictions – this is always the standard thing we do, right? We learn about how it's going in other provinces. We know that in B.C. there has been a civil forfeiture office functioning for a while, and it's been okay, but it's had some problems, too. I think that we should explore those issues before we import something like that here into the province of Alberta. A judge in B.C., for example, found that this civil forfeiture office had taken, in his words, "zealous measures" in a case and ordered the return of confiscated property. It's unclear in our analysis so far whether we are putting in place adequate safeguards to make sure that we are in fact confiscating and selling and distributing property in an equitable way and then making sure that we don't end up creating more legal cases based on legislation that maybe is not comprehensive in that regard.

I think that a broad definition of a peace officer – it's important to have a peace officer definition here that can work for us, right? The definition's potential to empower many people not intended to be empowered by this act is a potential issue that we should look at as well.

Another issue that I think we might want to consider is around section 7 of this bill. A respondent, according to this, now has only 30 days from the time of being served with a restraint order to apply for a review of their order. Previously the respondent had the time to the disposal hearing to apply for a review, so I think it would be prudent and worth while to explore further why we have this 30-day cut-off in this new legislation, and I would just like to explore that a little bit further.

Similarly, in section 8 there is the provision to give the court additional grounds to dismiss an application for review of a restraining order. Under this bill the application may be dismissed if the court is satisfied that "the only ground for a review is a defect in form, a technical irregularity or an inadvertent error or omission, and that no substantial wrong or miscarriage of justice has occurred." Mr. Speaker, I would just like to explore that further in regard to what the implications of that statement are, and, you know, I think it brings to mind what inadvertent mistakes would be now tolerated, that otherwise this bill seeks to change.

I mean, we've been working under tight time restraint here to have some analysis. We want to have time to pursue this further,

like I said, to talk to people outside to find out how the system is working for them now and how this might change.

I think that those are my concerns for now. I also would like to say, Mr. Speaker, that certainly upon a global analysis, a reading of this bill under short time constraints would suggest that Alberta's New Democrats would support this measure in a larger sense, but there are a number of specific issues that I would like to explore further in the various readings of this bill over the fullness of time.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

4:10

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to speak to Bill 23, Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2015. I will note that we were only given a briefing on this bill yesterday, and one would have assumed that if the government had had, I guess, its ducks lined up in a row, we should have seen this bill much earlier on the Order Paper, where we could have had a more fulsome discussion and had time to research more thoroughly and to reach out to stakeholders and the like. We're still working through that process, and we're going forward.

You know, it makes it very difficult for us to do our jobs on this side of the House, to analyze and critique government bills and amendments, when they're put on the Order Paper so late and we're given a briefing yesterday afternoon and expected to fill in the gaps and to be prepared here to come in and thoroughly look at legislation and analyze it and give our open, honest evaluation of it. Nevertheless, we'll try and work through it given those parameters.

What we have here are civil forfeitures, where the Department of Justice, on the recommendation of the police, takes goods and the like when people are accused of crimes under either the federal Criminal Code or the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. That's essentially used then to try to make amends, with that money, to people who have been victimized through the ongoing criminal process. Bill 23 will create a new fund for civil forfeitures, prohibit forfeiture proceedings in court from being used in criminal trials, and have the civil forfeiture office obtain money for operational expenses from the forfeitures themselves.

That's an interesting proposal that, of course, sounds good in practice given that if you can have a self-funding organization, well, then it does relieve the public purse of obligations to fund government operations. It sounds good, but the devil is in the detail. Whether or not we're creating a system that is sustainable, whether it doesn't create conflicts of interest and doesn't provide challenges by our going to the strict model is what we from the Alberta Liberal perspective are questioning. Under Bill 23 the civil forfeiture office will need seizures to survive. The civil forfeiture office will no longer obtain its operational revenue from the Ministry of Justice. Instead, 100 per cent of its operational revenue will be derived from the forfeitures themselves. The government calls this an expense-recovery business model.

Police will be able to seize assets on an interim basis for a maximum of 30 days in the absence of a judge's order. This is up from the current 10. Bill 23 will create a new fund for forfeiture proceeds called the civil forfeiture fund, a shift from the status quo, where proceeds are put into a ministerial trust account. The bill will also prohibit objections against seizures in civil court from being used in criminal court proceedings. The law's name will be renamed the civil forfeiture act from the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, as the hon. minister stated, to avoid confusion as there's another act with a slightly similar mandate that also exists.

You know, concerning the funding model, we question – and we’re trying to get our heads around it; maybe the minister can explain this. We see it as Bill 23 creating a conflict of interest on the part of the civil forfeiture office as they will need to seize property to exist. The only way for a conflict of interest to be eliminated under this funding model is for the Justice ministry to guarantee any shortfalls where the property seized is worth less than the office’s operational expenses. You know, we don’t really want to create a situation where the organization, in order to survive, in order to pay its bills, in order to do the work that they’re mandated to do, have to simply go looking for more assets to seize. That’s essentially what I think we’re creating in this situation, not following through. We’re creating a situation where we may be encouraging the organization to go about things in a fashion that may not be fair and may not be the wisest.

We know – it was noted by the hon. member who spoke before me – that this situation has occurred in British Columbia. It was noted by a judge that that office had become overzealous in pursuing seizures. Although civil forfeiture laws were initially intended to target organized crime, they can also be used, if this model is pursued, to go after some people who may not necessarily be the intended targets of what the government’s purpose of this program was in the first place.

Although the executive director of the civil forfeiture office does not anticipate that this model will reduce any grant payments from the fund despite the office’s plan that it will need to raise a minimum amount to ensure that grants can be paid and that enough money does exist to keep the operations going, that is a concern to us. We see it as a conflict of interest. If there is something in the bill that states that the Justice ministry will cover those ongoing concerns and keep it operating as a government entity should there be a shortfall, I think that would be a solution to what we see as a conflict of interest, or the minister could possibly explain as to why we missed the boat on that. Like I said, since we just got it yesterday, there is always that possibility. So I look forward to the minister clarifying that.

You know, this will create a broad-reaching organization. We have to make sure the proper oversight and proper limits are in place to ensure that the act is doing what it’s intended to do and not creating a situation where they act in a fashion that may not be in the best interests of the Alberta people.

In any event, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Those are my comments, and we’ll go forward from there.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 23, Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2015?

Seeing none, I’ll ask the hon. Minister of Energy to close the debate.

Mr. Oberle: On behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General I now ask that we call the question, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I’d like to call the committee to order.

4:20

Bill 23

Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2015

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Madam Chair. Again, you know, like I said, just because we got the legislation yesterday, we are working with stakeholders and so forth to maybe potentially have a couple of amendments here and there, but it’s very difficult for us to actually generate all that in a short period of time.

Like I said from the outset, Madam Chair, this bill globally is something that Alberta New Democrats can agree with. Specifically, I think we just have to be really careful. I know that in other places where they have expanded the forfeiture and seizure of property from the avails of crime, we could say, you run into that roadblock between the due process of finding someone guilty or not and then trying to sort out the property that that individual or individuals might have in their possession and how it all fits into the case. You know, that is a difficult but necessary job. We know that we want to have justice for victims as a central part of our justice system, but you want to make sure that you are doing that in a just and fair manner.

I know, from just looking at the next province over here, B.C., they’ve had some problems with that. It’s not insurmountable, but I think that the responsibility lies with us to ensure that we are building a bill that doesn’t end up creating more activity in the courts in regard to property and so forth. Of course, we want to dispense justice, but we also want to make sure that the court system is functioning properly and fluidly.

I’m just looking at this bill in terms of a line-by-line analysis. Right? Section 1 amends the name of the act, which is pretty straightforward, Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, replacing it with civil forfeiture and restitution act. I mean, that gives us a flavour of what’s to come, I guess, Madam Chair.

Then, of course, in the definitions you have “the fund,” which refers to the civil forfeiture fund that we’re presumably creating, and “peace officer,” which may refer to

any other person employed by a public entity, a municipality or the Government of Canada for the preservation and maintenance of the public peace, while the person is in the exercise or discharge of the person’s powers and duties.

The breadth of that definition, Madam Chair, as I had said in my comments not long ago in second reading, is, I think, a cause for some concern, just the breadth of deputizing people as a peace officer in the broadest possible way.

Also in the definitions the definition of a property victim is added. That’s fairly straightforward: a person who’s “been deprived of property by reason of [the] illegal act” that’s been carried out by another person. Fair enough. I guess that where we need clarification is in regard to what the definition of a property victim actually is. Okay? I mean, in some cases it becomes patently obvious, but in other circumstances it could be not so much. So I think that that’s worth pursuing here to some degree.

Section 7 is where we see another significant amendment, and that is the restriction that a respondent has 30 days to apply for a review of a restraint order. As I said before, we’re just wondering about the arbitrary nature of this time. Maybe it doesn’t quite fit in with court proceedings so that, you know, the court case has not really moved that much, but still you only have 30 days to appeal. It’s almost like you have two sort of parallel judgment things

happening at the same time, but one has a 30-day limit while the other one could go on for many, many months.

Section 8 is amended as well with this new bill by the addition of this piece here, which says that the Court may dismiss an application for a review of the restraint order if the Court is satisfied that

- (a.1) the only ground for a review is a defect in form, a technical irregularity or an inadvertent error or omission, and that no substantial wrong or miscarriage of justice has occurred.

Our concern with that provisionally is that the addition of that last part, that I just read, might limit the legal recourse available to those for whom the confiscation of the property is a somehow disproportionate sanction or where doubts exist as to whether or not the property was the proceeds of crime – okay? – so kind of where you draw the line with the property that an accused might own.

The other part, 3.1, is added on, and that's on the civil forfeiture fund itself. This is a regulated fund, as far as I can see, receiving, among other things,

- (a) proceeds from property forfeited to the Crown . . .
- (c) proceeds paid to the Crown from the disposal of property . . .
- (d) money appropriated by the Legislature for the purposes of the Fund;

So we would be starting this fund, I suppose.

- (e) advances from the General Revenue Fund for the purposes of the Fund;
- (f) money received as repayment of any amount paid by the Minister from the Fund;

Finally,

- (g) amounts paid to the Court, the Minister or the Fund in compliance with a court order or pursuant to a settlement of a legal action, or relating to administrative disposition proceedings.

Okay. That's a significant part of this bill as well, the function and creation of the fund.

Section 55 is permitting the cabinet to make regulations on this whole procedure, which is, I think, fairly straightforward. Then it also designates illegal acts as specified property acquisition offences and designates illegal acts as specified bodily harm offences as well. That's fair enough, I think. But we just should probably take note that this provision in the bill might effectively curtail debate as to whether designated illegal acts were indeed property acquisition or bodily harm offences. You know, it just kind of mixes things together, in our minds, so we have that concern as well.

Those are the issues that I have up to this point, Madam Chair, because, of course, we are in a dynamic of time and space and intellect, and where those intersect – we just don't have enough of it right now. If other hon. members can help us with the proper analysis of this bill, that would be great, and away we go.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

4:30

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be quite brief here. I do note that the Alberta Liberals will be bringing in an amendment, hopefully, that we believe will eliminate some of the conflicts of interest which may arise out of making the civil forfeiture office fully, 100 per cent, responsible for its operational revenue as it will be derived from the forfeitures themselves. Obviously, what the government is calling it is an expense recovery business, which, like I said in earlier debate, is probably what we would like in a perfect world. But it also could drive certain behaviours that may not be in the best interests of the Alberta public.

That amendment, being brought forward by our critic for this area, the Member for Edmonton-Centre, will be forthcoming. It's

my understanding that we are working on it as we speak given what was already stated, that we got a bill briefing on late yesterday afternoon. Frankly, we're in the dying days of a session. I'm still perplexed by the fact that this bill wasn't on the Order Paper a couple of weeks ago, frankly, to have us be able to consult, to do our work, to explore whether or not this is working because we do have a case where we should look at other jurisdictions that have gone down this path, that have civil forfeiture offices working and operating, and look at the best practices of those institutions going forward.

As I noted earlier in debate, there has been some commentary out of the justice system in British Columbia that states that having a self-funding organization based on the forfeitures they make has led to the commentary that that office has acted in an overzealous fashion. This can create difficulties for our citizenry if they have property confiscated and, in fact, whether they have the opportunity to get legal consultation to be able to appear before a magistrate or a judge to explain their case and to get their ducks in a row. Well, my goodness. We don't want to have overreach by our civil forfeiture office that would impinge on our civil liberties and wouldn't ensure a fair playing field for those involved in the criminal justice system.

So those are concerns, the apparent conflicts of interest that could be eliminated. If the Justice ministry were to guarantee any shortfalls where property seized was worth less than the office's operational expenses, that may be a fix to this conundrum that would actually allow it to move forward in a better fashion, where the organization wasn't compelled to not act in accordance with the spirit of the legislation or the purpose and the like. So we'd like to bring that intention forward and the careful scrutiny to this bill that I am certain the Member for Edmonton-Centre will bring forward in that.

I do note that there are some changes here that are being contemplated that affect the citizenry and affect the way this bill will work in some form and fashion going forward.

Madam Chair, I do have an amendment in front of me that I would like to pass out. I note the hon. Justice minister was just here, so I'm hoping that he can maybe shed some light on this amendment and that we can go forward and he can understand it and decipher it and give his commentary as to what his thoughts are on it, the reason, the rationale, and, hopefully, how . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, before we carry on and discuss the amendment, we'll take a moment to pass it out to everybody.

Mr. Hehr: That sounds wonderful.

The Deputy Chair: This will be known as amendment A1.

Thank you, hon. member. You may proceed with amendment A1 on Bill 23.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. This is brought on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman to move that Bill 23, Victims Restitution and Compensation Amendment Act, 2015, be amended in section 38, in the proposed section 45.2(d), by striking out subclause (vii).

We feel that this amendment will bring some clarity to the bill, will allow for a more seamless administration of justice, and will allow the bill to proceed with more of a sense of fair play and spirit that is meant to bring some more focus to what the purpose of the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2015, should look like. We believe it will create fewer conflicts of interest and allow the organization to proceed in a fashion that will allow it to do its good work without causing it to overreach or to act

in an overzealous fashion and would allow for the department to be more effective in the way it delivers and goes about its business.

I know the hon. Justice minister is here, so I'm certain he will have some comments on this amendment put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. I'm sure that he will see the wisdom in what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is proposing and duly enter it into the books. Like I said, we've been working very hard, with short timelines, to try and get our amendments in order and to understand the bill and the purpose and scope, and we think this amendment will go a long way to making the bill a stronger bill for the people of Alberta.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Just before I continue, I wanted to thank this member for his service to the Assembly. I remember the day when you and I had a trial opposite each other, Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I've always enjoyed your commentary. Thank you for your service the last seven years.

And, Madam Chair, thank you for your service the last 14 years.

I rise to speak against this amendment. What this would in effect do is that it would remove a section on page 26 of Bill 23:

- (vii) payment of the expenses directly associated with the administration of those Parts of this Act by the office, agency or branch of the Government responsible for administering those Parts of this Act.

Now, one of the piths and the substance of this bill is that we want to move to a self-funding model as exists for the civil forfeiture office in other major provinces. What's happening right now: the civil forfeiture office is doing good work, but at the same time the taxpayers are de facto subsidizing the civil forfeiture office. Of course, that does result in positive things, bad money helping good organizations throughout the last six to seven years that this has been operating.

One of the major tenets of this bill, Madam Chair, is that this office should not be subsidized by the taxpayer. I have yet to hear a good argument against this. With no disrespect to my friend from Calgary-Buffalo and his always congenial friend from Edmonton-Centre, I have to oppose this amendment, and I would encourage all members to vote it down.

Thank you.

4:40

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Madam Chair. Certainly, this is an interesting development. Again, we're dealing with very short, compressed timelines, and it's meant to be educative as well. As I read through the first part of the analysis of the setting up of this fund, it seemed clear that we'd take monies from general revenues to establish the fund in the first place. That's public money. Then, of course, this whole thing is going through the court system, which is a public entity.

The separate fund is what I'm curious about, then. Sure, it's great to have the idea that it is self-sustaining or self-funding – I mean, that's an idea that I think is worthy to pursue – but if it's not, certainly we need to have a provision for it to still carry on and still function. I'm asking the minister and House leader if subsection (vii) there, that we're debating whether we should eliminate or not – that does not preclude the possibility of still having to fund this restitution process using public funds if there's not enough seizure money and/or property to run the show. Am I getting that correctly?

Mr. Denis: I would respectfully defer – and I would also thank you for your service in the last three years and the four years before that.

Without this section my understanding is, again, that we're moving away from a self-funding model. The part of this legislation that is very important is the fact that we want to move away from taxpayers subsidizing this office. My understanding, my read of this bill is that if we pass amendment A1, from the Member for Edmonton-Centre, as the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has indicated, we would move away from that model, and you'd have basically a situation where the taxpayers are indirectly subsidizing this office through the cost of the many hard-working people of the Alberta public service.

Mr. Hehr: Well, now that I've heard the commentary going back and forth, I agree with the minister on the goal of a self-funding organization, okay? If a government body who is existing, the civil forfeiture, under this method can self-fund, great. Cool bananas. That is good in my books, and frankly it's responsible for it to do so if that is operationally possible. What we don't want to find and what this amendment addresses are cases where the civil forfeiture office maybe has a dry year, shall we say. The citizens of Alberta are no longer wanting to be involved in crime, have given it up as a means of pursuing their livelihoods, and just simply put, it finds itself having a difficult time making payroll, paying the people on staff to be able to do so – okay? – which is maybe a stretch but nonetheless a possibility out there. Well, you know, you can imagine a host of circumstances. We have seen how in other organizations, other provinces there has been commentary from the bench that says that these organizations in B.C. have become overzealous in their approach, okay?

What this amendment would do – obviously, it wouldn't take away from the goal or from the Justice minister saying to this organization: "Look here. You guys are primarily on your own. Don't expect any money from us. There's no money in the budget for anything of that nature." But if it comes down to the end of the year and this organization has \$50,000 outstanding and they're going to miss payroll: well, my goodness, we better get another forfeiture out there. Or is it better just to have the ministry cover that? We think that having that provision in place wouldn't undercut what the Justice minister is trying to do to have this organization be self-sustaining but would allow the provision where that conflict doesn't occur that the organization has to justify its means by going out there and overreaching, being overbroad and overzealous in their approach.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Denis: The last comment that I will make on this is that, unfortunately, we've never had a situation where there isn't enough money in the reserve fund in the civil forfeiture office. Somebody asked me: what about drugs? Well, unfortunately, illegal drugs are a major aspect dealing with this office, the items that they seize. That's going to be around for a while, unfortunately. That's just the reality. I hope that the member, though, is right and proves me wrong, that all the crime stops next year in Alberta. Unfortunately, I don't think that's going to happen.

I also want to mention and credit the Minister of Energy, who's whispered over to me that, of course, this is why we have a reserve fund. We don't pay out all of the money that we get in any given year. You keep a reserve fund to keep this operating. The purpose of this is to take a financial bite out of crime. The purpose is not to

seize legitimate people's property; the purpose is to take a bite out of the financial aspects of crime.

I also lastly just want to mention that the government of Ontario has an almost identical process whereby the office is self-funded and has not encountered any of the issues that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo posits.

That'll be my final comment on this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Any other members wish to comment on amendment A1?

Seeing none, we will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We will go back to debating Bill 23 in Committee of the Whole. Are there any members who wish to comment?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 23 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Mr. Oberle: Madam Chair, I would move at this time that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

Mr. Dallas: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 23. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Mr. Denis: I would like to ask for unanimous consent of the Assembly to proceed with third reading of Bill 23 today.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Mr. Oberle: Madam Speaker, in light of that and in light of considerable progress made today, I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:50 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, March 26, 2015

Issue 27

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Speaker
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Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Cao, Wayne C.N., Calgary-Fort (PC)
Casey, Ron, Banff-Cochrane (PC)
Cusanelli, Christine, Calgary-Currie (PC)
Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
Denis, Hon. Jonathan, QC, Calgary-Acadia (PC),
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 26, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray. Dear Lord, may the lessons we learn today help guide and shape our thoughts about tomorrow, and may we transfer the benefits of those thoughts into positive actions to help the people we've been elected to serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly on this special budget day the budget director and co-manager of finance in the Prentice family. She has selflessly fulfilled this responsibility for 32 years, my spouse, Karen Prentice. We have been together through thick and thin, good times and bad, some of both. She is the mother of our three beautiful daughters and the attentive grandmother of two grandchildren. She is an extremely successful woman in her own right, professionally and in many charitable causes that she supports and leads. She is the love of my life, Karen Prentice.

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

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very dear friend of mine, Cindy Ady, who is seated in your gallery. Cindy, as you know, served as the MLA for Calgary-Shaw for eight years, and she was the minister of tourism, parks, and recreation from 2008 to 2012. Cindy is well known for her enthusiasm, especially when she hosted the highly successful Alberta House pavilion at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics. She is currently enjoying her new role as chief executive officer for Tourism Calgary. Cindy, please rise so we can give you the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have about 30 guests to be introduced, so I would ask you to please be as brief as you possibly can so we can get them all in quickly and recognize them.

Let us begin with school groups, starting with the Minister of Seniors, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you a very special group of 28 grade 6 students from Guthrie school along with their teacher. This school is located on our military base at Edmonton Garrison. All of these kids have families that serve in the military, so we want to thank them for that. They're seated in the members' gallery. They're accompanied by their fantastic teacher, Colleen Tremblay, and their parent helper, Captain Jennifer Stewart. I'd ask them to please rise, and we'll give them the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 24 visitors from l'école À la Découverte. There are vingt-quatre visiteurs here

today, and I just had a photograph with them. They are enjoying their visit to the Legislature, and I'd ask that we all give them a very warm welcome.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups or education groups? The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Khan: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly nearly 60 students from my constituency in St. Albert. Today we're joined by students from Sir Alexander Mackenzie school. They're with their very talented teachers: Roger Bouthillier, Dawn Brown, and Janet Hurley, and a very able parent helper, Vince Biesinger. We had a group from SAM school, as it's affectionately called, earlier this week, and I let the House know that I am a graduate of SAM school. The kids here today are a tremendous reminder of where I've come from and, I think, a really great reason for why we're all here. I'd like to ask them now to rise – I believe they're in the public gallery behind me – and receive the warm traditional welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other school or education groups?

Seeing none, let us introduce other important guests, starting with Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured today to introduce to you and through you to all members three very special guests seated in your gallery. These guests are all friends and very close colleagues of the late Dr. Cy Frank, who I will speak about later in the Routine in a member's statement. Today in your gallery we have Ms Judy Crawford, who would have been executive assistant to Dr. Frank for 27 years next month; Dr. Don Dick, senior medical director of the bone and joint health strategic clinical network of Alberta Health Services; and Dr. Pamela Valentine, the interim chief executive officer of Alberta Innovates: Health Solutions. I would ask my colleagues to join me in extending our traditional warm welcome and our condolences to our three guests today.

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta, followed by the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Mr. Khan: Thank you so very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a great community leader from St. Albert. We're joined by Lynda Moffat, president and CEO of the St. Albert and District Chamber of Commerce. The St. Albert district chamber now has over 900 hard-working and contributing members working to develop and continue to grow the great city of St. Albert. I'd ask Lynda to now rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, followed by the Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am extremely proud to stand and introduce to you and through you someone who has been very special in my life, who has taken me on some walks when he thinks I need to go for a walk, and that's my assistant, Matt Solberg. I'd ask Matt to stand.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism, followed by the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly mon ami Ken

Baril, the mayor of Legal. Would he please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce two friends of mine, which I will do together in the interest of time. First off, a good friend of mine, is Dr. Amina Beecroft. Dr. Beecroft is a native of Edmonton. I had the privilege of meeting her at her door in 2007. She is the president of A2B2 Analytics. She has been on faculty at Mount Royal University as a professor in finance, is a graduate of the University of Western Ontario and the University of Alberta. She is a chartered financial analyst, MBA graduate, doctor of finance, and the list goes on. She's been a great adviser and supporter and friend. Thank you for joining us.

Secondly, a friend of mine from the picturesque constituency of Calgary-Acadia, a native of Salmon Arm, B.C., is Karen Lloyd. She is a resident of Willow Park, and I met Karen while door-knocking in 2012. She is a strong advocate for traffic safety. She is the president of the Calgary Association of Parents and School Councils, and right now she is actually a candidate for wards 11 and 13 public school board, which is an election happening on April 13.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask that we please give both of these incredible people the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two outstanding community volunteers, Doug Stevens and Lorna Stevens. They both are no strangers to many of my colleagues in the House and are among the best. Doug is serving as the CFO of Calgary-Hawkwood, that I have the honour to represent. I ask my guests to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. It is my great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two wonderful staff members from my Innisfail-Sylvan Lake constituency office, Charlene Preston and Kelly Larson. Charlene and Kelly are an integral part of my team working in the constituency office, helping everyday Albertans through their concerns. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Sean McIntyre, the mayor of Sylvan Lake. Sean has been an incredible, dedicated, passionate mayor for our community. I have worked with Mayor McIntyre on numerous issues in the community, and I appreciate his hard work and dedication to the residents of Sylvan Lake. I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations, followed by Calgary-Bow.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce Ms Shelley Wegner. Shelley is a tireless advocate on behalf of aboriginal people in the province. As an entrepreneur she's served on numerous boards in the province, including the police foundation,

Northlands, and the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce. Her work on the humanitarian side is equally outstanding. Above all, Shelley is the PC candidate for the constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona. I would ask Ms Wegner to stand and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by Lethbridge-East.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Josh Traptow. Josh currently works as an adviser in communications and government relations at The Alex community health centre in Calgary. I've known Josh since he was in Bowness high, and I would like to thank him for his many years as president of my PC board. Josh is seated in the public gallery, and I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the Assembly I introduce two super, smart, experienced, accomplished young women leaders of Alberta. Sitting in the public gallery, first, is Tammy Perlich, the PC candidate for Lethbridge-East, who will be a wonderful replacement for me and a dedicated MLA for Alberta; secondly, my daughter, a Lethbridge city councillor, Bridget Mearns, who is here today for me and represents her sisters, to whom I owe everything. Everything. Please rise and give a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly my three guests here today: my constituency assistant from Strathmore-Brooks, Lana Hale; Joanne Sieben, a long-time family friend and resident of the Bassano area; and Melissa Cotter, my legislative assistant here in Edmonton. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the Associate Minister of Asia Pacific Relations.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three guests, here for question period, from my constituency. I will ask my guests to rise as I call their names. My first guest is Dana Swigart, seated in the visitors' gallery, a first-term councillor for the MD of Bonnyville. I'd like to thank him for the great work he does for the people of his ward.

My second guest is Margaret Borders, seated in the members' gallery, a trustee from Lakeland Catholic school division, who also does a wonderful job serving the children of our community.

The third guest is the mayor from Cold Lake, Craig Copeland, no stranger to this Chamber. Craig is also the PC candidate for the Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency, so I'm leaving my community in very good hands.

I would ask all of you to give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Asia Pacific Relations, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Norman Poon, an HR professional with the Bethany care centres in Calgary, that have a facility for seniors with dementia

in my riding. He has also been a PC member for more than half his life and is a very long-time friend of mine. I would like to ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Red Deer-North.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two visitors from my constituency of Leduc-Beaumont who have come today for question period and to witness our Finance minister deliver the budget this afternoon. They are Bruce Lecren, a retiree from Nav Canada and a councillor for the town of Beaumont; and Alana Gueutal, a native of Leduc and local entrepreneur and president of the Leduc Regional Chamber of Commerce. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by Calgary-Currie.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a very good friend of mine who has just won the PC nomination for Red Deer-North. Christine Moore has a wealth of experience and is excited about the next great provincial event. With her today is her husband, David Moore, who is now busy taking lessons from my husband about signs. They are in the public gallery. I would ask them to rise and accept the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly Paul Pryce, who is the political adviser to the consulate general of Japan. He is here joining me today for the budget. I want to say thank you to him for all of his help to me now and in my future endeavours here. I would like to ask him, therefore, to rise and receive the traditional welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you two very close friends of mine and tremendous leaders from the region of the municipality of Wood Buffalo, Mayor Melissa Blake and Jeff Thompson, who is the chair of the public school board of trustees. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two very devoted community volunteers, Bilal Khan and Nusrat Akhtar. Mr. Khan is the publisher of *Community Times Canada*, western Canada's first and only multilanguage newspaper, and they are celebrating their second anniversary. I would request them to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce Ahmed Sawaf, a fine constituent of Calgary-Lougheed who is doing great things in the realm of marketing Alberta innovations in industry internationally. I ask our good friend to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, followed by Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you'll bear with me, I'll go quickly, but I have five introductions that I'd like to make. Today we're joined by a number of great guests: the president of the AAMD and C, Mr. Al Kemmere; the president of the AUMA, Ms Helen Rice; newly elected just this week, on Monday, our reeve for Brazeau county, Reeve-elect Bart Guyon – welcome, Bart, and congratulations on your election – the mayor of Drayton Valley, Mr. Glenn McLean; and a good friend and former minister, an MLA of this House, a great friend to this House, Mr. Ron Liepert. If you could all please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you a very good friend of mine and yours, Kal Toor, who is an accomplished businessman who is sitting in the public gallery. I ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, a reminder that you have 35 seconds for each question and 35 seconds maximum for each response. I will cut you off at that point if I have to.

Let us start with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition for the first set of questions.

Government Telephone Town Hall Meetings

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night the Premier conducted a telephone town hall to talk about the budget. Hundreds of thousands of Albertans received phone calls, and they were asked to provide their e-mail addresses to the government. The Privacy Commissioner recommends that privacy impact assessments be conducted before major projects that involve the collection, use, or disclosure of personal information to ensure the safety of Albertans' private information. To the Minister of Service Alberta: will you table the thorough privacy impact assessment that was conducted in advance of last night's telephone town hall?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, these are serious times for our province. There is not a person in this Chamber or amongst our distinguished guests here today that is not affected by what they're seeing in our province, job losses that we hear about from people that we know and love. The town halls are an important part of continuing a dialogue with Albertans, speaking about the circumstances that we're in, what we're doing, and the plan to move forward. No budget has ever received this amount of consultation with Albertans, and we intend to carry forward on that basis.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Premier, you didn't answer the question, so let's try it again. This morning we reached out to the office of the Privacy Commissioner just to ask if they had been made aware in advance of last night's large-scale data collection project. Unfortunately, the

commissioner was not consulted. Now, we're talking about the private information of hundreds of thousands of Albertans, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: if privacy impact assessments were not conducted and the Privacy Commissioner was not consulted, how can Albertans be assured that this large-scale data collection project has not compromised their private, personal information?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is incorrect in her assertions. These conversations are part of the process of laying out for Albertans the 10-year vision that's being put forward of setting things right in this province, a vision of moving the province forward, a continued process of consulting with Albertans in every corner of the province about the steps that their government is taking. I encourage the hon. member to stay tuned for the budget of the Minister of Finance.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, obviously, you haven't, again, followed the rules and the laws of the land, Mr. Premier.

The telephone town halls and the large-scale data collection by this government are happening. Now, I would like to know: will the Premier call the Privacy Commissioner to review the data collection from last night and ensure that the proper protections are in place before conducting any more of these large-scale telephone town halls? It's about people's privacy, Premier.

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly pleased to speak with the Privacy Commissioner at any time. More than 36,000 people participated in these calls last evening, and I would point out that the hon. member opposite and her party have had the opportunity to speak with Albertans directly to convey what their plan is to deal with the circumstance that we face as Albertans. They haven't taken us up on that offer because they don't have a plan and can't speak to our goals.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Second main set of questions.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's just straighten it out. Our plans are the ones that you've all taken, Premier.

Tax Policy

Mrs. Forsyth: Two years ago the former Leader of the Official Opposition asked the following question before the last once-in-a-generation budget:

Given that we know that the Premier wants to keep overspending ... because she keeps on insisting that all of this debt that she is racking up is the result of a revenue problem, what is it going to be: personal and corporate income taxes, health care premiums, liquor taxes, fuel taxes, or some other taxes?

The leaders have changed, but it's a good question. To the Premier: how often can this government claim to deliver a once-in-a-generation budget?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, the question seems to have been written for a different Premier. I'd like to reassure the hon. member opposite that I am, in fact, the Premier. I take a great deal of pride in the work of this government. We are Alberta under new management. The Minister of Finance will be in this Chamber momentarily introducing one of the most important budget documents that we've seen in modern times in this province. I'd encourage the hon. member and her party to be supportive.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, old management, new management: they're all the same, okay?

I'd like to provide this House with another quote, and it's a very good quote, in my opinion. "The key to smart fiscal policy is lower taxes. Taxes must be kept determinedly low to encourage expansion." Now, that's a great line, Mr. Speaker, and it definitely reflects the opinion of the Wildrose. To the Premier. This quote came from you as you fought rampant spending by the Liberal government. Do you still agree that higher taxes discourage economic expansion?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, smart fiscal policy is obviously the essence of any government. In terms of this province and the critical issues that we face right now, the job losses that we see in this province: these are challenging times. This budget that the House will hear momentarily is one that will reflect balance. It will reflect good stewardship. I would assure the hon. member and her party, to the extent that they're interested, that this budget will be in the interests of Albertans and their children and their grandchildren.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we should make something very clear. We're in the fiscal situation because of your government spending like drunken sailors, Premier.

A final quote from the former Member of Parliament for Calgary Centre-North during his time in Ottawa. "Mr. Speaker, I will say what is morally wrong. It was 13 years of Liberal ineptitude, mismanagement, incompetence, ducking, dodging, delaying, and cut and run tax and spend liberalism. Our government will not do that." It's an interesting quote, Mr. Speaker. Does the Premier agree that years of mismanagement and incompetence followed by tax and spend liberalism is morally wrong?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I encourage the hon. member to remain seated and to hear the budget that the Minister of Finance brings forward. You know, I don't think there's anyone in the province that doesn't understand that the challenges that we face relate to a collapse of oil prices and the fiscal circumstance that the government finds itself in, facing deficits of close to \$20 billion over the next three years. These are challenging circumstances, but one thing that separates the government from that side is an optimism and a hopefulness and a belief in Albertans and our ability to get through this together.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Disaster Recovery Program Payments

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After the devastating floods of 2013 water was pumped into the Hampton Hills and Sunrise districts in High River, and the homes in these communities were sacrificed as a result of the emergency strategy. Some communities that flooded like Beachwood, however, were bought out and compensated at full market value, but the Hamptons and Sunrise districts were only compensated for partial home damage. To the minister: will you ensure that the residents of Hampton Hills and Sunrise, who have now lost their homes again as a result of inappropriate remedial work, now receive full market value for their homes and the lots?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government cares deeply about the people that were affected by the 2013 floods. It was a devastating event for all of them, and we care deeply. We're working with the families in Hampton Hills and in all of the areas

of High River and in southern Alberta on the flood mitigation work and on the flood recovery program. That's very important for us. We've added additional staff to do that. We will be there till every one of those cases is resolved.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the residents of these communities, though, need a voice in the Legislature, and your government's DRP response just hasn't been good enough so far. There are still hundreds of files left to close from these communities of Hampton Hills and Sunrise. They deserve compensation for both their homes and the lots, like Beachwood. It's been two years, and these residents really need help. Will you admit that the current program to only cover partial values is flawed and reverse this decision and fully compensate these poor residents?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm so proud to stand and say that the community does have a member of the Legislature in government. The Member for Highwood is in government. I'm very proud to say that. They do have their MLA sitting on this side of the House and doing a fantastic job. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, they were replaced at assessed value, and we will continue to be there for every one of those cases until they're resolved.

An Hon. Member: And so will their MLA.

Mrs. McQueen: And so will their MLA.

We've added additional staffing to make sure that that will happen, to make sure that all of those cases are resolved.

The Speaker: Hon. member, final supplemental. I hope we can all give him the floor and give the answering person the floor as well. Proceed.

2:00

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the government's DRP response has been less than stellar. I say once again that when emergency services ordered these two communities to be sacrificed, the residents expected full and proper compensation. They didn't ask for that to be done. Please explain why this government has refused to do a full and complete buyout for their homes. Explain.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me remind this hon. member that there were 10,500 cases from the 2013 floods. We have gotten all of those completed, with just under 2,000 left to complete. There is no other jurisdiction that has been able to react and respond as quickly as Alberta has done with regard to that. You look at the floods in Manitoba. They couldn't respond as quickly as we have. We will be there for every one of those residents. We will be there right till the end. We've increased it from 50 per cent to 90 per cent of the funding, and it's because of this government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Investigation into Release of Information

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Infrastructure has publicly been accused of pedalling dirt on the Member for

Edmonton-Castle Downs and the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs to the opposition. Calgary Police Services is also investigating an alleged case of fraudulent impersonation to send that same dirt to the media. Yesterday this same minister all but admitted to these claims but saying he often, quote, shoots the breeze. End of quote. When will this Minister of Infrastructure stop hiding behind the Justice or Service Alberta ministers, stand up, show some courage, and admit to Albertans exactly what he's done?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Any investigation is inappropriate to comment on in this Chamber. The matter the member raises is in the hands of the Privacy Commissioner. I have no further information. The Privacy Commissioner, Ms Clayton, will deal with this.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, media reports that two more opposition staffers have come forward alleging that the Minister of Infrastructure was guiding the opposition on where to look for the telephone bills of the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs and the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs called this, quote, disappointing and unethical that a cabinet minister would in any way try to blemish the reputation of another caucus member. End of quote. We agree, but this minister continues to sit beside the Premier at the cabinet table. To the Premier: is this the standard of behaviour you as Premier and Albertans can expect from your government?

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice, do you wish to comment?

Mr. Denis: The only comment I have is that it appears that the leader of the third party references allegations against another member, which is 23(h) of our Standing Orders.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the most disturbing fact about these cases is that the Minister of Infrastructure was the Premier's leadership campaign co-chair. Obviously, they're great buddies. It is often said that if you tell me who your friends are, I'll tell you who you are. To the Premier: are you the type of person who approves these shady backroom deals? Is this the type of leadership you're offering Albertans for the next 10 years?

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is not really characteristic of the kind of questions we normally would like to hear in the House.

Obviously, hon. Minister of Justice, you've already stated a position. I'll allow you to state one final one, and hopefully we can move on after that.

Seeing no response, let us move on. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. More allegations surfaced today that the Minister of Infrastructure encouraged opposition MLAs and staff to FOIP the long-distance phone records of the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. At the time the MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs was a candidate for the PC leadership, and the minister was a key organizer for the Premier's leadership campaign. The phone records were subsequently leaked to the media. To the Minister of Infrastructure: did you or did you not, while a minister of the Crown, encourage opposition MLAs to seek out the phone records of the MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs?

Mr. Denis: Again, Mr. Speaker, this was answered about 30 seconds ago. We have no further information. I would suggest that this member go talk to the Privacy Commissioner, who is an independent officer of this Legislature.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When the phone records were leaked, an individual's name apparently was falsely used. Impersonation or fraudulent impersonation is a crime, and the Calgary police began an investigation, which was abruptly terminated. The chief of police at the time was recently appointed as a PC candidate by the Premier. In order to avoid any appearance of political interference, will the Justice minister appoint a special prosecutor to review the evidence to see if further investigation or charges are warranted?

The Speaker: Hon. members, let's be careful when we use names of people who are not in the Assembly and able to defend themselves. You know the long-standing tradition, hon. member, as well as I do.

Is there anyone on the front bench that wishes to comment? I see no one.

Let's see what you have for a final supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't aware I'd named anyone, but this does smell to high heaven.

Several individuals, including the MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark, apparently told police about the minister's actions, yet the police never interviewed the target of the leak, the MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs. Again to the Justice Minister: in order to avoid the appearance of political interference, will you appoint a special prosecutor to determine if further investigation or charges are warranted, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: Please have a seat.

Hon. members, as I understand it, the Minister of Justice has clarified this matter. It has gone for investigation by one of our legislative officers. If you wish to reiterate that statement, I'll allow you to do so. If not, we're going to move on.

Let us move on, then. Edmonton-Centre, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

Maintenance Enforcement

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's your day, kiddo. The Justice minister has closed the Calgary maintenance enforcement office. Now, he is quoted as saying that this is a decision about space, but the effect will be about losing staff. Now, given an already crappy collection rate and 27 per cent of cases being noncompliant – it's pretty crappy; no money there – this makes for a pretty dismal outlook for Alberta children expecting a court-ordered payment. To the minister: how does the minister expect to improve this collection rate owed to Alberta children with fewer staff?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The approach that we've undertaken reflects how clients are accessing maintenance enforcement. The vast majority are through online contacts or through the phone. The member is quite correct, though. The regularity of payment rate is 73 per cent. The total collected on behalf of Alberta families under maintenance enforcement: \$253.3 million.

Ms Blakeman: Yep, and you left half a billion on the table that's owed to kids.

Back to the same minister. Given that 27 per cent is the noncompliance for monthly collection and out of that there is still a 46 per cent fail rate in collecting arrears on back payments, what are the minister's plans to improve the arrears collection aside from cutting staff by seven positions?

Mr. Denis: Again, Mr. Speaker, we look toward the best efficiency that we can possibly get. There were seven positions in the Calgary office. As I mentioned to the member before, our approach reflects how clients are accessing the service. The Calgary office was never intended to be a drop-in office for in-person service and maintenance enforcement.

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, why is the minister okay with having 1 out of every 3 kids who are entitled to support payments not get them? So they get second-hand clothes, used sports equipment, living in a less-safe neighbourhood. Why is the minister okay with that for Alberta's kids?

Mr. Denis: Again, Mr. Speaker, I respectfully reject the premise of that question. The reality is, unfortunately, that not every debt that maintenance enforcement incurs is collectible. The reality is that \$253.3 million is what Alberta maintenance enforcement collects for our children.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

School Construction and Equipment Funding

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the budget almost upon us my constituents would like to know that school boards are going to be properly funded while continuing to provide for Alberta children the tools they need to succeed. Adequate funding is needed not only for the new schools opening across the province; funding is also required to sustain and equip existing schools. My question to the Minister of Education: as new schools continue to open, how is your ministry ensuring that school boards are properly funded with the resources needed to sustain operations and prepare these schools for new students?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for this important question. We recognize that there is more to building new schools than just bricks and mortar, of course. Each new school is given a furniture and equipment grant in the amount of 9 per cent of the construction budget for that project. Additionally, new schools receive I believe it's \$100,000 to equip each career and technology studies lab in that school.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. School board trustees have informed me that it can cost them upwards of \$1 million to prepare new schools for students. Is this an accurate figure, and if not, what are the actual costs associated with preparing school boards and new schools for students? Are these figures being met?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the important question. How much it costs to prepare a school for students depends, of course, on the size of the school. As I mentioned in my previous response, we provide funding in the amount of 9 per cent of a new school's construction budget for furniture and equipment. For example, for an elementary school with 600 capacity, which costs about \$20 million to construct, we would provide \$1.8 million for furniture and equipment. In terms of actual funding for phase 2

school projects currently under construction in Calgary we're providing more than \$25 million, and that would mean \$11 million also to Calgary Catholic to equip new schools.

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's hear the final supplemental.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you. There are schools in my constituency of Calgary-Glenmore that are 20, 30, even 50 years old. My question to the same minister: what measures are being taken to ensure that my students have access to resources that allow school boards to provide modern technologies and equipment in their classrooms?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, Alberta students deserve nothing less, of course, than modern, state-of-the-art school facilities. Each modernization project receives a furniture and equipment grant of 4.5 per cent of the total construction budget. Like the new schools, each modernization project receives an additional \$100,000 per modernized CTS lab to equip and refurbish those labs.

Violence against Aboriginal Women

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, in 2013 the RCMP found that since the 1980s more than 1,200 indigenous women have been murdered or have disappeared. Indigenous women are three and a half times more likely to experience violence than nonindigenous women, and more than half of indigenous women, or 54 per cent, experience some form of spousal violence, and 44 per cent fear for their lives. This is unacceptable. To the Premier: will you stand with indigenous women and support an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women, and if not, why not?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, the circumstances to which the hon. member refers are of concern to all of us. These are deplorable statistics. It's one of the reasons that we have been so focused on achieving results in partnership with First Nations and First Nation women leaders on the ground. It's one of the reasons that the Minister of Education and I have been so focused in our discussions with First Nation leaders on education, on improving the outcomes for educational opportunities for First Nation students. That is what the future is about, and we're working very closely with First Nation women on those outcomes.

Mr. Bilous: I'll take that as a no.

Mr. Speaker, given that a national inquiry would provide possible solutions to address the epidemic level of violence that indigenous women are dealing with while also allowing these communities to tell the stories of the loved ones they have lost, to the associate minister: why does this Premier continue to put the lives of indigenous women at risk by failing to call for an inquiry?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I made it very clear that I have no opposition whatsoever to a national inquiry on the matters that the hon. member refers to, but I make the point again in this Chamber that the future depends on working together with First Nation women, leaders in First Nation communities to improve educational outcomes.

To deal with the other circumstances which the hon. member is referring to, we will only do that through this government exercising leadership, stepping up, dealing with these matters, providing proper support for First Nation communities, and we intend to do that.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, given that there was a round-table on missing and murdered indigenous women, that every other Premier

across the country made a priority but the Premier of Alberta couldn't be bothered to attend, and given that indigenous leaders from across the province have been calling for an inquiry, back to the Premier: do you really believe you know better than the indigenous leaders on indigenous issues?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I take exception to that premise to the question. Let's just deal with a couple of facts. Firstly, my support of First Nation communities in this country and First Nation women in particular is well known. It is well known not just in Alberta but in every corner of this country, if not in that corner of this Chamber. Let's be clear about that.

Secondly, in terms of the national round-table that was supported by this government, and we were honourably represented by one of the most distinguished aboriginal women in this country, in fact in the British Commonwealth, and that's the Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Seniors' Housing

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, seniors' housing is a huge issue in our province. In my constituency a privately funded facility has been planned for Didsbury. This will give the seniors of our area a top-level facility with no construction costs to the provincial government. This question is to the Minister of Seniors. Is your ministry willing to work with municipalities that obtain private funding for facilities such as the one in Didsbury?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is absolutely. But I would add that under the new management of this Premier we've demonstrated that we'll partner with anyone who can help our tax dollars, our public dollars, go further but, more importantly, help our parents and grandparents have a higher quality of life.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Health. Will your department work with AHS to develop staffing contracts for privately funded facilities that meet the proper standards?

Mr. Mandel: Well, Mr. Speaker, the short answer, as the Minister of Seniors said, is yes. We look forward to partnering with all those that have received the ASLI grants and all those private operators who deliver the kind of service we need for all of Alberta's citizens, and we look forward to working you.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you for that, Minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is back to the Minister of Seniors. Many seniors are still capable of living full lives in their own homes. For those seniors that own their homes, there can often be a struggle with financial issues. Is your ministry willing to provide incentives for seniors to live unassisted in their own homes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that many seniors who do own their own homes live on fixed incomes, and we're aggressively looking for ways to help those seniors stay in their homes as long as possible. We've got a number of programs, including the special-needs assistance, but in particular one of those

is the seniors' property tax deferral program. That was brought in by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne when he was in this chair, and it's a great program that's seen nearly 1,900 seniors access more than 3,100 low-interest loans to stay in their homes longer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Calgary-Lougheed.

Caribou Habitat Protection

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. To stay stable or even thrive, caribou need undisturbed habitat: no roads, pipelines, utility corridors, seismic or cutlines, no trucks, no snowmobiles, no ATVs. Now, currently the government is advertising 900 hectares of leases in the Redrock-Prairie Creek caribou range and another 500 hectares in the Naraway range. To the Minister of Energy: is it absolutely necessary to lease for oil and gas development every square inch of public land, especially the square inches that are also used by caribou?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta has got a number of well-protected landscapes, and we believe that in combination with the protected landscapes that we have in the province and a working landscape that takes into consideration the issues of habitat and species such as caribou, we can move forward.

Ms Blakeman: Hmm. Well, maybe the Energy minister can explain why that department is auctioning oil and gas leases on land where endangered caribou live, particularly when it violates the Department of ESRD's policy on caribou habitat.

Mr. Oberle: It does no such thing, Mr. Speaker. We believe that development and species management can co-exist on this landscape. The hon. member, I'm sure, knows that the issuance of a disposition does not guarantee surface access. There are a number of approvals that have to be gone through, including working with ESRD and considering species management criteria. Perhaps the member doesn't know that we're doing a play-based regulation pilot right now, where we're looking at how we can merge activity and species management on the landscape.

Ms Blakeman: Undisturbed habitat, Minister.

Well, let me go to the Premier, then. Who gets top billing here? That is to say, which minister gets their way, the Minister of Energy to sell oil and gas leases or the Minister of ESRD to protect caribou habitat? Who's higher on the totem pole?

Mr. Oberle: Actually, Mr. Speaker, that's not how it works at all. In fact, the minister of environment and myself and our staff are working together on the caribou management scheme right now. Stay tuned. You're going to be impressed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

2:20 School Infrastructure Maintenance and Renewal

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary-Lougheed constituents have expressed concern to me regarding infrastructure maintenance and renewal. Taking care of what we have is crucial to the success of all Albertans in the past, present, and future, and my first question is to the Minister of Education. Can he assure the residents of Woodbine, Woodlands, Evergreen, and Bridlewood that this government is committed to increasing IMR funding for school boards on a go-forward basis?

Mr. Dirks: I thank the member for the very important question, and the answer is: yes, I certainly can make that commitment, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's students and teachers deserve well-maintained schools. That's why last fall the Premier and I announced the doubling of the infrastructure maintenance, or IMR, funding that we provide to school boards, from \$100 million last school year to \$200 million, I believe. At that time we also committed to help school boards plan and modernize 90 schools, which will also reduce maintenance issues.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that my constituents may be somewhat satisfied at least with the theme of that answer, but I know that they're looking for specific details beyond just the numbers since this has a direct effect on the personal and professional success of our students, Alberta's leaders of tomorrow. So can the minister tell us what exactly are the real-life actions this government is taking where the rubber meets the road with respect to IMR funding in southwest Calgary and, indeed, across this fine province.

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, where the rubber meets the road when it comes to schools are things like roofs, boilers, windows, floors. The additional \$100 million in IMR funding was introduced to help school districts address some of these pressing maintenance needs. It's also important to note that we provided an additional \$476 million in plant operations and maintenance funding to school boards in this fiscal year, and the source of that funding is used for day-to-day maintenance needs.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Investigation into Release of Information (continued)

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ever since the government was under investigation for privacy breaches, leaking the cellphone bill for the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, the Infrastructure Minister has been silent. Several staff members have alleged that this minister was shopping around to sell the phone bills of his colleagues during his party's leadership race. His fingerprints are all over this, so I want to give the minister a chance. Will he tell this House whether or not he was the one who leaked the information last summer?

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, we've had several questions on this already.

Hon. Justice minister, if you want to comment on this, please do.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I've said it once; I've said it again; I'll say it yet again for this member. I'll say it slower this time even. This is in the Privacy Commissioner's hands. She is an independent body of the Legislature. I suggest that the Member for Drumheller-Stettler give her a call.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, I'll rejig it somewhat. The details and payments of this bill came directly from Executive Council. I'm sure the Premier is as concerned as we are that this department was involved in what looks like a massive privacy breach. Will the Premier, then, conduct an internal investigation into the conduct and integrity of his office?

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice, I mean, we're fishing here a little bit is my sense of it, but if you wish to make a comment quickly, please do.

Mr. Denis: Again the same answer and again 23(h), "makes allegations against another Member," Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, my concern is that pretty soon we're going to get into the realm of points of order and there'll probably be no end to it all.

But let's see what you have rejigged for your final supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to continue. Given that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie recently removed himself from cabinet for serious allegations, will the Infrastructure minister be removing himself from cabinet given the serious nature of the allegations against him in this ongoing investigation?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice. The same answer?

Mr. Denis: Once again, Mr. Speaker, nothing has been proven.

The Speaker: Let's move on. We're going to have to have a talk about allegations and motives at some point.

Let's move on to Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed again by Drumheller-Stettler. I put you down twice.

Milk River Watershed Management

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Water remains a valuable and often scarce resource in our province, especially in the southern part of my riding, the Milk River area. According to studies Alberta annually donates enough water to Montana in excess of the 1909 and 1921 international treaties to irrigate 26,000 acres. That water could be put to good use by farmers in my area. Can the Minister of ESRD explain why your department is giving away this much water to the U.S.A.?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. member for actually asking an appropriate question. I want to let the Assembly know that water does not know any political borders, and I'll make it very clear that Alberta does not transfer any water to Montana. The Milk River runs through both Alberta and Montana, meaning each jurisdiction has rights to its water through an allocation. Alberta is working with all partners, including the U.S., to ensure watersheds are managed in a way that meets our economic, societal, and environmental needs.

Mr. Bikman: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to ask relevant questions for my riding.

Given that the agrifood industry in Alberta is a huge driver of the economy, what is your department doing to manage the Milk River watershed for the benefit of the agricultural community?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My department is committed to maintaining the environmental and economic integrity of the Milk River watershed for all users in the area. Through the Milk River integrated watershed management plan we are addressing water supply and allocation, enhancing the delivery of water, and promoting the efficient use of water for all sectors. Additionally, Alberta's rural economic development action plan

outlines specific actions in support of rural economic development, which includes enhanced water infrastructure for agricultural development.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear that perfectly good land remains underutilized along the Milk River because of the inadequate water storage of that landscape. What will your department do to rectify this storage issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government is reviewing and considering all storage opportunities to mitigate both flood circumstances as well as provide for the resiliency of water supplies in times of drought. The water conservation action plan reaffirms the need to advance the progress on water storage options in the south for a range of benefits, including rural and agricultural development. Alberta and Montana have been working together on a joint water management initiative, for which the final report is pending, and I can assure the hon. member that storage has been one of the considerations that has been up for discussion in these negotiations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. At the great risk of repeating myself, I'd like to say that in the last few days we've found out about improper hearings at AMVIC and resignations from a lead investigator and a board member due to their improper connections to the PC Party. Albertans are still waiting for this review to be released to the public. Now we've discovered that the individual in charge of AMVIC has a close relationship with a deputy minister in the government. Can the minister tell Albertans that this report isn't being delayed to smooth over glaring problems of this broken system?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for continuing to raise the profile of Service Alberta's consumer protection agenda. The hon. member is absolutely correct about one thing. He's awfully repetitive. I'll attempt to answer his question one more time. That's correct; we do have a draft report. We tasked the board of AMVIC to address some issues. We're working with the board, and it's always been my intention to make that report public at some time.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. This board has a mandate to promote trust and integrity in Alberta, but none of it gives Albertans confidence or assurances. This minister has said just yesterday, "All appointments . . . are merit based." Clearly, the PC government is not doing its job. Minister, can you tell us how many more board members have to resign due to the obvious patronage and improper conduct of the board?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, again this member is proving his point in being more than a little repetitive, but again I'll do my best to answer the question. All agency boards and commission appointments follow a process. They are merit-based processes, candidates are vetted, and the members of the AMVIC board have been appointed based

on merit. They're professional people, they're lawyers, and they give their time to Alberta and serve the best that they can.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, thank you for that. Yesterday the minister said that all appointments are "vetted closely." The record of appointments at this board is damaging. Clearly, the vetting process is not up to snuff. Does the minister agree that the current Infrastructure minister is directly responsible for the chaos surrounding the board at AMVIC?

2:30

Mr. Khan: The hon. member did ask me a good question. He asked me what I thought of the Infrastructure minister. I will tell you and I will tell the House that the Infrastructure minister is one of the finest individuals I've had the pleasure of meeting. It's an honour to work with the Infrastructure minister, and I thank the hon. member for the question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Blue-green Algae Health Advisories

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On July 14 of last year AHS advised of a blue-green algae health advisory for one minor bloom on Pine Lake. AHS could have lifted this advisory as early as August 1. AHS's policy is to keep an advisory on a lake once one bloom has occurred regardless of whether it is warranted. To the Minister of Health: will you modify this policy to ensure that Albertans have an accurate reflection of the health risks on all Alberta lakes?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know how important the lakes are throughout our province, and the hon. member makes a very good point. We will work with Alberta Health Services to ensure that they take the proper steps to remove the controls that they put in place as a result of their actions.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Pigeon Lake, Pine Lake, and others have been negatively impacted by this policy, will your ministry change the policy from a seasonal ban to a common-sense solution of lifting the ban once the blue-green algae bloom has gone?

Mr. Mandel: Yes, Mr. Speaker. After we've been able to do an inspection to ensure that the lake is safe, we will remove the ban.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is very positive. Given that communities around Pine Lake, Pigeon Lake, and others are tourism destinations and that this policy adversely affects landowners and the residents around them, can you also create a chart of lab results showing when a lake was issued the advisory and that the threat no longer exists?

Mr. Mandel: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I think that's a very reasonable approach. We'll see if we can create a chart where the results can be posted to ensure that everybody knows that everybody is safe. We'll do all we can to ensure that access to our beautiful lakes in the province of Alberta is maintained.

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

Farm Worker Labour Protection

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has given more time, money, and effort to golf courses and the Premier's \$100,000 infomercial while the plight of injured farm workers goes on. Almost 500 farm workers have died at work over the last 30 years, without the right to unionize, rest periods, or even a minimum wage. They labour under conditions that are unacceptable. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: how does this government plan to protect farm workers, as they have failed to do so over the last 30 years?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our ministry works closely together with the ministry of agriculture on farm safety issues, and in fact the associate minister and I met with a group of farm and ranch leaders this week and talked about progress that we have made and progress that we can make in the future. But the fact is that the farmers and ranchers of this province are doing a very good job of providing a safe place to work, and we intend to keep working with them.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that we've managed to find time to debate 12 bills during the session – and we did a very good job – and given that while the minister and the agriculture minister are meeting with farm and ranch leaders without meeting the agriculture workers association, who actually represents these workers who are not being protected, again to the minister of labour: when will the government bring forward actual legislation to protect these vulnerable agricultural workers in the province?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, under the current legislation any farm or ranch that wants to have, for example, WCB coverage can. We have with the industry a farm safe program. We work together constantly on more farm and ranch safety programs, and the results speak for themselves. We're not satisfied till there's not a single injury or a single death on the farms. Alberta is very comparable with other provinces, that have different legislation. What we're doing is working.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that if you do not mandate workers' compensation, minimum wage, and safety conditions, certainly you can't expect people to voluntarily just do those things and given that as a result we have an unacceptable rate of injury, death, and then lack of coverage for those families who experience those terrible tragedies, again, finally, how many more people must be killed, maimed, and left destitute before this government moves to have mandatory farm protection for the workers in this industry?

Mr. McIver: Well, I struggled, Mr. Speaker, and I found one area of agreement. One injury, one death is too many, and that's why this government continues to work with farms and ranchers across this province. We won't be done until there are no injuries. We take it seriously, and I will reiterate for the member: our results in Alberta are good. We're not satisfied until the injuries are zero, but I will assure Albertans that our results are good.

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

Rural High-speed Internet and Mobile Services

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta continues to grow, and that needs to include our rural communities, but for our rural communities to continue to attract and keep new families, we need to ensure they have access to services such as SuperNet and high-speed Internet. Question to the Minister of Service Alberta: what is being done to ensure rural constituents like mine have access to the high-speed Internet they were promised?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. I also thank the hon. member for being such a stalwart leader in his community for so many years. The hon. member raises a very good point. In this global market it's critical that every community across Alberta has access to high-speed Internet. That's why the Premier has tasked Service Alberta in our mandate letter to increase capacity for high-speed broadband around the province, and we are doing just that.

Mr. Lemke: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that rural connectivity was an issue that was raised during the 2015 Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties convention, what is this province doing to ensure we have the appropriate infrastructure in place to connect rural communities?

Mr. Khan: Again, I want to thank the hon. member for the question. Mr. Speaker, one of the pleasures of this ministry is that I have the opportunity to work with our Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. I also have the added pleasure of working with our new associate minister, and I will tell you that I want to congratulate them on their initiative on the final mile rural community program. Just this last week they announced a few more grants for it to build more towers and some capacity to increase high-speed Internet across this province.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that we have often heard that high-speed Internet for all Albertans is a priority for this government but there are some communities in Alberta that do not even have wireless cellphone connections, what is being done to connect these communities?

Mr. Khan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that we attended the bear-pit session at the AAMD and C conference just last week, and I was very pleased to actually field more questions than the minister of agriculture and the associate minister of agriculture. This is an issue we know that rural Albertans feel passionately about. We are currently working with our private telecoms partners. We will build high-speed Internet, and we will also get mobile access for all rural Albertans. We're working very hard on it, and we'll deliver that to Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East, followed by Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Municipal Government Act Amendments

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015, proposes several changes to enhance municipal accountability and transparency, enable more efficient municipal operations, enhance municipal viability, strengthen municipal and intermunicipal planning as well as to address emerging issues. My constituents of Calgary-South East have expressed some concerns regarding these amendments. To the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. Annexation should be a highly

transparent and impartial process that meets the needs of all municipalities involved. How does this revised MGA make sure the process is fair?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question and for his hard work in this Legislature. I want to start by saying that the Bill 20 amendments that came through with the Municipal Government Act were consensus items that were reached by AUMA, AAMD and C, the mayors of Calgary and Edmonton, and by business and industry, so a great deal of consensus, a great deal of collaboration. The issues of annexation are ways so that there's a process in place so any of those dealing with annexation make sure that they're clear on the process and the process is clear upfront.

Mr. Fraser: To the same minister: since the devastating decline in oil prices has made it nearly impossible to accurately plan for the future, how will municipalities be able to put forward a three-year plan and a five-year plan for capital, as the MGA proposes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's an excellent question, hon. member. This is something that was brought forward by the municipalities, something that they want to do to ensure that this happens. There were over 54 items that were dealing with the MGA review. We've dealt with some of those consensus items, but these have come right from the municipal leaders themselves, from business, from industry, from Albertans. And we'll continue. We've passed Bill 20, and we're continuing to work on a number of other items for fall legislation.

2:40

Mr. Fraser: Again to the same minister: all municipalities will need to develop a code of conduct that fits the needs of a given municipality, but how will these codes of conduct be enforced?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This, again, is something that municipalities have asked for. It will be up to them through their bylaw process to develop codes of conduct in their municipalities and then to be able to work through those in their municipalities, again, one of the 11 consensus items that were brought forward with Bill 20.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 108 opportunities for questions and answers were offered today, which is a pretty good record in spite of a few bumps along the way, as one might say.

Before we have the 30-second break, could I have unanimous consent to revert briefly to the Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Let us move, then, to the Minister of Culture and Tourism first.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to my colleagues in the Legislature here Lisa Holmes, the mayor of Morinville. She is one of the youngest mayors in the province, does an amazing job of keeping her community

active and alive. If you'd rise, please, Mayor Holmes, and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Asia Pacific Relations.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce Mr. Tim Onyett, who is with the accounting firm of Deloitte and is also the past president of the Hong Kong Canada Business Association. Mr. Onyett is seated in the members' gallery. He's now risen to receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

Seeing none, allow me to briefly introduce the Alberta Girls' Parliament. We have 54 visitors from throughout the province who are here today. They are accompanied by their group leaders: Shannen Hoffman, Veronica Hoffman, Victoria Hoffman, Kate Johnson, Kirsten Johnson, Laila McIntosh, Laurie Robertson, and Kathleen Robertson. Ladies who are here – or did they just vacate? Perhaps they just left. We might have just missed them. Let's applaud them anyway for the good work they do.

Thank you.

Thirty seconds from now we will continue with our Routine and hear the first of six private members' statements.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by Livingstone-Macleod. Please remember you have two minutes for each of these statements.

Dr. Cy Frank

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this month Alberta and Canada lost one of the most remarkable leaders in the history of medicare. I am honoured to rise today and invite all hon. members to join me in commemorating the life and many contributions of Dr. Cy Frank.

I had the privilege of meeting Cy for the first time over a decade ago, and we worked closely together ever since. Like many, I will remember him for his optimism and for always pointing out the possibilities in health care rather than the obstacles, no matter how difficult the issue. In countless displays of quiet and often unseen leadership Cy challenged everyone to raise the bar and truly put patients first. As Minister of Health I relied greatly on his advice, and wherever I went in Alberta or abroad, I never ceased to be amazed at how many others did as well.

Mr. Speaker, we see the results of Dr. Frank's work all around us: in leading research organizations such as the McCaig Institute for Bone and Joint Health and the Alberta Bone and Joint Health Institute; in Alberta's strategic clinical networks – researchers, clinical leaders, administrators, and, thanks to Cy, patients – working together to bring the best in clinical practice and innovation to everyday care; and in countless strategic partnerships in academia and industry around the world. As chief executive officer at Alberta Innovates: Health Solutions he quickly reaffirmed Alberta's reputation as an international leader in health research.

Mr. Speaker, the lessons of Dr. Cy Frank were many. The most important thing he taught me and, I suspect, many others is that achieving better health for current and future generations requires us to do three things: to make decisions first and foremost from the patient's perspective, to know and to follow the evidence, and to build a culture in health care where leadership is shared with patients and front-line providers of care.

Mr. Speaker, to his family and to his colleagues, on behalf of all members our condolences and, most importantly, our thanks for the gift of Dr. Cy Frank and for a legacy that will endure for years to come.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Official Opposition

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past three years this PC government has done just about everything in its power to break the will of Albertans. We've seen secret sky palaces, expensive Olympic trips, the partisan use of government airplanes, more debt and deficits, you name it. Now the government says that it's under new management, when really it's all the same faces in all the same places.

The new CEO is familiar, too. He's been hanging around the government halls for decades. Not only that, he's singing from the same songbook the former Premier did. He doesn't think there's a single penny of waste to cut from the most expensive government in Canada. He wants to bring in new job-killing taxes. He wants to maintain the status quo and blame Albertans for the fiscal mess this government created. The truth is that Albertans didn't create the mess; the government did.

Wildrose has been there to fight them every step of the way. For the past three years we've been the best opposition this province has seen in decades. We did it through hard work and conservative values, and we did it because we came to work in this building for Albertans, not ourselves. Let me be clear. Wildrose is the only conservative party left in Alberta. We believe in cutting waste and shrinking government. We believe in low taxes. We believe in trust and democracy.

As we prepare to face another PC Alberta deficit budget, Wildrose believes that we're the only party standing between Albertans and this self-serving government. Wildrose represents the true frontier spirit – and it's strong – of Alberta, and just as this government couldn't break the will of Albertans, it will not break the will of the Wildrose Official Opposition. We will fight your spending. We will fight your taxes. Wildrosers everywhere will hold our heads high, knowing we did right by the people of this province, past, present, and future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Lethbridge-East.

Retrospective by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with mixed emotions. Since the last election I have represented the constituents of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills as their MLA. It has been an incredible journey. As we all know, we can't do this job alone. It takes a team of great staff, but most of all it takes the support of those closest to us. In my case that would be my wife, Carol. I would not be here without her.

In my time here the landscape of the caucuses, the House, and even the province itself has changed dramatically and mostly for the better. I am proud of everything I have accomplished, first to change the government and then as part of it. That, Mr. Speaker, is why I became an MLA. I have strived to champion methods and concepts that were tried and tested and to be part of implementing ones that were new and groundbreaking. I became an MLA so that my neighbours and friends could have their voices heard and to lend

decades of expertise and share in the passion of my colleagues as we charted a new course.

This journey has given me lifelong friends. The road has been at times bumpy and the climb a little steep, but we can stand triumphant knowing that we have done our best. I look forward to years of knowing those whom I have grown to respect and admire along the way.

However, as is often said, nothing lasts forever. Today I am bidding farewell to the Legislature and my colleagues. Vital, important years are ahead for my wife and family. Government frequently needs to bring in fresh ideas. I have done what I set out to do, and I can rest knowing that our great province is in capable hands.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

2:50 Retrospective by the Member for Lethbridge-East

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, in 2005 in my maiden speech I said that I was humbled by the awesome responsibility of governing and that I would do it with fairness, openness, and accountability. I also said that continuing care staff shortages needed to be addressed to ensure that our seniors would not experience the indignity of being a commodity on a bottom line. We still have a way to go.

For my public service I wanted to emulate the example of our late Lieutenant Governor Lois Hole, that of courage, compassion, and strength of character. I'm proud of my 11 years of provincial public service. I worked diligently. In opposition I sat on a government task force and wrote an adjunct report. I had my Bill 205 passed and was an outspoken advocate on seniors', PDD, and AISH issues and critic for many ministries. As a government member I served on the Canadian/American Border Trade Alliance and had an important resolution for our cattle industry passed. Bill 13 has just passed. It was a file that I worked very hard on, the prevention of invasive species. Agricultural issues for southern Alberta were always front and centre when I spoke with the government.

Having sat on both sides of the House, I believe every member in this House is equal. Yes, we do have different jobs and different responsibilities, but each is paramount for democracy and good government.

My daughters Florence and Bridget were elected politicians. My daughter Shelagh and my granddaughter kept us grounded. My granddaughter Kerstin made me a great-grandmother to Blake, and there's another one on the way. Mr. Speaker, is that not what it's about, our families? Without my girls' love and support, this would have really been a long haul.

I had fun in this Chamber. Not all of it was recorded in *Hansard*, like the time I asked the House at 4 a.m. if I was boring anybody because I heard nothing but loud snoring. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members, for your indulgence there.

Let us move on to Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Whitecourt-St. Anne.

World Sledge Hockey Challenge 2015

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and not give a farewell speech. Last month from February 1 to 7 the city of Leduc, in my constituency of Leduc-Beaumont, played host to the 2015 World Sledge Hockey Challenge. This tournament gave Albertans a chance to see world-class para-athletes from Russia, Korea, the United States and, of course, Canada. The tournament was won by the United States while Canada beat Korea for the bronze. The Canadian team included 13 players who helped Canada to win bronze at the Paralympics in Sochi and 14 who won the 2013 World Sledge Hockey Challenge in Toronto.

For those who have never seen it, Mr. Speaker, the sport follows the same rules as hockey except that the players sit on specially designed sleds, or sledges, with skate blades under the seat. Two sticks are used to not only pass and stickhandle and shoot the puck but also to propel and manoeuvre their sledges. The sledges are built high enough off the ground to allow the puck to pass underneath. Sledge hockey made its debut at the '94 Lillehammer Paralympic Winter Games and has since become a full medal event at the Paralympic Winter Games. Canada has participated in sledge hockey in every Paralympic Winter Games.

I have stood before this House and spoken about paralympic athletes before, Mr. Speaker, and I am pleased to see the growing support for our para-athletes. I'm pleased to report that both medal games in Leduc were sold out, and I was pleased to be joined by the hon. minister of culture for the final game. I'd like to commend the organizers and volunteers who made this championship possible and all the athletes who competed. I'd like to wish the best of luck to our Canadian national sledge hockey team, which will next be competing in April in Buffalo at the 2015 IPC World Sledge Hockey Championship.

Again, a salute to those athletes and the great volunteers in the city of Leduc. Mr. Speaker, thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Legislative Assembly Staff

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to give thanks to some very important people, the Legislature staff. First, I want to thank our caucus legislative assistants, research and communications team, and our constituency assistants. They work quietly behind the scenes so we as MLAs can perform our duties in this Chamber and serve our constituents at home in our ridings. I want to extend thanks to the staff in the ministers' offices, who ensure that our ministers are driving out the government agenda and addressing the concerns of all Albertans. A caucus of 70 personalities – and I can guarantee that there are personalities – always guarantees an interesting day in the Legislature. This caucus cannot be a strong and effective team without the tireless work of our staff.

Finally, I'd like to thank the staff that keep this fantastic building operational. Thank you to the infrastructure staff, that always keep the hallways clean, the meeting rooms ready, and the lights on. Mr. Speaker, it's a privilege to come to work here at the Legislature each and every day. I remind myself of the privilege as I walk across the breathtaking grounds that are diligently attended to by meticulous caretakers, making our Legislature a crown jewel of the capital city. When things get hectic for us as elected officials, it always brightens my day to be greeted by our security staff team and the smiling faces of our visitor services team, that shares the history of the Legislature with visitors from across the world.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to take the opportunity to pass on my gratitude to all the staff that are involved in the day-to-day operations of our lives. Albertans have the opportunity to get to know MLAs through television and through community events, but they never get to see the people that work behind the scenes, that are part of Alberta's success. I invite members of this Chamber to join me in thanking those excellent members that serve us each and every day.

The Speaker: Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, you caught my attention. You're rising for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 7(7), I understand.

Mr. Scott: I am, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Does anybody object to granting unanimous consent to go a couple of minutes beyond 3 o'clock?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Bill 25 Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 25, the Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Amendment Act, 2015.

These proposed amendments will close program eligibility for the Alberta centennial education savings plan, or ACES plan, as of March 31, 2015. Several reviews showed that the program, created in January of 2005, was underutilized and not achieving its goal of encouraging families to save for their children's education. Over the last 10 years our government has made it easier to access student loan funding by streamlining processes, relaxing eligibility requirements, improving debt management tools, and creating grants to support low-income borrowers. The proposed amendments to this act will result in \$19 million in savings for the taxpayers of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move pursuant to Standing Order 75 that Bill 25, the Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Amendment Act, 2015, be moved onto the Order Paper . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, excuse me just one minute. We just had a little distraction here.

Let us vote on this motion that's just been presented here by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat because he's moved first reading of Bill 25, the Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Amendment Act, 2015.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a first time]

The Speaker: Apologies for the distraction and the interruption. Please proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move pursuant to Standing Order 75 that Bill 25, the Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Amendment Act, 2015, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

3:00 Bill 26 Fiscal Sustainability Act

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 26, Fiscal Sustainability Act. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of the bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

The proposed bill reflects the Premier's commitment to sound, conservative fiscal principles and to present Alberta's finances in a clear format that follows public-sector accounting standards. The proposed bill also supports the government's plan to deal with our

current fiscal challenge, with a long-term focus on reducing our reliance on volatile resource revenue. More details will be available today, when I present Budget 2015.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a first time]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I believe you're up next.

Bill 209 Commission to Safeguard Albertans' Interests in Natural Resources Act

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce a bill being the Commission to Safeguard Albertans' Interests in Natural Resources Act.

Bill 209 is about ensuring that the people of Alberta, who own the natural resources of this province, receive full and fair value. Mr. Speaker, the bill is designed to ensure that our government, particularly in terms of its treatment of resources, which we all own together, abides by the principles originally set forward by Premier Peter Lougheed. These principles include acting like owners of our resources, collecting our fair share of their value, saving for a rainy day, and ensuring that high-paying, value-added jobs are kept right here in Alberta.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, like everyone in our caucus, knows that this government has squandered our resource wealth. For this reason, we are proposing the establishment of a resource owners' rights commission to ensure that our resources are managed with the correct priorities in mind, priorities that ensure a better future for Albertans and their families. This commission will regularly issue reports to the owners and will consult with Albertans across the province on what they think should be done with our resources to ensure long-term prosperity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice or someone on behalf of.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(3) I'm pleased to table the requisite number of copies of the schedule for consideration of the 2015 main estimates.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, I understand you have five tablings, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, I do. Lucky me. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The first one is from Ann Campbell, which is an e-mail noting, "What would an Alberta day be without the sound of music, the joy of reading, and the thrill of discovering a beautiful piece of art . . . or movement such as seen in dance or theatre." She asks that the government "reconsider proposed cuts to arts organizations," and I certainly agree.

The second is the appropriate number of copies of a letter from the leader of the third party, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, to the Privacy Commissioner asking for an update on the office's investigation into the cellphone bills.

The next is also a letter from the leader of the third party, the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View, to the Calgary Police Service asking for an update on their investigation and formally requesting a copy of the report, that it's in the public interest.

I have two additional tablings, Mr. Speaker. The first is an article from the *Edmonton Sun* from yesterday: Minister Named by Two More Staffers. It is around staff members and the Alberta Infrastructure minister approaching them to find information.

Finally, one from *Metro* news, small but mighty, that the Alberta Minister of Infrastructure “doesn’t deny asking opposition to seek [the Member for Edmonton-Castle Down’s] cellphone bill.”

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition created by the Better Way Alberta campaign that is calling on the government to “ensure there is enough money to pay for necessary public services like education and health care.” The signatories want to achieve this through measures that include a higher tax rate on corporate profits and a progressive tax system in general. It’s garnered more than 1,600 signatures on paper and 6,000 signatures online so far. It reinforces the government’s own survey, which shows that Albertans are opposed to a waiting room tax and want corporations and the wealthy of this province to pay their fair share. I only hope that the voices of Albertans will be respected today in the upcoming budget.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to table the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail between my constituency office and one of Alberta’s very valued teachers. He’s worried about classroom sizes and student mental health and is in shock that the government would even consider cutting funding that is of the utmost importance to our children. He says that it’s his responsibility as a teacher to speak up when the government is not looking out for the best interests of our students. I’m tabling this e-mail because this government cannot continue to ignore the outcry of teachers, parents, and families, especially when they’re trying to protect Alberta’s most precious resource, our future generation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, there are no points of order, but could we have unanimous consent to revert to introductions for one introduction only? If anybody is opposed, please say so now.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Very briefly, the hon. Associate Minister of Asia Pacific Relations.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Dr. Edy Wong, associate dean of the University of Alberta’s faculty of business. In addition to the important role of educating our young, he’s a great asset to Alberta’s effort in the Asia Pacific region to expand our market and presence in that area. Mr. Wong has now risen to receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall wishes unanimous consent to offer 30 seconds, but I’m watching the clock, and it would be against all protocols. I wonder if we could just thank

him for his service, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.
[Standing ovation]

Thank you, hon. members. I know we’re tight to the clock.

In order to allow adequate time to prepare for the Budget Address by the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance this afternoon, the House will stand recessed for the next seven minutes, until 3:15 or thereabouts.

Thank you.

[The Assembly adjourned from 3:08 p.m. to 3:17 p.m.]

The Speaker: Hon. members, if we could take our seats, please, we could continue with our important business in one minute.

Orders of the Day

Transmittal of Estimates

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, I have received certain messages from His Honour the Honourable Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor also transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

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

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the 2015-16 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates as well as the 2015-16 government estimates. Further, I also wish to table the government performance plan and ministry business plans and the 10-year strategic plan, Putting Things Right.

Government Motions

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

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now wish to table the government’s Budget 2015 fiscal plan. The government has introduced Bill 26, the Fiscal Sustainability Act, which will define the fiscal and financial reporting requirements of the province beginning April 1, 2015. The form and contents of each of these plans anticipates this new legislation.

3:20

Budget Address

24. Mr. Campbell moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present my first-ever budget as Minister of Finance. I’d like to introduce my wife and partner, Jennifer, who is seated in the Speaker’s gallery. She keeps me grounded and on task. I’d also like to thank our Premier for this opportunity. This is a privilege few Albertans get to experience.

With a change in the tradition of Finance ministers wearing new shoes on budget day, I am proud to deliver my budget speech

wearing a new pair of moccasins. These were made by Mary Whitehorse, an elder in my constituency of West Yellowhead, and presented to me as a gift by the Edson Friendship Centre. Mr. Speaker, I've always had a deep respect for our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, and as a previous Minister of Aboriginal Relations that respect has grown. I've learned much about aboriginal peoples' relationship with the land and the resources it has to offer, an appreciation of family, the need to ensure the well-being of both young and old, as well as the responsibility of each generation to consider the vitality of generations to come. These long-held but simple values are important to consider as we address the challenges we face.

Earlier this month our Premier spoke about the unacceptable achievement gap that exists between First Nations students and other students in Alberta. To help address that gap, our government will work with First Nations in the province on a made-in-Alberta solution to improve First Nations education. We will invest \$74 million over the next three years to improve educational outcomes for First Nations students by working as a partner with First Nation chiefs and First Nation educational authorities in the province.

Mr. Speaker, all children in Alberta should have equal opportunities to be successful. For decades people have been drawn to our province by the promise of making a better life for their families. They were drawn by the very attributes that make Alberta the unique place it is, a province where hard work, perseverance, and the willingness to take risks brings rewards. Certainly, this was the case for me. I came to this province looking for opportunity. My journey began in Hinton 36 years ago, when I first, as a young man, was seeking to make my mark in the Alberta coal industry. Perhaps it's no surprise that I would have a career in mining. Like the Premier, I come from northern Ontario, and I'm also the son of a miner. My sisters and I would see my father arrive home after working the night shift. He would be bone tired but content in the knowledge that his day's work would provide for our needs.

My mother did triple duty keeping us all clean and fed, working as a bank teller to help make ends meet but never missing a hockey game or other sporting event that I or my sisters were involved in. We were fortunate as kids that our parents always lived within their means, ensuring we had a safe home and we were looked after. These memories helped guide my career as a labour representative in the coal industry, an industry that has had many ups and downs due to volatility in commodity prices. When negotiating contracts, we often had to sit down and resolve issues by working together. That sometimes included giving up raises or benefits in order to save jobs, good-paying jobs, Mr. Speaker, that allowed our members to stay in the community, meet the needs of their families, and successfully raise another generation of Albertans. We took a long-term view of what was best for our community.

Our government is doing the same thing. We are working hard to meet the needs of families and the next generation by providing the programs and services that ensure Alberta remains strong. We want an Alberta that responsibly develops its resources but also protects the environment. We want an Alberta that has strong communities that care for the elderly, support the growth of our youth. We want an Alberta that has the economic and social strength to be the best place for our families now and the best place for our children's and grandchildren's families in the future.

To realize the long-term vision for Alberta I have just described, we need long-term stability. Today we have everything but stability. North American crude oil prices plunged in the final four months of last year and in the past few weeks have hovered around \$45 U.S. per barrel, down by over 50 per cent from last summer. This plunge in oil prices has had a dramatic impact on government revenues. For the fiscal year of 2015-16 alone a revenue shortfall

of approximately \$7 billion is anticipated. To put this in perspective, \$1 out of every \$7 in government revenue is gone. That is close to the Education budget for the entire year or our provincial health care costs for less than five months.

In the past strong resource prices masked the fundamental stresses and cracks in our financial foundation. Our overreliance on volatile resource revenue to pay for the needs of today meant that stable revenues such as taxes and fees haven't kept pace with our growing expenses. To put it in a household context, our weekly paycheque has not been covering our day-to-day expenses. We have been lucky in recent years that resource revenues provided a bonus that allowed us to pay the bills. But as many Albertans who work in the oil and gas sector already know, there will be no bonus this year, and for some there might not even be a weekly paycheque. We are now faced with a lifestyle and household expenses that we can no longer afford.

As a government we know that we must change course, and under the leadership of Premier Prentice we will move forward with a balanced, thoughtful approach that will repair the cracks in our fiscal foundation and set us on a path of stability, prosperity, and hope. Doing nothing is not an option. Oil prices are not on the cusp of recovery, and industry experts anticipate that this low-price environment will continue for at least three budget cycles. Falling back on the province's reserves is not an option either.

At today's oil prices if government took no action, we would burn through our savings from the contingency fund in the first year and then blow through the heritage fund over the next two years. That would not be responsible decision-making. If we want long-term stability, we need a long-term plan, a plan that gives us the courage to make tough choices, the common sense to change how we must pay for the services we use, the confidence to try new approaches to long-standing problems, and the commitment to persevere during difficult days ahead.

Earlier this week the Premier announced a 10-year strategic plan that does just that. The 10-year plan outlines the steps Alberta needs to take to get ourselves off this economic roller coaster. We will put our revenues and spending back in balance so that our government can afford the high-quality services Albertans need regardless of the price of oil.

The strategic plan consists of three main goals: strengthening Alberta's fiscal foundation, building a lasting legacy, and securing Alberta's future. To put Alberta on the right track, our first goal is to take a disciplined and principled approach to Alberta's public finances and strengthen our fiscal foundation. The government will make responsible choices about how much Alberta spends on public services, how it finances those services, and how it ensures the long-term stability of those services.

The second goal is building a lasting legacy. As the provincial budget is put back into balance and on a more stable footing, the government will work to enhance the province's financial security over the long term.

Our third goal in the 10-year strategic plan is securing Alberta's future. We will invest strategically to create new opportunities for Albertans, build a strong economy, and foster a strong society to enable our children, grandchildren, and future generations to lead happy, healthy, and fulfilling lives.

Mr. Speaker, that brings us to today. Budget 2015 is the first year of our plan to restore Alberta's fiscal foundation and begin the path to balancing the budget. Now, balancing the budget by eliminating \$7 billion in spending in a single year or dramatically raising taxes is not a responsible course of action. Economists have advised us not to move too fast and that we should avoid taking drastic decisions that would further aggravate the economic situation for Albertans.

Over the past few months my caucus colleagues and I listened to Albertans in 26 communities, met with over 2,000 participants, and received over 40,000 online survey responses. Albertans told us that a calm, reasoned approach is needed. In communities like Grande Prairie, Athabasca, and Chestermere I was told that we need to do more to diversify our economy. In Calgary there was agreement that we need a long-term plan to address the budgetary issue and that we should put more money away into the heritage fund. In communities like Sylvan Lake and Camrose we heard from residents about the importance of protecting front-line services and funding for persons with developmental disabilities. Everywhere I travelled, there was one common theme: we need to get off the roller coaster of energy prices, and we need to do it in a balanced and measured way. We must control expenses while protecting front-line services.

Based on this input we have developed a plan for getting our budget in balance and still meeting the needs of Albertans. It is a plan that uses a combination of the three levers available to government: restraining spending, increasing revenue, and using our savings.

Albertans are demanding more than words. They need to see action, and we are already taking action starting at the top. Earlier this year the Premier announced a 5 per cent reduction in his salary plus the salaries for cabinet ministers, government MLAs, and his office staff. We have limited severance pay for political staff and have eliminated unnecessary discretionary spending. These actions serve as an important example to the rest of the public service that we're all part of the solution.

3:30

The first step in implementing our first budget under the 10-year strategic plan is to slow the growth of government spending. Starting with this budget and over the next several years, our government will focus on holding the line on expenses. In 2013-14 Alberta spent approximately \$1,300 more per capita than the national average on public services. That same year approximately 50 per cent of the entire budget, \$22.5 billion, was spent on public-sector compensation, including teachers, nurses, physicians, and members of the public service. This number is set to rise further over the next three fiscal years. Clearly, this is not sustainable.

The government will honour current contracts that are now in place, but as they expire, new contracts will be negotiated that take into account our current fiscal situation. This spring we will launch talks with public-sector employers and their respective unions about how a different approach, including an essential service model similar to that in place in other provinces, might be appropriate for Alberta. Change must be informed by mutual understanding, and we are prepared to listen to our partners in the public sector and take the time to get this right.

Beyond salaries, further action is needed to reach our goal of bringing our spending closer to the national average over the next four years. It means we need to hold the line on our overall spending, to be more innovative and efficient but still meet the needs of Albertans. Make no mistake: holding the line on spending while our province grows will be difficult. It means the government will have to absorb the costs of population growth, inflation, and wage increases. When factoring in these pressures, spending across the government in 2015-16 will be \$2 billion less than previously planned.

In Budget 2015 we made strategic decisions about where to allocate our limited fiscal resources. We established priorities and made decisions on how to deliver the most important programs and services Albertans need. As we made these decisions, we were guided by some key principles: to minimize the impact to the front line and seek administrative efficiencies first; to explore alternative

delivery mechanisms that can deliver the right services at the right time in the right way for the right results; to make smart investments and system improvements to ensure quality education for our children, protect vulnerable Albertans, provide supportive care for the elderly, and ensure access to high-quality health care for everyone; to continue to invest in infrastructure that supports Alberta's growing population in the most effective way possible; and to protect working families and maintain our position as the lowest tax jurisdiction in Canada.

This is not a one-year or one-budget fix. Spending constraints across government and the public sector will be part of our budgeting plan over the next three years.

Today, however, I want to speak to Albertans about some of the key changes contained in Budget 2015. On a program basis the single largest employer and largest expense in Alberta's budget is health care. Therefore, this must be our biggest focus for innovation and efficiency. Over the past decade Alberta's population has grown by 25 per cent, but funding to health care has grown by 100 per cent. Today Alberta spends 19 per cent more per capita on health care than the Canadian average. For the first time in 20 years we will start moving to bring health care spending closer to the Canadian average.

Budget 2015 will see a decrease of \$160 million for Health, for a total investment of almost \$18.9 billion. However, \$950 million in pressures will also need to be absorbed. There is room to achieve these cost reductions without disrupting the health care system or reducing care to patients. We will protect front-line care as we promised. There will be no hospital bed closures, no cuts in funding for physician services to patients, and no deinsurance of services. In fact, we're increasing access by opening new continuing care and restorative beds next year. The path forward requires our health managers and providers to do things differently. The improved health system governance recently announced will drive change and will give Albertans a stronger voice in local health care decisions that affect them.

The 2015-16 Education budget is increasing by \$145 million over the previous year. This funding increase will protect teaching positions and allow government to honour existing collective agreements. In order to accommodate teaching salaries, funding in other areas of education will see reductions. Budget reductions will start at the top, with a 9 per cent decrease in ministry administration. School boards will be required to find efficiencies and productivity improvements to reduce their nonteaching costs by 3 per cent. We recognize that school board reductions will be challenging in the face of increasing enrolment, which will not be funded but still must be accommodated. The transition will not be easy but will be necessary to ensure a quality education system is affordable to taxpayers now and in the future no matter what the price of oil.

Alberta universities receive almost 58 per cent of their operating revenue from government funding, compared to 42 per cent in Ontario. We need to align our system with national averages in government funding, user-pay, and revenue generation. Campus Alberta will see a reduction in its base grant funding of 1.4 per cent in 2015-16. While Budget 2015 protects postsecondary institutions from significant reductions to their operating grants, we must make changes to ensure a financially sustainable, accessible system. We will work with postsecondary institutions to preserve high-demand, high-value programs and, correspondingly, to identify and shed low-value programs that do not represent a good return on investment. In the months ahead we'll be discussing with our stakeholders a review of tuition fees and other revenue generation options, and at the same time we're making changes to student aid programs that will help students cover their education costs.

Holding the line on spending in some departments also means that we can make some strategic investments in other departments such as Human Services. Albertans have been clear that we must not balance the budget at the expense of those who are the most vulnerable. This government, under the leadership of our Premier, will ensure that they are protected. Budget 2015 increases our government's overall investment in services and programs for vulnerable Albertans by \$72 million to maintain high standards of support for communities and families. It means that our government will keep the Michener Centre open, allowing current residents to remain in the place that has long been their home, and it means that front-line services and staff that vulnerable Albertans depend on are maintained and services are integrated so they are close to home and can be accessed quickly.

There is nearly \$1.1 billion budgeted in 2015-16 for programs supporting persons with disabilities, including PDD and families of children with disabilities, an increase of \$66 million. There is also an additional \$31.5 million budgeted to maintain Alberta's monthly AISH benefit, which is the highest among provinces.

Beyond these specific highlights, Budget 2015 will require government and our related agencies to be innovative. There is a quote attributed to Apple's Steve Jobs that says: innovation is not about saying yes to everything; it's about saying no to all but the most crucial features. We must not be afraid to eliminate or reduce programs and grants that no longer achieve results. We can leave no stone unturned as we seek to remove inefficiencies, avoid duplication, or stop using outdated service delivery models. We must, in Steve Jobs' words, say no to things that are not essential.

But efficiencies and innovation alone cannot achieve our goals. If Albertans want stable public services, Alberta needs to establish stable ways of paying for them. This means making the responsible choice to use stable sources of revenue such as fees, levies, and taxes rather than relying on volatile energy royalties. As the government of Alberta brings the budget back into balance, it will make changes and provide greater funding stability for Alberta's public services.

In 2014 if Alberta had employed the tax system of any other province, Albertans and Alberta businesses would have paid at least \$11.6 billion more in taxes. This means that Alberta has the flexibility to place revenues on a more stable footing while remaining the most tax-competitive place in the country. At this difficult economic time we're also mindful of increasing the burden on the business sector both small and large. I've heard Albertans say that business needs to do its part, and we agree. Businesses are often thought of as large, multinational entities. The reality is that 95 per cent of all businesses in Alberta are small businesses. They are found in every community across the province and employ 35 per cent of Albertans.

3:40

As our province deals with the current economic challenges, we will expect that businesses both large and small will do their parts creating jobs and employing Albertans. There have been significant layoffs in our economy already. We don't want to make the situation worse, so we are holding the line on corporate taxes so that corporations will keep existing jobs here in Alberta, not move them to some other province or some other country. As our 10-year strategic plan helps diversify our economy, the current corporate and small-business tax rates will create more businesses, more revenues for government, and more employment for Albertans.

As our government looks for greater funding stability, we will ensure that this burden does not fall on the backs of vulnerable Albertans or lower income working families. Our government will ensure that Alberta has a fair and competitive tax system tied to a

person's ability to pay. Budget 2015 maintains the current 10 per cent tax rate for all Albertans who earn under \$100,000 a year. However, our tax system will be adjusted so those who can afford to pay more will pay more. This is a reflection of what we've heard from Albertans.

Personal income taxes for individuals with taxable incomes over \$100,000 will see an increase from 10 per cent to 10.5 per cent effective January 1, 2016. This will gradually move to 11.5 per cent by 2018. There will also be a three-year additional temporary tax of .5 per cent applied to taxable incomes of over \$250,000. A more progressive tax system will provide a more stable source of revenue to fund public services.

Our government also recognizes that these are challenging times and more can be done to protect working families. In 2016-17 we'll significantly enhance the Alberta family tax credit, which provides incentives for parents in lower and middle-income families to seek employment while providing credit for the cost of raising a family. Starting July 1 this year, payments will increase to a maximum of \$754 for one child and a maximum of \$1,987 for four or more children. We will enhance this program in 2016 by raising the rate at which payments start and raising the levels at which the benefits phase out. This change will provide an additional \$25 million in benefits for lower and middle-income families.

To further support Alberta's working families, Budget 2015 introduces a new refundable tax credit, the Alberta working family supplement. Starting in July 1, 2016, this new program will benefit families earning under \$41,250. Under this program working families with one child will be eligible for a maximum annual benefit of \$1,100, with a maximum benefit of \$2,750 for larger families. This program will provide an additional \$85 million in direct support to approximately 75,000 working families.

Over the years we have been complacent and have fallen back on the status quo approach of funding public services without any effort to recover or mitigate costs. Where appropriate, government will ensure that those who use public services are defraying the true costs of providing those services. The government will build on the user-pay principle. Fees for motor vehicle registrations, provincial parks, and land titles transactions, among others, will increase. There will be a 35 per cent increase in the rates of traffic fines. This is long overdue since traffic fines have not been increased since 2003 and have lost their value as a deterrent to poor driving.

Recognizing the additional costs to society of the consumption of alcohol and tobacco products, our government will increase the taxes collected on tobacco and the markup on liquor. These increases will take effect at midnight tonight.

An Hon. Member: Everybody is leaving.

Mr. Campbell: Everybody is leaving. Yeah.

Our government will increase the current fuel tax by four cents, to 13 cents per litre, also effective tonight at midnight.

In recognition of the cost of health care and its importance to Albertans a new health care contribution levy will be introduced. Let me be clear. This is not the system that we've seen in the past, which was regressive and had sizable administrative costs. We recognize that the old premium resulted in a disproportionate impact on lower and middle-income earners. The new health care contribution levy will have a progressive structure. It will be based on an individual's ability to pay, and it will ensure that we're not causing undue hardship for vulnerable Albertans. The new health care contribution levy will be applied to individuals with taxable income over \$50,000, impacting roughly 1.1 million Albertans. Only those with a taxable income over \$50,000 will pay the levy,

which increases in \$200 increments as income rises and is capped at a maximum of \$1,000.

In achieving greater funding stability, Albertans will have a stronger connection between the taxes they pay and the public services they receive. Taken together, we expect these measures to generate almost \$1.5 billion in new revenue in 2015-16. Despite paying more, Albertans will remain by far the lowest taxed jurisdiction in Canada. More importantly, these steps will put our province on a path to reduce our reliance on nonrenewable resource revenue.

Even as we hold the line on spending and increase revenue, both this year's budget and next year's will run deficits due to our commitment to minimize the impact on front-line services while we continue to invest in infrastructure. In 2015-16 a deficit of \$5 billion is estimated and in 2016-17 a deficit of \$3 billion. We will return to surpluses in 2017-18.

We are fortunate that our contingency savings account is forecast to be \$6.5 billion at the end of this fiscal year and that for the next two years we can draw on it to avoid borrowing for the operating costs of government. Alberta's savings, much like a family's emergency fund, need to be there for shocks and difficult situations. Much like a family, our province should responsibly work to replenish those funds after they've been used.

By 2019-20 only 50 per cent of our resource revenue will be used for programs and services, with the other 50 per cent allocated to savings and paying for investment in infrastructure or the reduction of capital debt. Instead of leaving future generations a bill, we will create for them a legacy and restore the heritage fund. With this plan we will more than double the value of the heritage fund over the next 10 years.

The province also has a responsibility to pay off its capital debt. Left unaddressed, this debt will act as a drag on Alberta's competitiveness and agility. In the short term our 10-year plan will see an initial increase in capital debt as we continue to build and maintain needed infrastructure. However, with the return of surplus budgets beginning in 2017-18, we will work to bring our capital debt down to \$11 billion by 2024-25 and to pay it off completely in the following years.

In Budget 2015 we're unveiling a \$29.5 billion capital plan to provide the public infrastructure Alberta families and communities need. Over the next five years there will be \$7.9 billion in municipal infrastructure support through the municipal sustainability initiative and other programs. This includes \$5.6 billion under MSI, including \$1.8 billion in basic municipal transportation grants, \$965 million for GreenTRIP, and \$188 million for the small communities fund. This is on top of the additional \$398 million in MSI funding that we announced earlier this month.

Albertans rely on a safe and efficient transportation network to move people and goods across the province. The capital plan invests \$6.7 billion in the provincial transportation network. This includes \$2.9 billion for the Calgary and Edmonton ring roads. There is \$774 million for other highway projects plus \$353 million to complete the twinning of highway 63 from Grassland to Fort McMurray. We are committed to providing innovative, high-quality, and well-designed learning facilities for Alberta's children. The capital plan has \$5 billion to build new schools in neighbourhoods where students live and modernize existing schools to meet today's educational needs. This includes \$3.9 billion to support almost 200 schools and modernization projects and an additional \$80 million to deliver more than 160 modular classrooms in 2015-16 and complete previously approved projects.

Over the next five years \$3.4 billion is budgeted to build, modernize, and maintain facilities that support Alberta's health system. Our plan includes \$926 million for capacity expansion

projects in Calgary and Edmonton; \$849 million for health facility projects in Grande Prairie, High Prairie, Edson, Lethbridge, Whitecourt, Beaverlodge, Medicine Hat, and Red Deer; and a further \$200 million for long-term care beds and other critical-care projects.

3:50

Our capital plan also includes \$4.8 billion in maintenance and renewal projects for nearly 1,900 public schools, over 1,000 health facilities, and 1,600 other properties across the province. We have learned from past mistakes that deferring maintenance impacts our services and our service levels to Albertans. Our capital plan identifies \$2.1 billion for maintenance and renewal of existing roads and bridges, \$909 million for schools, \$653 million for health care facilities, and \$547 million for postsecondary institutions.

Mr. Speaker, our province has been blessed with abundant and amazing natural resources, but the full benefits of these resources have only been realized due to a well-educated workforce, a commitment to innovation, and perseverance. We must build on our economic strengths in areas like energy, tourism, agriculture, and forestry to develop new opportunities for Albertans and confidently reach into new markets. Because Alberta has important competitive advantages when it comes to petrochemicals, we must ensure that additional petrochemical value chains like methane and propane are also competitive. We can build on our environmental strengths and become leaders in the areas of climate change and conservation. We must build on the strength of Albertans and support them as they age and invest actively in our children.

Many Albertans are asking, quite understandably: "Haven't we been here before? What's different this time?" I will tell you what's different. We're going to be strategic in our approach, not blindly cutting services but determining where we can get better value for tax dollars and improve the bottom line. We are going to be thoughtful, measured, and steady in our moves to balance the budget. We're going to make decisions that consider the impact on front-line services and the need to protect vulnerable Albertans. We're going to remain committed to a capital investment plan and build through this downturn so that we will have the infrastructure we need to accommodate future growth and get good value for taxpayers during this good time to build. We will make decisions that ensure that we maintain our triple-A credit rating. We've worked too hard and made too many sacrifices to reach this point only to fall back into bad habits.

At this time we will do the full job that's necessary. Simply getting the budget back in balance is pointless if we also don't fix the underlying problems that created our current deficit. We are committed to fixing the fundamental structural problems in Alberta's fiscal foundation. By following our 10-year vision and using the three levers available to us – restraining spending, increasing revenue, and using contingency savings – we will get Alberta off the revenue roller coaster. Over our long-term fiscal plan we will ask much of Albertans to help get us back to a point where we're spending within our means on what we need and saving for the future once again. We will do this in a way that protects jobs, protects our vital services, and protects our tax advantage.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are resilient, and we have an abundance of opportunity in our province. Going forward, we have much work to do, and all Albertans can take great pride in who we are, what we have accomplished, and what we are committed to do in the future as we build this great province and seize every opportunity before us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

On behalf of Her Majesty's Official Opposition, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to debating and opposing tax increases in this House. With that, I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this point I would hereby move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, April 13, 2015.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:55 p.m. to Monday, April 13, at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 28th Legislature - 3rd Session (2014-2015)

Activity to March 26, 2015

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 199 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1 Respecting Property Rights Act (Prentice)

First Reading -- 6 (Nov. 17, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 30-31 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft.), 142-46 (Nov. 24, 2014 eve, passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 169-73 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 206-11 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft.), 277-79 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014; SA 2014 c15]

2* Alberta Accountability Act (Denis)

First Reading -- 404-05 (Dec. 8, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 456-67 (Dec. 9, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 500-14 (Dec. 10, 2014 aft.), 515-16 (Dec. 10, 2014 eve., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 516-20 (Dec. 10, 2014 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014, with exceptions; SA 2014 c9]

3 Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2014 (Quadri)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 89 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 165 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 173 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 259-75 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014; SA 2014 c14]

4 Horse Racing Alberta Amendment Act, 2014 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 89 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 165-67 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 174-75 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft.), 177-79 (Nov. 25, 2014 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 279-81 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2014 c12]

5 Securities Amendment Act, 2014 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 22 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 89-90 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 167-68 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 173 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 281-83 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014, with exceptions; SA 2014 c17]

6 Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2) (Olson)

First Reading -- 22-23 (Nov. 18, 2014 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 90-92 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft.), 175 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 193-206 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft.), 283 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 321 (Dec. 2, 2014 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014, with exceptions; SA 2014 c18]

- 7 Chartered Professional Accountants Act (McIver)**
First Reading -- 159 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 275-76 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve.), 319 (Dec. 2, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 425 (Dec. 8, 2014 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 480 (Dec. 9, 2014 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2014 cC-10.2]
- 8* Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (Kennedy-Glans)**
First Reading -- 159 (Nov. 25, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 276-77 (Dec. 1, 2014 eve.), 319-21 (Dec. 2, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 425-28 (Dec. 8, 2014 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 480 (Dec. 9, 2014 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014; SA 2014 c13]
- 9* Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014 (Olesen)**
First Reading -- 237 (Dec. 1, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 336-38 (Dec. 3, 2014 aft.), 428-33 (Dec. 8, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 470-75 (Dec. 9, 2014 aft.), 477-80 (Dec. 9, 2014 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 495-500 (Dec. 10, 2014 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2014 c10]
- 10* An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children (Jansen)**
First Reading -- 238 (Dec. 1, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 300-18 (Dec. 2, 2014 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 338-55 (Dec. 3, 2014 aft.), 357-66 (Dec. 3, 2014 eve.), 367-74 (Dec. 3, 2014 eve., passed with amendments), 538-548 (Mar. 10, 2015 aft., recommitted, passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 536-38 (Mar. 10, 2015 aft, recommitted to Committee), 548 (Mar. 10, 2015 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 19, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 1, 2015, with exceptions; SA 2015 c1]
- 11 Savings Management Repeal Act (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 334 (Dec. 3, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 433-41 (Dec. 8, 2014 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 468-70 (Dec. 9, 2014 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 494-95 (Dec. 10, 2014 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014; SA 2014 c16]
- 12 Common Business Number Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 562-3 (Mar. 11, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 619 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft.), 698 (Mar. 17, 2015 aft.), 733-4 (Mar. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 798-800 (Mar. 23, 2015 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 858-59 (Mar. 25, 2015 aft., passed)
- 13* Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015 (Leskiw)**
First Reading -- 563 (Mar. 11, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 619 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft.), 668-71 (Mar. 16, 2015 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 730-3 (Mar. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 754-57 (Mar. 19, 2015 aft., passed)
- 14 Agricultural Societies Amendment Act, 2015 (Olson)**
First Reading -- 563 (Mar. 11, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 619-20 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft.), 800-01 (Mar. 23, 2015 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 832-33 (Mar. 24, 2015 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 859-60 (Mar. 25, 2015 aft., passed)
- 15 Securities Amendment Act, 2015 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 563 (Mar. 11, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 620-21 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft.), 667-8 (Mar. 16, 2015 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 730 (Mar. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 753-54 (Mar. 19, 2015 aft., passed)

- 16 Statutes Amendment Act, 2015 (Donovan)**
First Reading -- 563-4 (Mar. 11, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 621-22 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft.), 666-7 (Mar. 16, 2015 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 727-9 (Mar. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 751-53 (Mar. 19, 2015 aft., passed)
- 17 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2015 (\$) (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 597 (Mar. 11, 2015 eve., passed)
Second Reading -- 612-19 (Mar. 12, 2015 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 659-66 (Mar. 16, 2015 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 687-9 (Mar. 17, 2015 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 19, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 19, 2015; SA 2015 c2]
- 18 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (\$) (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 698 (Mar. 17, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 716-22 (Mar. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 748-51 (Mar. 19, 2015 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 791-92 (Mar. 23, 2015 eve., passed)
- 19 Education Amendment Act, 2015 (Dirks)**
First Reading -- 635-6 (Mar. 16, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 801-05 (Mar. 23, 2015 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 833-38 (Mar. 24, 2015 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 860-61 (Mar. 25, 2015 aft., passed)
- 20* Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015 (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 636 (Mar. 16, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 722-7 (Mar. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 792-98 (Mar. 23, 2015 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 829-32 (Mar. 24, 2015 aft., passed)
- 21 Safety Codes Amendment Act, 2015 (Casey)**
First Reading -- 746-47 (Mar. 19, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 805-07 (Mar. 23, 2015 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 838-40 (Mar. 24, 2015 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 861-63 (Mar. 25, 2015 aft., passed)
- 22 Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 771 (Mar. 23, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 823-25 (Mar. 24, 2015 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 840 (Mar. 24, 2015 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- (Mar. 25, 2015 aft., passed)
- 23 Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2015 (\$) (Denis)**
First Reading -- 821 (Mar. 24, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 863-65 (Mar. 25, 2015 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 865-68 (Mar. 25, 2015 aft., passed)
- 24 Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act (McIver)**
First Reading -- 771 (Mar. 23, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 825-29 (Mar. 24, 2015 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 832 (Mar. 24, 2015 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 857-58 (Mar. 25, 2015 aft., passed)
- 25 Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Amendment Act, 2015 (Pedersen)**
First Reading -- 882 (Mar. 26, 2015 aft., passed)
- 26 Fiscal Sustainability Act (\$) (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 882 (Mar. 26, 2015 aft., passed)

- 201* Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014 (Anglin)**
First Reading -- 86 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 125-28 (Nov. 24, 2014 aft.), 238-52 (Dec. 1, 2014 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 406-08 (Dec. 8, 2014 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 408 (Dec. 8, 2014 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 17, 2014 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 17, 2014; SA 2014 c11]
- 202 Safe and Inclusive Schools Statutes Amendment Act, 2014 (Blakeman)**
First Reading -- 86 (Nov. 20, 2014 aft., passed), 335-6 (Dec. 3, 2014 aft., withdrawn)
- 203* Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 192 (Nov. 26, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 409-18 (Dec. 8, 2014 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 639-42 (Mar. 16, 2015 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 642 (Mar. 16, 2015 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 19, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force 3 months after date of Royal Assent; SA 2015 c3]
- 204 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014 (Amery)**
First Reading -- 388 (Dec. 4, 2014 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 642-51 (Mar. 16, 2015 aft.), 774-79 (Mar. 23, 2015 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 779-84 (Mar. 23, 2015 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 784 (Mar. 23, 2015 aft., passed)
- 205 Police (Protection of Victims of Sexual Violence) Amendment Act, 2015 (Cusanelli)**
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- 206 Childhood Comprehensive Eye Examination Act (Jablonski)**
First Reading -- 636 (Mar. 16, 2015 aft., passed)
- 207 Independent Budget Officer Act (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 636 (Mar. 16, 2015 aft., passed)
- 208 Alberta Human Rights (Commission Accountability) Amendment Act, 2015 (Saskiw)**
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Alberta Hansard 2014–2015 **(28th Legislature, Third Session)**

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