

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, November 28, 2002**

1:30 p.m.

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[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our divine Father, as we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our thanks and ask that we may continue our work under Your guidance. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you Mr. Giuseppe Filippo Imbalzano. Mr. Imbalzano is currently posted at the Italian embassy in Prague in the Czech Republic, and he's in charge of consular affairs. He was formerly the Italian vice-consul in Alberta from 1991 to 1995. Mr. Imbalzano is a commander of the Italian navy in the reserves and was recently elected president of the Interallied Confederation of Reserve Officers within NATO. Our country, Canada, is also a member of this confederation. During his visit to Alberta Mr. Imbalzano will also attend the celebrations for the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Alberta branch of the Italian Naval Association, of which he is the honorary president. Mr. Imbalzano is accompanied by Mr. Vito Spadavecchia, a longtime Edmonton resident. Mr. Spadavecchia is the president of the Alberta branch of the Italian Naval Association. They're seated in the Speaker's gallery today, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome. Welcome back to Alberta.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Yeh Fung-jee, director of the Heilongjiang Department of Personnel, and Ms Shing Rong-hwa, also a division director of the Heilongjiang Department of Personnel. Together they are leading two delegations totaling 58 senior public- and private-sector officials from Heilongjiang, China. They are taking executive management training at the University of Alberta, and this is a partnership between the Heilongjiang government, the Alberta government, and the University of Alberta School of Business. The partnership is a key initiative under Alberta's 22-year-old sister province relationship with Heilongjiang. Participants in the program complete six months of training at the University of Alberta and a four-week practicum in various Alberta government ministries. We are pleased that these officials have come to Alberta to study western management and business practices. I would ask that our honoured guests seated in the members' gallery please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce two groups of guests who are in the Assembly today. First of all, I'd like to introduce to you and to the members of the Assembly the members of the Northern Alberta Development Council who are here today following a day and a half of meetings. Unfortunately, some of the members had to leave early and are on their way home. They're seated in your gallery, and I would ask them to stand as I call out their names and to remain standing. First is Mr. Art Avery of Fort McMurray, Berkley Ferguson from Boyle, Michael Procter from Peace River, Al Toews from Fort Vermilion.

Some of the staff members are Allen Geary; Corinne Huberdeau; Jan Mazurik; Rita Phillips; Gladys Gammon, my legislative assistant; and Emily Dye, my constituency assistant. I would like our members to afford them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The second group of guests is 29 people from Peace River, from Peace River high school to be exact. They're a group of high school students accompanied by teacher Mrs. Hill and parents Ms DeWit and Mr. Ross. There are actually two classes. One is an English 10 class, and the other is a French immersion class. They tell me that they were very impressed with their meeting with you earlier today. I'll give you some of the more intimate comments in private later on. They're seated in the members' gallery, Mr. Speaker. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to introduce a very special guest who is visiting us from the agriculture community of New Brigiden. She's very young, and she lives on a farm in New Brigiden with her horse Sweetie and her dog Mojo. She's a very special young lady who is the granddaughter of the Deputy Premier. Her name is Shelby T. Cox, and I'd like her to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we're just sliding right into the second portion of the Routine.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure today to stand and introduce to you and through you to the members of the House Rebecca Holgate. Rebecca is in Edmonton today with the constituency workers' meetings, but she serves in my office in Lethbridge-East. She began with us in September of 2001 after completing a degree from the University of Lethbridge in political science. She works part-time in our office, and in the rest of her time she's now considering joining the army reserves. She'll be able to keep me in line, I guess, a little more if she learns some of the things that go on there. I'd ask Rebecca to stand and receive the warm welcome from the House.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I'll be introducing all of the constituency assistants later on as most of them are not coming in until a little later.

The Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you today 59 visitors from Strathmore. They are from Wheatland elementary school and consist of 44 grade 6 students and 15 teachers, parents, and bus drivers. They've made the long trek from Strathmore here today. This is the first time that I've had the opportunity to introduce a school group from Strathmore in this Assembly, so I'd now ask that the Wheatland elementary school grade 6 students and their parent helpers and the teachers please stand and receive the greetings from the Legislative Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, do you have an additional introduction?

MR. JONSON: No.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure of introducing one of my constituents to the House today and to you. This constituent responded to an open invitation from me to my constituents to call my office if they would like to come here and observe the proceedings of the House. Mr. Houlihan is the first of the three who responded by e-mail to us. He is seated either in the public gallery or the members' gallery; I'm not sure. I would certainly ask him to now please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am really pleased today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two very wonderful gentlemen from Calgary. Neil Hamilton is a constituent of mine in Calgary-West but most important, to this Assembly, Neil is a true Alberta and Canadian hero. His wonderful autobiography, *Wings of Courage: A Lifetime of Triumph over Adversity*, is a wonderfully moving story about a World War II bomb aimer and his amazing and challenging journey through life. Neil's personal motto has always been: "Quit? Never." His son Robert Hamilton, a great admirer of Neil's and, I would say, certainly an exemplary caregiver, also has, I've heard, many of his father's fine qualities. I would ask my two special guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

1:40

MR. McFARLAND: Mr. Speaker, when we come up to Edmonton quite often we see a sign that says: the city of champions. But I'm really honoured to introduce to you and to members of this Assembly somebody that doesn't get the recognition so often deserved. She's a numerous provincial/national power lifting master record holder. She's a master provincial/national Pan-American world weight lifting record holder. She's the first Canadian female to be inducted into the Canadian masters Weight Lifting Hall of Fame. She's a six-time gold medalist at the national and provincial masters weight lifting championships, a five-time gold medalist at the Pan-Am Masters weight lifting championships. She's competed in world masters competitions in Scotland, Poland, Canada, Greece, U.S.A., Australia, winning three gold and three silver and just recently and finally returned from the World Masters Games in Melbourne, Australia, where she won the gold again in her age and weight category for the sport of weight lifting. Right here from Edmonton, personally trained by herself along with her friend, personal trainer, weight lifter, and coach, I'd like to introduce to you somebody that's quite well known, Wendy Rogers. Would you please rise.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm excited and delighted today to introduce to members of this Assembly and ask them to acknowledge the visit of 40 grade 6 students and their teachers, Mr. Dale Mandryk and Ms Colleen Reeder, teacher aide Mrs. Olga Miranda, parent helpers Mrs. Ann Baker, Mrs. Stephanie Tempest, Mrs. Connie Connery, and Mrs. Laurel Laing from the George P. Nicholson elementary school, the first brand-new school of the 21st century built by the Edmonton public school board. It's located in the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. The community of Twin Brooks celebrated the grand opening of this school this past Saturday. They sang the George P. Nicholson song, which says:

Learning values to love and share makes our school fine.

Inspired by parents and teachers who care,

I know the future is mine.

This is our song about our school,

and we sing it loud.

We come together to do great things and make our community proud.

The former Minister of Infrastructure, the MLA for Vegreville-Viking, did great work with the Edmonton public school board to resolve issues around formulas and boundaries to make sure that this school could be built. This is the first class from that school who is attending the Legislature. They will be coming into the members' gallery at 2 p.m. and departing before question period ends, but I'd like the Members of this Legislative Assembly to give their warm welcome to this class, which celebrates the future of our community.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you two distinguished guests to our province from the country of Thailand. Dr. Nongluk Chintanadilok is from the Mahidol University in Bangkok. She is in residence at the university Faculty of Nursing studying qualitative research. Professor Omjit Wongwanich from the Srinakharin Wirat University in Thailand is as well in residence at the university Faculty of Nursing studying pediatric nursing. Joining them today is my wife, Dr. Karin Olson, who's the associate professor at the Faculty of Nursing. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, may I also introduce you to the hon. Member for Leduc, who's having a birthday today.

head: Ministerial Statements

Romanow Report

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, this morning I spoke with Mr. Roy Romanow and ministers of health federally, provincially, and territorially, and I conveyed to Mr. Romanow my thanks to him for an enormous amount of work that has been done. I want to add that I wanted to congratulate Mr. Romanow on some of his conclusions. He agrees that the health system needs to change. He agrees that the time to change is now. He agrees that we need to look at how we deliver and how we are accountable to taxpayers for health services. He proposes some initiatives on which Alberta is already acting. He speaks eloquently and often on shared Canadian values, and these values are equally important to Albertans. However, we disagree with how Mr. Romanow proposes to implement change and how to act on these values.

We agree that some of the solutions are national, but we disagree that the only solutions are national. Canada already has a body to achieve national solutions and accountability where it is appropriate. That body is called the Council of Ministers of Health. It is made up of elected people who report back to their constituents. In recent years our relationship has strengthened, as seen in our recent agreement on a national drug program.

Absent in Mr. Romanow's report, this September all provinces and territories issued the country's first nationally comparable health results. That first report offered reliable information on in-hospital survival rates for heart attack and stroke and years of life lost to cancer. We use this information to save lives and to improve our services and our results.

Mr. Romanow proposes a national health system in which

provinces and territories answer to a nonelected body on which all of western Canada – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba – share one representative. He proposes that reporting be included in the Canada Health Act so that the federal government has yet another reason to withhold money and yet another means to impose its will. In return we share in billions of dollars, all of which have strings attached. Mr. Romanow, Alberta's responsibilities for health care to Albertans are not for sale.

To say that I am disappointed in this part of the Romanow report is an understatement. I expected a former Premier of this country to understand that health care is a provincial and territorial responsibility. From his consultation I expect him to appreciate our uniquely Canadian approach, that our diversity is reflected in our different medical services and models. I expected him to understand that collectively we are accountable to Canadians for their health care, not to an unelected council.

Mr. Speaker, I also anticipate that many other provinces and territories will share Alberta's disappointment. It seems that Mr. Romanow gives little credit to work that is already being done, to previous reports that are already being acted upon, or to the long and productive partnerships that already exist among our federal, provincial, and territorial governments. I will be interested to see how the federal government chooses to react to this report.

The additional federal money Mr. Romanow proposes sounds impressive until you realize he's expanding public health care to include a host of new responsibilities and services. This does little to help sustain the services that we are already struggling to maintain. When we are struggling to pay our bills, we don't go out to spend more.

Mr. Speaker, the one thing as valuable as more funding is more flexibility. Alberta, like many provinces, wanted the Canada Health Act to be open to create that flexibility. Mr. Romanow instead seeks to make it more restrictive by incorporating provincial reporting to a national body and by adding a range of services, conditions, and costs. One area where flexibility is paramount is service delivery. Since Mr. Romanow acknowledges access as a priority for Canadians, I'm disappointed that he rejects alternative delivery systems.

In Alberta access to insured systems has only one entry, through the public health system, and only one payer; that is, the public. Private providers only offer insured services within our public health system. Money has not, does not, and will not determine access to insured health services in Alberta no matter who the provider is.

Mr. Speaker, if we are serious about sustaining medicare, we must be open to all options that provide the access that Canadians value when and where it is needed and without financial consideration. We need to encourage innovation, not stifle it. Innovation is at work here in this province.

Alberta agrees with Mr. Romanow that access is a big issue. So are wait lists, palliative care, and home care. Alberta is acting on those priorities. Mr. Romanow holds up Edmonton as a model for palliative care. As part of our own health reform agenda we are developing a wait list registry, centralized provincewide booking, and access targets for selected services. A provincewide electronic health record will be implemented in another 16 months. Alberta covers the cost of catastrophic drugs under our Blue Cross benefit plans, and we welcome improvements to drug coverage. Regions already deliver home care services with provincial funding. We already have extensive accountability reporting, including our three-year business plans, annual results reports, and quarterly wait list reports.

Alberta believes prevention is important. Staying healthy is the first theme of our health reform agenda. We are implementing a tobacco reduction agenda. We are developing 10-year health objectives and targets to reduce disease.

I am looking forward to exploring where the options and recommendations in the Romanow report can support our own health reform efforts in Alberta, but to be clear, Mr. Speaker, we will look at the Romanow report in the light and through the lens of the Mazankowski recommendations, not the other way around. I will work with my colleagues in Alberta and across the country to make use of innovative and practical solutions that do not diminish our responsibilities to the citizens of Alberta or our flexibility in meeting them.

Thank you.

1:50

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, today Albertans and all Canadians were handed a vision for an end to the feeling of crisis in health care in the form of the Romanow report. This report confirms what experts across this country have long been saying. It says with perfect clarity that a public health care system is sustainable and, more than that, that a public health care system is the best way to deliver the health care that Canadians want and deserve. This report also makes it clear that by any reliable measure spending on health care is in no way out of control. In fact, the report confirms that we are spending less of our wealth on health care today than we did a decade ago and that it is time to make well-considered reinvestments.

Mr. Romanow has served as a Premier during very difficult times, and despite claims we hear in this House, he made Saskatchewan, not Alberta, the first province with a balanced budget in the 1990s. He knows the importance of both leadership and vision. What does he say we need? First and foremost, to save medicare, strong leadership, and improved governance. So let us apply the questions of strong leadership and good governance to Alberta's health care system.

In the past 10 years there have been eight deputy ministers of health. No one can lead in those circumstances, and there is no possibility of good governance. In the past 10 years Alberta's health care funding has swung wildly, crashing down and cranking up more dramatically than any other province. Instability, demoralization, and waste have been the results. In the past 10 years we have seen thousands of staff laid off, then, to counter the ensuing staff shortages, huge wage settlements. In the past 10 years we have seen regional health authorities hurriedly created and suddenly disbanded, and for months now we have watched a paralyzing debate over their boundaries. For the past 10 years we have seen the process for establishing health authority budgets and business plans simply break down. This year not a single health authority – not one – had its budget approved on time. I could go on, Mr. Speaker, and on and on.

The sense of crisis in Alberta's health care system is not the fault of the people who use the system nor the people who work in it. It is the fault of failed leadership, but there is now a way out. We urge this government to set aside its plans to create yet another round of upheaval in Alberta's health care system. It is unneeded and unwanted. Albertans are tired of the bickering. They are tired of the confusion. The Romanow report is clear, constructive, and workable. We urge the government of Alberta to adopt it.

Thank you.

head: Oral Question Period

Federal Health Care Funding

DR. NICOL: The Romanow report outlines a national framework for delivering all Canadians with a comprehensive, borderless health care system. One of the recommendations is for new federal funds to be specifically targeted for health care initiatives. My question is

to the minister of health. Will the minister accept federal fund transfers if they are targeted for specific health initiatives?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, this is an area that will have to be discussed among not just ministers of health across Canada but also first ministers when they meet in January to discuss health care. It will depend on what those areas are targeted to. I've said in this House and I've said in public that it is difficult for some provinces to have dollars that are targeted to certain areas that are new areas when they have difficulty and struggle with the existing areas that they already cover.

Now, as I indicated, there are some elements of the Romanow report that may be valuable and things that we have as a province already embarked upon. We agree that there is a need for a rural health strategy. We agree that there is a need to improve access. We agree that there is a need for primary health care reform. We are already acting on those areas. If the federal government chooses to implement those portions of the Romanow report that are consistent with the priorities the provinces have already established, then, yes, we will be happy to go down that road, but if the federal government insists that there are new programs that are created that are not consistent with the priorities of provinces and territories, we cannot.

DR. NICOL: Given that the Canadian Medical Association recently reported that federal funds for medical equipment were either misspent or misused by provinces, what sort of accountability is the government willing to provide for new federal funds?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the Leader of the Opposition that money that was allocated for medical technology in the province of Alberta by the federal government was used for medical technology. That's the first point. But that there were provinces that may not have spent their moneys on medical technology is at the very heart of the problem. There were provinces that did not spend it on medical technology, and the reason for it is because they did not have sufficient moneys to match the federal government's moneys, which was a requirement under this program. They had difficulties matching the program dollars put up by the federal government, and they couldn't afford the operational dollars for that equipment. That's exactly the reason why this idea of matching federal dollars, that is inconsistent with provincial priorities, is the heart of the problem.

DR. NICOL: Again to the minister: will the minister use funds provided through the new diagnostic services fund recommended by Romanow to improve access to publicly delivered diagnostic services, or would they be used to prop up private facilities?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we are going to be focused on access. This is something that we agree with with Mr. Romanow. We are not, however, prisoners of ideology to suggest that you cannot use the private sector in the delivery of publicly paid for services. We have invested an enormous amount of money in buying new diagnostic equipment. We have increased dramatically our publicly owned MRIs, as an example, in this province such that the number of MRIs which were done three years ago was roughly 20,000. This year it will be almost quadruple that, nearly 75,000 MRI scans. Now, that is done partly through the public system but also through private delivery of MRI scans in this province.

Private Health Care Services

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health and Wellness

admits that he has no evidence that contracting out in Alberta has saved money. Today the Romanow report concluded there's no clear evidence that contracting out is more efficient or less costly. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that no evidence exists, how can the minister claim he's following evidence-based decision-making when he pushes for greater privatization?

2:00

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Institute for Health Information clearly says that when institutions, when facilities do a large volume of a narrow group of services, they get better at it. It makes perfectly good sense that if a regional health authority can provide greater access to a service by use of a private surgical facility and that service is paid for by the public system and if it doesn't cost any more and it does improve the volume of activity that can be generated, then it is a prudent move. It's not just about dollars and cents. It's also about being able to improve access and reduce queues and wait lists.

DR. NICOL: Again to the minister: since the minister has no evidence for contracting out, why has he disregarded his own legislation requiring him to consider cost-effectiveness before approving any contracts?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that cost-effectiveness is not the only criterion that is to be considered. It is quite clear that in our tendering process, which is available to any who wish to see it – and any of the contracts that have been approved under our legislation are available for the hon. member to see – cost-effectiveness is but one of a number of different criteria. It also has to include the quality being maintained and the access to the service being improved.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you. Mr. Minister, are you prepared to table in this House the calculations for each one of the conditions on a contracting out that are listed in the legislation?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, that sounds like an entirely appropriate question to be done through a written question request.

Romanow Report

DR. TAFT: A research budget of over \$2 million, 40 discussion papers, three major research projects, eight roundtable discussions, six televised policy forums, 12 dialogue sessions with randomly selected Canadians, numerous in-depth interviews with various policy experts: that, Mr. Speaker, is the Romanow commission, which the Minister of Health and Wellness so arrogantly dismissed before even seeing its final report. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: given the multitude of research that has gone into the Romanow report, we ask again why the minister has decided to callously disregard so many of its findings.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, unless the hon. member has been sitting in a cave somewhere for the last several weeks, he would be aware that there have been many reports in various media outlets, electronic and newspaper, about what would be contained in the Romanow report. Mr. Romanow has made no secret about trying to outleak himself through speeches that he's made at Harvard University, speeches that he's made at Memorial University, speeches that he's made in Washington, D.C. So for anybody to suggest that there are any surprises coming out of today's official release of the Romanow

report – I'm astonished that the hon. member had no idea of what was coming down the pike.

So, Mr. Speaker, I have indicated, and not in a callous way, that there are elements of the Romanow report that we find consistency with, but at the end of the day we are moving forward on the recommendations set out by Mr. Mazankowski. Anything that can be contained in the Romanow report that can improve on what we are already doing, we are happy to entertain, but we must stand up for what is right in the province of Alberta.

DR. TAFT: Wouldn't it be nice if they did stand up for what is right once?

Will the minister admit that the real reason he won't embrace the Romanow report is because it doesn't support the government's position of rapidly expanding privatization, which Mr. Mazankowski would like?

Thank you.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, he has completely missed the point on what the issue in health care is. The issue is improving access and maintaining the quality of the health care system. I have used this example on many occasions; I'll use it again. When an individual is ill and goes into a facility, the questions that they will ask: does this place have the people and the equipment and the skills to diagnose me and treat me so I get better? People don't ask: is this a public or a private facility? That is an irrelevant question.

DR. TAFT: To the Premier: can the Premier tell us when his government's position changed from listening to the experts and became one of either firing them, like they did with Dr. Swann, or ignoring them, like they are with Mr. Romanow?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, it is not true, to say the least – and there's another word for not true – to say that this government fired Dr. Swann. This government had absolutely nothing to do with Dr. Swann's dismissal or his rehiring. Absolutely nothing. If the hon. member were truly honourable, he will stand up and apologize for that very misleading, to say the least, allegation. But if he's honourable.

Mr. Speaker, we listen to the experts, and indeed we're listening to Mr. Romanow. We agree entirely with Mr. Romanow that there is a need for more federal funding, that the feds need to step up to the plate and pay their fair share. We don't agree, considering that health is exclusively a matter of provincial responsibility under the Constitution, that there should be strings tied to that money unless, of course, those strings allude to programs that we already have in place or are contemplating and are deemed to be our priorities. We certainly don't agree – maybe the Liberals do, because they like the socialist, centralist kind of control; maybe they agree – that there needs to be a national council, a new bureaucracy, formed to act as a watchdog over health care spending.

Mr. Speaker, when we went through the last round with the federal government in the year 2000, when they increased somewhat funding through the Canada health and social transfer, I said that I would sign my name in blood that that money would go to the delivery of health care, and I'm sure the other Premiers would be willing to make an absolute commitment. As the hon. minister pointed out, there's already a council in place, and that is the ministers of health, people who are duly elected to deliver health care programs in their provinces according to their constitutional authority.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Roy Romanow has done all Canadians a great service by laying out a detailed blueprint for modernizing, strengthening, and sustaining medicare. By contrast, the health care agenda of this Tory government can be summed up in three simple words: privatization, delisting, and user fees. The Tory government's approach is ideologically driven and so simple that it can be written on the back of one napkin and with lots of space to spare. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: other than blind ideology and a need to reward Tory-friendly investors, why does the Tory government ignore the facts and continue to push a for-profit health care delivery agenda, that costs more and delivers less?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, when I saw the sign go up, I thought I might have been across the hall from Stockwell Day.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that we are not bound by an ideology. We are bound by an unfailing focus on improving the delivery, the access, maintaining or improving the quality of a health care system that Canadians, that Albertans treasure. These are common values between what Mr. Romanow has espoused and what we as an Alberta government have espoused. We believe that the system should be sustainable, that it should be affordable, that it should be accessible, that it should be of high quality, and those are the commitments that we have. If that's an ideology, then we're guilty of following that ideology.

2:10

Mr. Speaker, there needs to be an examination of alternative ways of delivery. We know, for example, that long-term care has in this province long been served by a not-for-profit sector, by a for-profit sector, by the public sector, and this idea of having a blend of all of these things to deliver a high-quality, affordable service is what we want in our health care system.

DR. PANNU: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: why is the government so hell-bent on delisting necessary health services in direct opposition to the Romanow report's call that medically necessary diagnostic and home care services be brought inside the medicare umbrella?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, what Mr. Romanow has done is he has gone well beyond anything that Tommy Douglas had ever contemplated when medicare was first introduced in the Saskatchewan Legislature in 1961. I have referred to Mr. Douglas's speeches from 1961 in the Saskatchewan Legislature where he talks about the fact that he felt that it was important that individuals make a contribution for the use of the health care system. What was originally contemplated was ensuring that Saskatchewan people and, ultimately, Canadians would be protected from catastrophic financial loss as a result of catastrophic health consequences, and what was really talked about was doctors and hospitals, not all of this other stuff. So we have gone well beyond what the original contemplation of medicare was originally viewed to be as the scope of a social program, but what we seek in this Legislature and with this government is more flexibility, not less flexibility, which is what Mr. Romanow is contemplating.

DR. PANNU: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: why is the government on the verge of introducing MSA-style accounts that will force sick and injured Albertans and their families to pay deductibles in direct opposition to the Romanow report's conclusion that these approaches don't save money, only serve to shift costs onto the shoulders of patients and their families?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, there is no such plan, and I will not answer a question that is based on speculation, innuendo, and conjecture.

Electricity Deregulation

MR. McCLELLAND: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Energy. When private companies use electricity generated by public utilities, utilities subsidized by the tax base, are they in contravention of the North American free trade agreement?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that it would be extremely difficult to argue that electricity companies in the United States are harmed by electricity imported from Canada. For example, the majority of generators in the Pacific Northwest are still regulated, and they would not be harmed as they would be guaranteed the rate of return, which is the fundamental side for putting a restrictive trade practice against NAFTA. Now, for example, if a company were to take the federal government to a NAFTA trade panel for imposing the Kyoto protocol, there might indeed be a restraint of trade hearing held, but I'm only speculating on that.

Mr. Speaker, 70 percent of the power generated in Canada is hydro power. It's generated by utilities that have encountered some one hundred billion dollars' worth of taxpayer-supported debt. They export power to the United States to the tune of \$2 billion to \$3 billion a year, and there has not been any NAFTA claim on them.

MR. McCLELLAND: To the same minister: given the minister's answer then, in backing away from the deregulation of electricity, has the government of Ontario put its economy in the future in jeopardy?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, this is the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta, and we're not going to comment on what's going on in Ontario.

Hon. member, your third question.

MR. McCLELLAND: All right. To the same minister: by embracing the deregulation process advocated by the government, has EPCOR not contributed to the long-term competitive advantage of Alberta, to the Alberta advantage?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, in evaluating an individual corporation's performance, those determinants are usually the function of, one, the perception by consumers in the marketplace and, secondly, by those investors and shareholders that organize the capital that's necessary to make that company run.

For the effects of having a generator such as EPCOR in Alberta and what has happened to this marketplace with respect to EPCOR's involvement, I would turn to the Minister of Economic Development to talk about what EPCOR has done with respect to the competitive advantage of Alberta as well as deregulation.

MR. NORRIS: I appreciate my hon. colleague deferring to me on this point. Obviously, deregulation has had remarkable success in Alberta. As you know, the province of Alberta requires about 7,800 megawatts of power. With new power coming on-line, we anticipate having about 8,500. We may actually become a net exporter like the provinces of Quebec and British Columbia, which is a whole new industry to Alberta. New power is up from deregulation, but it's done something very interesting as well, Mr. Speaker. It has allowed companies to see the market opportunities, invest in new forms of power such as wind power in the beautiful Crowsnest Pass, experiment in clean coal exports, and deregulation of power from

clean coal. Overall, it shows that the Alberta government is ideologically welcoming new challenges and changes from deregulation and willing to embrace them, so it's been a remarkable success.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Electricity Deferral Accounts

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. EPCOR in its third-quarter report announced that about \$312 million was yet to be collected on electricity charges for the year 2000 and 2001, that this government would not allow them to collect leading up to and during the provincial election. This is not a remarkable success story. There is no end in sight for these extra charges on Albertans' power bills, because sooner or later we are going to have to pay for Balancing Pool deferral accounts as well. The exact amount of the Balancing Pool deferral account is a mystery that will continue to haunt Alberta consumers in the form of high electricity bills for years into the future. My first question is to the Premier. Can the Premier please confirm that the Balancing Pool stands to lose substantial amounts due to its commitments to the owners of the electricity production?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, no, I can't confirm that that, indeed, will happen or that it won't happen. Hopefully, it won't happen. All I can say is that consistently power rates generally have been going down. They have stabilized considerably. There are some problems with the delivery of electricity, in the billing practices relative to electricity in some areas, not all areas. It's anticipated that the Balancing Pool will have some electricity to sell. It's anticipated that profits will be made. It's also anticipated that because of our sound management of this very difficult issue, we will not have to go into another subsidy program and that power rates will remain stable.

The hon. member is making all kinds of assumptions; in other words, everything that he is basing his assumptions on goes back to the year 2001 and is purely and absolutely hypothetical. [interjection] Back to 2000, yes.

MR. SMITH: Can I just add a very short point? In his preamble the member referred to the \$312 million in the run-up before the election of 2001. That was the year 2000, Mr. Speaker. This province was under a regulated model during that period of time. He knows it, and I think he's just maybe fudging a little bit for the House.

2:20

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, this isn't conjecture. This is information from the Balancing Pool's annual report.

Again to the Premier: given that you stated that the average rolling price of electricity is 4 cents per kilowatt-hour, which, by the way, is not available to consumers anywhere in this province, can the Premier please confirm that the deferral account could increase by \$100 million this year because the Balancing Pool's commitment to the owners of the electricity production is 5 cents per kilowatt-hour for fixed and variable costs?

MR. KLEIN: No, I can't confirm that, Mr. Speaker. Relative to the daily energy pricing report this is, I take it, the Power Pool price. The average to the 25th of November was about 4 cents a kilowatt-hour. That document is available; it's published on a daily basis, and that is the report to noon, Monday, November 25. I doubt that it's changed very much since then.

Relative to the question I can confirm absolutely nothing other

than that the hon. member is speculating and he's putting forward a hypothetical case, Mr. Speaker.

With regard to the hon. member's preamble we announced deferral of rate riders so that people wouldn't have to pay the riders when prices were so high. Indeed, prices were high. As I pointed out, in January of 2001 it was 13.1 cents a kilowatt-hour. By the time it reached the consumer and the costs were added on, the retail price was even much higher than that, so we introduced rebates. The deferral was not connected to the election, and we make absolutely no apologies for doing what was absolutely right at the time; that was, protecting consumers.

We feel that the situation has stabilized. There are some bumps that have to be flattened out, certainly, relative to billing practices, and we'll deal with that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: what is the total amount of interest Alberta consumers must pay on these secret deferral accounts because you want to hide those additional charges from them until after the next provincial election?

THE SPEAKER: We have to move on here. Questions are supposed to be about government policy, not about all kinds of other things.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Forestry industry jobs and jobs in secondary industries associated with the forestry industry are important to the Drayton Valley-Calmar constituency. Earlier this fall, in light of the ongoing softwood lumber dispute, the federal government announced a \$246 million assistance package for workers and communities dealing with this issue. Yesterday in Ottawa the four opposition parties held a rare joint press conference to demand more. My question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Can you please tell the Assembly how this package will help Alberta?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member and other members of the Assembly know, we've been working closely with the forest industry in Alberta throughout this very lengthy dispute. With respect to the recently announced support package from the federal government we are working with the industry, particularly, though, with the communities that are impacted by this development, and we are advising them on the formulas that should be applied in terms of assistance to communities across, actually, all parts of Alberta that are impacted by this particular issue.

Mr. Speaker, we're very much involved with the program. We're suggesting that the federal government should be prepared to have money available not only in the current fiscal year but in the year ahead because we cannot guarantee that the dispute will be resolved in a prompt way. So I think we're certainly fulfilling our responsibility in terms of representing and working with industry in this regard.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is also to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. What is your ministry doing to work with the forest industry in Alberta to help deal with this ongoing dispute?

MR. JONSON: Well, throughout the dispute, as I just mentioned, we have met regularly with the Forest Products Association. We have provided both legal and strategic advice. We continue to support the challenges that have been made to NAFTA and to the World Trade Organization. Mr. Speaker, I think most important right now, we are awaiting and urging as we can the American government to consider coming back to the table with respect to negotiations. There is something that has developed in the United States known through the Department of Commerce as a possibility of opening some discussions about changed circumstances; that is, there'll be an opportunity perhaps to work out agreements on a province-by-province basis, although that was not our preference, in the coming year. So it is, I know, an issue which we wish could be resolved quickly and satisfactorily, but that is the nature of what are very complex matters that involve negotiations with the United States.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Wainwright.

Rent Supplement Program

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Seniors. Could the minister please tell us what the status is of the private landlord rent supplement program?

MR. WOLOSHYN: The private landlord rent supplement program is still on an ongoing basis. We have taken the initiative to ensure that people with emergency situations are being housed. We are having significant budget pressures on the program simply because the rents are rising beyond our ability to meet them and that of the housing that's in the private sector.

MS BLAKEMAN: This is the private landlord supplement, and when I contacted the Capital Region Housing Corporation, Red Deer Housing Authority, Calgary Housing Authority, and Lethbridge Housing Authority, they all say that the program is on hold and has been since October of '01 due to lack of funding from the province. Why is the minister saying that it's okay?

MR. WOLOSHYN: I can't comment on the conversations you may have had with these authorities. Like I said earlier, the program is still there; it is still going. We're under a severe financial crunch, and we're meeting the emergency needs of the people in these various communities that you listed.

MS BLAKEMAN: What additional programming, then, is the minister looking at to increase the number of rental housing accommodation that's subsidized and available to people?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, this province has thousands of supportive housing programs for the seniors through the lodge program, thousands there through our support for people in social housing. We have thousands of units that we support there through the various housing foundations. We also have the rent supplement program, resources for which, I readily admit, are being stretched to the limit because of the escalating rents. We are also currently working with the federal government on the affordable housing program, which, when it is implemented, I'm sure will have a very positive effect on transitional housing, and putting people who are in the workforce in these very same communities to give them some availability of units. Also, I might add that through the initiatives of this government and with the support of other levels of government, we have added hundreds of homeless spaces and are working on that problem also.

We must remember, Mr. Speaker, that the solution to the housing

crisis is not solely the responsibility of any single government. It's a responsibility that is taken on by the communities and municipalities involved in conjunction and partnership with the private sector, with the provincial government, and indeed with the federal government.

2:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Federal Report on Implications of Kyoto Accord

MR. GRIFFITHS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Industry Canada produced a report that describes devastating effects to key sectors of Alberta's and Canada's economies under the Kyoto protocol. Can the Minister of Economic Development tell us what is being done to address the report and the alarming projections it makes?

MR. NORRIS: Well, at the outset, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for the excellent question. Clearly, the member understands the significance of the Kyoto report, and at the very least this report not being shared with us is a travesty on so many different levels that I don't know where to begin. But the Department of Industry Canada does have in its hands a report that outlines the effects of the Kyoto accord and its implications on Alberta. It talks about the loss of tens of thousands of jobs, billions of dollars worth of investment, and dried-up investment in years to come, and they know this. It is not an Alberta government report. It's done by the government of Canada, and they refused to share it with us.

What we have done as a course of action is written a very sternly worded letter to the Minister of Industry telling him that it is his responsibility to share that with us and to let the rest of Canada know the devastating effects that this accord is going to have on not only Alberta but all of Canada, Mr. Speaker.

MR. GRIFFITHS: My first supplementary question is to the Minister of Energy. Can the Minister of Energy tell us how his department is responding to the details of the report?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister . . . There is some confusion. One minister says the report's not public. How can another minister know what it is? Please, some clarification here or consistency, if nothing else.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to provide the clarification in that the report has been released by Industry Canada, but it cannot be found by Industry Canada officials. Therefore, what happens is that this information, like ink from a squid, leaks out of Ottawa in a purported business relationship with a province where none of this information is available. So what we have to work on are some difficult details, but when you see in pages of a report that there is expected to be a 48 percent decline in investment in the coal industry – the coal industry not only being the backbone of Edson-Yellowhead; it also represents some 5,700 megawatts of a 10,000-megawatt grid in this province – that means that over half that investment would be gone.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, in the crude petroleum and natural gas sectors, that natural gas that heats up 70 percent of Ontario's homes, that estimated decline is 33 percent, 33 percent of a present \$20 billion investment in Alberta. That's \$6 billion down the drain. It also talks about a 55 percent decline in refined petroleum. Shell Scotford, Petro-Canada: their upgrading facility from the oil sands will provide Edmonton with the backbone of refining for the next 70 years.

So, Mr. Speaker, in a short summary, the council of Manufacturers and Exporters, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the council of business executives, the Alberta Building Trades Council, the C.D. Howe Institute, and David Dodge, the governor of the Bank of Canada, have all said that Kyoto is bad for Canada. When will they listen?

MR. GRIFFITHS: To the Minister of Environment: what response has your ministry received from the federal government about the contents of this report?

DR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, like other departments we haven't received a lot, and Canadians are now starting largely to recognize that the federal government has some conflict within itself in terms of the information it's willing to put out. In fact, even the environmental movement is starting to recognize that. I might quote from Patrick Moore, the founder of Greenpeace. He says that this country's push to implement the Kyoto protocol is politically motivated and unrealistic. He goes on to say that Canada is risking a "political civil war" for an accord that isn't likely to have a significant environmental impact and could severely damage the nation's economy. He further says that climate change is nowhere near the crisis it's being made out to be: "Where are the bodies? Where is the so-called climate disaster they keep talking about? I don't see people falling over from heat-prostration by the millions."

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. minister. You will be prepared to table the required document a little later.

Bighorn Wildland Recreation Area

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, for 26 years the Alberta government has respected and protected the environmentally sensitive terrain and resources of the Bighorn wildland recreation area. [some applause] They're clapping too soon, because last year the provincial government went back on its promise to protect this fragile and beautiful land. It took the Bighorn wildland off its maps, sold gas leases within the area, and initiated an access management planning process that will allow access into areas where policy explicitly prohibits off-road vehicles and industrial development. And let the record show that the Minister of Energy clapped for this. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: what is it that has convinced you that Alberta's most fragile ecosystems and beautiful parklands are no longer worth protecting?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, in fact this is just the opposite. We are protecting, of course. If the socialists across the way had their way, they'd do nothing, like they always do. Wait on the sidelines and criticize, that's all they do. What we are doing there – there are 5,000 square kilometres between Banff and Jasper.

AN HON. MEMBER: How many?

MR. CARDINAL: Five thousand square kilometres of area, Mr. Speaker. The area was recommended as a special places project. The committee reviewed it, and the committee agreed at the time that the best process for that area is to develop an access management plan. Our government, of course, was asked to do that. We put in a committee of six government departments and also 15 multi-use users to develop a plan. The plan was developed. It went through the process, got approved; it's in place. We have a monitoring committee now in place that will continue to do ongoing monitoring and recommending changes in the area, and that is just

the first step. Developing the plan is just the first step. From here on is where the work starts.

In addition to that, the way the system is set up now – and this is very, very important to Albertans – there are recreation users in the area, and there always have been. There's commercial use in the area; there always has been. And there's environmental protection in the area, Mr. Speaker. That will continue. The problem with that whole region, the whole 5,000 square kilometres . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: How many?

MR. CARDINAL: Five thousand square kilometres. We never had any regulations to be able to enforce usage in that area. This plan does that exactly.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, if the plan and the consultation process worked so well, then why are so many of those environmental groups, who spent hours and months and years working on putting in input, now withdrawing from ever doing anything with this government again because they're not consulted and they are never a part of the plan?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, this plan was developed over a long period of time. Again I'll stress the fact that it was recommended to be part of the special places program. The area committee did not agree with that, and that involves people from the environmental side. They did not agree with that. They agreed with a multi-use access management plan. That is exactly what we have developed, keeping the balance between environmental management and economic development. It's trying to protect the environment. It is a top priority, but the worst thing for our environment is poverty, and that is why you have to develop new resources in a balanced way to ensure that proper developments take place in Alberta.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately this government doesn't understand balance, only economic development. How does this minister justify the destruction of such an integral component of an international effort to preserve the biological diversity, natural processes, and recreational activity of the Rocky Mountain corridor as the Bighorn wildland?

2:40

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, this member needs a good education on what is out there and what has happened and what we are doing, but I'm not sure she can learn. I'll give you an example of the recreational users presently out there before the plan was in place: there are 700 kilometres of trails used by hikers, by snowmobilers, by trail riders, by mountain bikers, but the problem with that was we didn't have regulations to be able to monitor and manage that. That is exactly what this plan does.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Private Health Care Services (continued)

MR. MASON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The Romanow commission was exhaustive in its efforts to hear from the public. It held 21 days of public hearings, conducted nine opinion polls, and received over 18,000 on-line surveys. It also produced 40 research papers, held international roundtables and 12 televised policy dialogues. Conversely, when this government decided to examine health care, they held no public meetings, conducted no opinion

polls or surveys, or at least none that they would share with the public, and listened only to their own friends and insiders. My question to the minister of health is this: will the minister admit that the only way he can foist private health care on this province is to do it behind closed doors and without the full participation of the Alberta public? I don't know which minister wants to answer the question. Maybe the Deputy Premier.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll undertake the question for advisement and referral to the minister of health at the appropriate time. However, I do take some exception to the allegations in the member's question about how he so freely and inappropriately uses the term "privatization of health care." It's true that there are private providers involved in the delivery of health care, but they are subsidized through that process with public funding. That is what the minister of health and others here have indicated time and time again, that it's important that those facilities, including doctors' offices and certain clinics, provide those services.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, then, to the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, who's answering the questions: why are decisions to delist medically necessary services being made behind closed doors? Why is the public excluded?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, again I'll undertake that question for advisement to the hon. minister of health. What's important is that health services be provided for through publicly funded abilities, and that's what we're doing, and that has been a very open and accountable process.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why doesn't this government have the guts to admit that the reason it wants to delist services, privatize, and cut health care is so that the government's corporate friends can add billions of dollars of public health care money to their bottom line?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I think that clearly the health minister covered a number of these areas earlier in question period today. The one thing that he did make clear in answering those questions is that we're not really interested in dealing with conjecture, innuendo, what might happen, what could happen, and what-ifs. What this government has done is reformed a health system that delivers a system that is number one in Canada. In fact, the Capital region, in which we are sitting right now, for two years running has been named as the top delivery system of health services in Canada. I would suggest to the hon. member that he perhaps pay just a little bit of attention to what is happening in this region, to the access to the most dedicated professionals anywhere in the country who are right here delivering health services.

The health minister also noted very clearly earlier today that the Canada Health Act is about doctors and hospitals, and that is not what we are about in delivering services. We deliver a wide range of services far beyond the Canada Health Act, which, in fact, if you want to take the time to read it, hon. member, is nothing more than a funding mechanism.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Small Business

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Poverty and issues surrounding poverty continue to be of concern. There are calls for increases in minimum wage rates, and often it is cited as one solution. However, capacity to pay higher wages by small business owners does not appear to be a subject which has received the same degree of attention or study. My questions are to the Minister of Economic Development. If the Department of Economic Development has done any extensive studies of poverty rates among small business owners, what were the highlights of those studies?

MR. NORRIS: Well, I'd like to thank the hon. member for his question. As a former small business owner, Mr. Speaker, I think it's a vital one to the future of Alberta. As many people in this House know, small business is clearly the backbone of our economy and continues to drive our economy. There is an assumption that all businesses are profitable, that all businesses are a gravy train. The studies that we have undertaken and the information we have tell us a remarkably different story. In fact, many times small business owners are working for the better part of nothing, when all the dust settles, only to say that they are their own bosses.

Exact studies show, Mr. Speaker, that on average the annual household income of employers of self-employed businesses is \$12,000 less than the Canadian average. In the small business category about 75 percent of those firms reported losing money or breaking even at best. I should also note that in that study 80 percent of the same small business owners report that they always – always – work 60 hours a week or more, compared with only 14 percent of their employees who said that.

The member raises a great question that needs more research. There is a theory that small business is a licence to print money, Mr. Speaker. The evidence is that it's the hard work and determination of those people that keeps them going rather than the money that's involved.

MR. LORD: My second question, Mr. Speaker: if the Department of Economic Development has done any extensive studies of the numbers or percentages of small business failure rates as a percentage of small business start-ups, what were the highlights of those studies?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we actually have. As I said at the outset, as a former business owner I understand this issue implicitly, and having had many colleagues who have struggled and not succeeded, the evidence is overwhelming. Unfortunately, it points out that of most businesses that start up, within the first five years 75 percent do not make it. They don't make it, which flies in the face of common wisdom of the members opposite that all small businesspeople and businesspeople in general are taking a free ride in this economy.

It also reported, Mr. Speaker, that about 4,000 businesses started up in Calgary, and about 75 percent of those did not survive. The same number is available in Edmonton and around the province. Again, I relate it back to the same premise. We as Economic Development understand that small business and business in general drives this economy. We want to make sure we can do everything possible, which is a low tax regime and a fair set of rules, and we will continue to work with small business, who, I sincerely believe, drive this Alberta economy to be one of the greatest in Canada.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is: if the Department of Economic Development has done any studies of the effects or impacts of raising the minimum wage payable by small business owners in an effort to alleviate poverty among their employees, what would those results indicate?

MR. NORRIS: Well, this is probably the most important point of the series the hon. member raises, Mr. Speaker. When most small businesses are at a break-even point at best, they're doing their best to provide jobs and employment to other people in society. I'd like to reiterate the point: governments do not create jobs or wealth. They never can, never will. The people who create jobs and wealth are the small businesspeople who risk their own hard-earned capital and build something with it. It is fairly obvious to all concerned who have run a small business that there are many more things than minimum wage that keep people happy: things such as loyalty, job satisfaction, recognition of a job well done, a team spirit that seems to thrive in a small business enterprise.

The overwhelming studies show, Mr. Speaker, that a minimum wage raise will do nothing but kill jobs. The first response as a small businessman is to pay his suppliers, his rent, and keep his doors open. Then he has to deal with whatever government intervention there is, and I'm glad to say that in Alberta there's very little. A raise in the minimum wage or a significant increase in that will do nothing more than kill jobs and drive our economy into a slowdown, which is not what we're attempting to do.

What I'd really like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that I found fascinating in Alberta – and you can drive in any neighbourhood, whether it's Calgary-McCall or Calgary-Egmont or Edmonton-Meadowlark. You'll see signs: part-time work, \$7, \$8, \$9 an hour. Those jobs aren't being filled because of a white-hot economy. This government believes that the economy, being strong enough, will drive that minimum wage up naturally and let businesspeople do what they have to do to survive.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before I call on the first of several to participate today in Members' Statements, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

2:50

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(*reversion*)

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, I want to take this opportunity to recognize a group of individuals in the galleries today who play a key role in the democratic process in the province of Alberta. These are the men and the women who work for members of this Assembly in their constituency offices. Each year the service and the contributions of these individuals are celebrated with an employee recognition dinner, which I'll be hosting a little later this evening along with the Deputy Speaker. Today over 50 constituency office staff members are with us, and 18 will be recognized with five or more years of service, two with 10 or more years of service, two with 15 or more years of service. One constituency staffer, Ms Jeanette Weatherill, has served the constituents of Wainwright for over 20 years. Now, that means that her current member had reached the great age of 10 when she started working.

I would ask that Ms Weatherill and the rest of the constituency staff contingent in the public gallery this afternoon please rise and receive the warm recognition of members of this House.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I gather we were a little bit out of sync previously, so with your kind permission I will repeat my introduction from the beginning of this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you two distinguished guests to our province from Thailand: Dr. Nongluk Chintanadilok from Mahidol University in Bangkok, who is in residence at the university Faculty of Nursing studying qualitative research, and Professor Omjit Wongwanich from Srinakharin Wirat University in Thailand. She is, as well, in residence at the university Faculty of Nursing and studying pediatric nursing. Joining them today is my wife, Dr. Karin Olson, associate professor at the Faculty of Nursing. I would ask all three to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Scott Winder, who is a constituent of Edmonton-Centre and has joined us in the public gallery today to watch us in question period and in Routine of the day. I would ask Scott to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: Let me now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Sprucewood Library

MR. MASYK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take the opportunity to rise and speak today on an issue very dear to me and my constituents. Last week the city of Edmonton announced the possibility of a library closing in the city. One of four potential branches considered for closing is in my constituency. The Sprucewood library is a source of learning, information, inspiration to my constituents. It's a shame that city hall has not seen fit to prioritize the minds of our young children over other items in their budgets. The closing of a library will take away more opportunity for the underprivileged in my constituency to break the cycle of poverty that surrounds them. Libraries are institutions of equality that provide a resource of self-improvement. To close a library in a neighbourhood like Edmonton-Norwood, that already is disadvantaged, will only perpetuate poverty.

Mr. Speaker, libraries are an important parenting tool. They're a place where children can be taken and learn and expand their imagination. The minds of youth should not be sacrificed for a mere \$220,000. I strongly urge – actually, no; I don't urge at all. I demand that they keep this library open, because the youth have to be educated on such things as the Kyoto accord. They can go and find out for themselves, as shareholders of a power company generated by coal, what it really means to them, what it means to their family, what it's going to be at the end of the day. I cannot understand why anybody would close such facilities.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Health Care Services

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today Canadians were handed a vision and a plan to strengthen our public health care system. At the same time, the Alberta government was meeting behind closed doors, cutting the heart out of rural Alberta. This

government is disbanding health care regions without ever having done a review of whether regionalization works or not. Where's the proof? Where's the proof that this decision is the most efficient way possible to deliver health care services to all Albertans? Where's the proof that this decision won't result in reduced access to health care services in rural Alberta? There isn't any. This government feels that it doesn't have to base its health care decisions on evidence.

The bottom line is that without a thorough evaluation of regionalization the government can't be sure whether one or nine or 16 health regions is the right number. It's pretty clear that no one in the government really knows what it's doing on this issue. Given this government's lack of evidence that amalgamation won't mean less service, Albertans, especially rural Albertans, should be concerned. We need a plan with a long-term vision that's based on the real needs of communities, not directives by a minister bent on implementing a flawed strategy. Now that we have Romanow, it's time to set Mazankowski aside and get on with the business of building a stronger public health care system for Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Neil Hamilton

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Neil Hamilton was born in 1920 in Regina, Saskatchewan, was raised on a farm nearby, graduated from Regina Luther College, was an outstanding athlete, was employed by the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool as an accountant, and in 1941 was drafted into the RCAF, where he graduated as an observer/navigator and flew with the Wellington bomber squadron posted in England and Tunisia. He completed 37 – yes, 37 – successful bombing missions over Germany, Sicily, and Italy and near the end of World War II was flying as an instructor on a training flight when in an instant his eyes hemorrhaged, and he was left with only 10 percent of his sight. Neil returned to Canada, only to be struck with tuberculosis at 25 years old. He recovered but only after six years of lying nearly motionless in a half-body cast. Soon after his release Neil lost part of his hearing.

Throughout all his trials Neil's personal motto, "Quit? Never!" became his prescription for life and for survival. Neil's training with the CNIB helped him to rise to an executive position with that organization and to live life to the fullest. Neil also worked tirelessly with local Lions clubs to develop and implement innovative programs that still benefit the visually impaired and blind, especially the young, in Alberta and across Canada. Through Lions Club enrichment programs Neil excelled in golf, bowling, and curling, and – get this – becoming a true role model, he holds the world record for the highest bowling score for a visually impaired person and consistently shot below 100 in golf.

Like many executives, Neil balanced a demanding career with a rich family life, with June and their three children. In his 50s Neil suffered a heart attack, lost much of his hearing, and overcame a crippling condition. At age 80 he launched his autobiography, *Wings of Courage: A Lifetime of Triumph over Adversity*, which tells an amazing story to inspire all of us.

Through it all Neil never quit, and he continues today to find laughter, friendship, and new opportunities wherever he goes. He is a real true Albertan hero, and our young people should have more opportunities to learn from the very best like him.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Romanow Report

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a defining moment

for the future of health care in Canada. We've been presented with an historic opportunity. This opportunity involves making a choice. One choice is for a more comprehensive, adequately funded, and accountable public health care system. This is the choice of the Romanow commission, made after exhaustive consultation with Canadians. The other choice is for a public health care system that's steadily weakened through privatization, delisting, and user fees. This is the choice of the Mazankowski report and the handpicked government committees devoted to its implementation.

Before the Romanow report was even released, it was under attack by this Tory government. The reason is that the Romanow report threatens the provincial Tory agenda, an agenda that will inevitably lead to a two-tier, American-style health care system. Roy Romanow spent 18 months challenging the advocates of for-profit health care to prove that their approach would save money and improve health outcomes. The privatization advocates failed to provide such evidence; they had none. Romanow calls on the government to stop wasting public dollars to subsidize private facilities. Unfortunately, what Albertans are instead getting are private, for-profit hospitals that line the pockets of Tory-friendly investors.

3:00

Romanow rejects schemes like medical savings accounts, which far from constraining health care costs contribute to their escalation. Yet the Tories in this province with their ideological blinkers firmly in place seem all hell-bent on pursuing such failed schemes. Romanow recommends that medicare cover more health care services, starting with diagnostic services and home care, with prescription drug coverage added down the road. By contrast, the provincial Tories' handpicked panel has been told to delist and shift costs onto patients. The choice is clear, Mr. Speaker. We must make medicare more comprehensive, not less. We must reject the Tory government's scheme of privatization, delisting, and user fees.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Select Special Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act Review Committee I rise to table the committee's final report, dated November 2002. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all members of this committee from all parties for all the hard work and dedication they put into the final draft of this report.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to present two petitions on behalf of the Member for Lethbridge-West. The first petition is signed by five residents of the city of Lethbridge urging the government to "remove abortion from the list of insured services that will be paid through Alberta Health."

Mr. Speaker, the second petition is signed by approximately 180 residents of the cities of Medicine Hat and Lethbridge and the towns of Whitecourt and Coaldale. These individuals are urging the government to "ensure that the Children's Advocate should become an officer of the Legislative Assembly and report directly to the Assembly."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a petition signed by 200 Albertans urging the government of Alberta to provide health care coverage for medical supplies for diabetic children under the Alberta Health Care Plan and provide financial assistance to parents to enable them to meet their children's necessary dietary requirements and cover costs incurred in traveling to Diabetes Education and Treatment Centres outside their own communities in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by 26 of my constituents urging the government to deinsure abortion that's not medically necessary.

Thank you, sir.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the House knows, normally at this time I'd be moving a motion that written questions and motions for returns stand and retain their places, but there are none on the Order Paper, but I thought I'd better at least make mention of it in the event that the House was not aware of that.

Thank you.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to give notice that after the completion of the daily Routine I plan to make a motion under Standing Order 30.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to table five copies of the audited financial statements and other financial information of the Alberta Law Foundation. The Law Foundation receives the interest that banks, credit unions, trust companies, and Treasury Branches must pay on clients' funds held in lawyers' general trust accounts. Interest is then made available to organizations engaged in activities considered to be in keeping with the foundation's objects, two of which are conducting research into and recommending the reform of law and the administration of justice and contributing to the legal education and knowledge of people in Alberta and providing programs and facilities for those purposes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to table in the Assembly the five requisite number of copies of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta annual report for the previous year.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a letter addressed to the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, to Mark Gunderson, their volunteer chair, and to Elaine Calder, the CEO, congratulating them this weekend on their 50th anniversary of providing outstanding music to our city and to our province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter I received from a constituent, Ms Amber Pikula. She goes on in this letter to say:

I fully support the Kyoto Protocol, and believe that Alberta and Canada should get behind it immediately. It's a great problem when people, especially our present provincial government, value money over health.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of a paper prepared by Dawna Haslam on women and public policy.

The second tabling is a description of the contents of the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. This protocol and an alternate protocol were signed by the federal government on October 18, 2002, this year, in commemoration of Persons Day.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of information released on March 15, 1990, by the then Minister of Environment in conjunction with the then Minister of Energy – of course, the then Minister of Environment is now our Premier – where they actually committed back in 1990 to respond to the impact of energy-related emissions on global warming on behalf of this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first one is a letter that I received from the hon. Energy minister on August 19, 2002, and this is a letter regarding information on matters related to the Balancing Pool.

The second tabling this afternoon is also a letter that I received on September 4, 2002, from the hon. Minister of Energy, and this letter is in regard to the government of Alberta and its proposals or discussions on joining the Regional Transmission Organization West.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two tablings today. My first tabling is a letter that I received from Ms Helene Paquin from Medicine Hat, director region 8, Alberta Council on Aging. Ms Paquin has heard reports of the discontinuation of Blue Cross coverage for seniors' programs. She writes: should this happen, seniors who have difficulty in paying for their medication may well do without it or try to space medication out to make it last; in either case the results could be disastrous.

The second tabling is a letter addressed to me accompanied by a document prepared by the Interfaith Coalition on Health Care, Edmonton chapter. This is a study on the health care system in Alberta and Canada. This study supports the strengthening of a publicly operated health care system based on the values of compassion and concern for all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling five copies of an ATCO Electric bill from a consumer in the town of Blackfoot, near Wainwright. The bill indicates that the consumers are being charged 4.9 cents per kilowatt-hour for the electricity actually used and an additional 4.62 cents per kilowatt-hour for delivery charges for a total cost to these consumers of 9.52 cents per kilowatt-hour.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. Earlier in question period I referred to a letter that I had sent to the Hon. Allan Rock. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of that letter.

I have another tabling, Mr. Speaker, which is our department report on the international offices' performance in the year 2001-2002. Most notably, Alberta businesses had an 87 and a half percent approval rating of their experiences with those offices. I have the appropriate number of copies here.

head: **Projected Government Business**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would now ask that the government share with us their projected government business for next week.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed, we'd be pleased to do that. On Monday afternoon we will of course begin with private members' business – Written Questions, Motions for Returns – followed by Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders. Then I assume we will possibly be recessing for the lighting of the lights. Maybe not. I'm not sure what the latest status on that is, but we'll find out. In the evening we'll be dealing with Motions Other than Government Motions, and at 9:00 p.m. we'll be doing Government Bills and Orders, probably proceeding with second reading of Bill 38, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2002; then onward to Committee of the Whole, as may be necessary, for Bill 31, the Security Management Statutes Amendment Act, 2002; Bill 33, the North Red Deer Water Authorization Act; Bill 37, the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act, 2002; Bill 34, the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta Amendment Act, 2002; Bill 35, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2002; and Bill 38, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2002 (No. 2).

3:10

On Tuesday afternoon under Government Bills and Orders we hope to be doing third reading for Bill 30-2 and Bill 31. On Tuesday evening, December 3, we will be continuing with Government Bills and Orders under Committee of the Whole bills 33, 37, 34, 35, as may or may not be necessary, and third reading of bills 25, 30-2, 31, 33, 37, 34, 35, and 38, again as may be necessary.

On Wednesday, December 4, under Government Bills and Orders for third reading bills 25, 30-2, 31, 33, 37, 34, and otherwise as ordered on the Order Paper. That evening, Wednesday, December 4, under Government Bills and Orders, as necessary, Committee of the Whole bills 33, 37, 34, 35 and third reading of bills 30-2, 31, 33, 37, and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, December 5, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for third reading bills 30-2, 31, 33, and 37, again dependent on how progress goes earlier in the week.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, there is some business arising from earlier in the Routine. First of all, I presume it's the Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Exhibits

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was listening with some intent to the questions during question period, and I believe that the hon. leader of the ND opposition did contravene a standing practice of this House, which I think this Speaker has ruled on in the past, and that's with respect to the use of exhibits or props or things of that nature. I think that sort of falls under the generic issue of 23(h), (i), and (j), but more specifically to the point that falls under *Beauchesne* 501, and I'd just like to briefly read two or three sentences from this because it's germane to the point of order. It reads:

Speakers have consistently ruled that it is improper to produce exhibits of any sort in the Chamber. Thus during the flag debate of 1964, the display of competing designs was prohibited. At other times boxes of cereal, detergent and milk powder have been ruled out of order.

In this case, when the hon. leader of the ND opposition rose with his prop, being certain language on a serviette, I believe he contravened the general practice of this House and also the standing rule under *Beauchesne*, and in that respect I would ask him to recant his actions and await the ruling of the chair in that regard.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. third party House leader.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the hon. Deputy Government House Leader has quoted under section 501 of *Beauchesne*, which says that exhibits are not allowed. He neglected, I might add, under 503 to mention that potatoes were also included in the list of things that have been ruled upon. But if I can quote generally from Documents Cited, which is 495, it deals quite extensively in a number of points about the right of members to quote from documents and from notes. I would submit that the document in question here, although it is written on yellow paper, is part of the notes of the speaker and is not, in fact, an exhibit, but it's a document with writing on it and it's made of paper, and it can hardly be considered an exhibit.

THE SPEAKER: Do hon. members want to participate in this very important point of order? The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would refer you to your own ruling on May 6, 1999, page 1535, where you allow that the then member's minibanners did not offend the rules of the Assembly in accordance with the notes that you have given us regarding exhibits.

THE SPEAKER: Do no members want to participate? It is Thursday afternoon. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, at the point in time that your hon. colleague was raising his question, there was a lot of movement in the galleries, and the Speaker's eyes were vigilantly searching as to what might or might not be happening. During the question that did arise, there were three simple words:

privatization, delisting, and user fees. Then when the eyes of the chair came back to the floor, the chair saw a yellow sheet being moved, and at that point in time the hon. Government House Leader then did rise on a point of order.

Now, is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands suggesting that the eye ability of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is such that he needs larger than normal lettering that has to be provided on a particular piece of paper which forms the point of notes for the hon. member and that it would not be the whole text of the hon. member's question that would require this exaggerated heightening of the words but only certain words? Perhaps in the future the hon. member might then be guided by having all of his speaking notes in similar size printed before him so that there would not be an opportunity for other members to suggest that there was a prop being used, which clearly would violate all the rules of the Assembly and would be completely out of order and would cause great retribution to be handed to the hon. member.

So perhaps the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands might be governed by these words of guidance this afternoon, consult with his colleague about this use of this particular speaking note or prop in the view of others, and perhaps not return unless everything is consistent. Would that conclude this point of order?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on a purported point of order.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, the first point of order will be handled by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Point of Order Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order this afternoon, and I quote *Beauchesne* 410(5) and (6) and Standing Order 13(2). *Beauchesne* states in 410(5): "The primary purpose of the Question Period is the seeking of information and calling the Government to account." Section 6: "The greatest possible freedom should be given to Members consistent with the other rules and practices." Standing Order 13(2) of our own Assembly: "The Speaker shall explain the reasons for any decision upon the request of a member."

In light of the fact that I was questioning the Premier earlier this afternoon on the Balancing Pool, which is made to comply with all applicable laws and regulations specifically adhering to the deregulation principles that are outlined in the Electric Utilities Act, I would appreciate an explanation as to why my third question was ruled out of order. And particularly, to the Speaker, I respect the fact that the Speaker was absent on Monday, November 25, 2002, and the Deputy Speaker was in the chair. There was a similar question asked, and it was not ruled out of order. I would like to clarify that; the Speaker that was in the chair on November 25, 2002. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The member has the floor.

3:20

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to withdraw the previous reference to the absence of the Speaker in the chair and note that in *Hansard* on page 1482 on November 25 I asked a very similar question, and it was not ruled out of order.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, advice was provided to the chair that this would be a point of order. Now, recognizing the hon. member on a point of order, the hon. member now wants to get an explanation? Please identify what it is we're after here.

MR. MacDONALD: That is correct. In 13(2), "The Speaker shall explain the reasons for any decision upon the request of a member."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: May the chair refer all members, please, to *Beauchesne* section 409. We're now dealing with the third question in a series of questions that occurred in the question period this afternoon. In the third series of questions – by the way, even with the abbreviated version and the lack of response to the third question it lasted 6.5 minutes. The first series of questions was four minutes in length; the second series of questions, between the Leader of the Official Opposition and the minister of health, was two and a half minutes; the third one was 6.5; the fourth one was five; the fifth series, four; the sixth series, 6.5; the seventh series, 2.5; the eighth series, 3.5; the ninth series, .5; the 10th series, 10.5; the 11th series, four minutes; and the last one, five minutes plus.

Now, we refer to *Beauchesne* 409, and I would like to read:

A brief question seeking information about an important matter of some urgency which falls within the administrative responsibility of the government or of the specific Minister to whom it is addressed, is in order.

But be guided by:

- (1) It must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate.
- (2) The question must be brief. A preamble need not exceed one carefully drawn sentence. A long preamble on a long question takes an unfair share of time and provokes the same sort of reply. A supplementary question should need no preamble.
- (3) The question ought to seek information and, therefore, cannot be based upon a hypothesis, cannot seek an opinion, either legal or otherwise, and must not suggest its own answer, be argumentative or make representations.
- (4) It ought to be on an important matter, and not be frivolous.
- (5) The matter ought to be of some urgency. There must be some present value in seeking the information . . . rather than through the Order Paper or through correspondence.
- (6) A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government.

And there are further additional things in there.

- (7) A question must adhere to the proprieties of the House, in terms of inferences, imputing motives or casting aspersions upon persons within the House or out of it.
- (8) A question that has previously been answered ought not to be asked again.
- (9) A question cannot deal with a matter that is before a court.
- (10) A question ought not to refer to a statement made outside the House by a Minister.
- (11) A question which seeks an opinion about government policy is probably out of order in that it asks for an opinion and not information.

There are additional things that go on with respect to that.

That is just part of the explanation, hon. member, including the one that if a question has already been asked, it's not going to be asked again.

So this afternoon, then, to specifically respond to the request being made for explanation, which I'm very, very happy to give in any and all circumstances and occasions, this was the third series of questions, and I do believe that the previous two probably violated all the rules I just talked about. But then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. What is the total amount of interest Alberta consumers must pay on these secret deferral accounts because you want to hide those additional charges from them until after the next provincial election?

Now, if the hon. member is in a position to tell me that some of the

words used in this question clearly do not violate at least all 10 of the clauses just read by the Speaker with respect to this, then the Speaker would be very, very happy to meet with the member in the Speaker's office to kindly go through the words and the meanings of the words.

In this case, six and a half minutes had already transpired with respect to this. The purpose of question period is to afford all members in this Assembly, as many of them as possible, an opportunity to have questions and answers. The question was not ruled out of order by the chair. The advice was just provided to the person to whom the question was addressed that it was not one that need be answered, which is quite different than ruling the question out of order.

All in all, that was only section 409 that was used in providing an explanation for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold-Bar. There are a number of other books here that the chair could use if there's any difficulty with respect to this, but I suspect that probably it answered the question.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on a point of order.

Point of Order Oral Question Period Practices

MS CARLSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I refer to Standing Order 13(2), where I would ask for reasons for your decision in the question from the Member for Wainwright to not intervene in the questions and then the subsequent answers. As I heard the question, it clearly contravened *Beauchesne* 410(12): "Questions should not be hypothetical."

In light of the ruling you just gave with reference to the most recent point of order, *Beauchesne* 410, specifically 410(12), and some of the other points as well, what we had was a question from the Member for Wainwright to three ministers asking about a report that all three ministers said they had not seen, even though they had heard of its existence, so really were not in a position to comment on in terms of any factual reference to the implications within their departments.

I was very surprised not to see you intervene in that case and would like some explanation.

THE SPEAKER: Well, quite frankly, the hon. Opposition House Leader is wrong. The chair did rise. The chair did rise, and there's no doubt about that whatsoever. The questions appeared to be quite a bit in order after the hon. Minister of Energy started responding to the question. Whether or not two members of Executive Council speak from the same song sheet with respect to a particular document or knowledge of a particular document is secondary to the chair.

Ministers have agreed and disagreed in this House in responding to various questions. This afternoon was a case where the impression of the chair was that one minister basically said that such a document did not exist. It does not necessarily mean that the other minister was not aware that the document did exist.

Thirdly, within the time frame allocated to the questions and answers there were four minutes and about 50 seconds that were used on this. It was not an abuse of the time of the session. It may have been in one hon. member's view questions and responses that would have been on the line, but I think virtually every question would be ruled out for that test.

I think that covers that.

head: Request for Emergency Debate

THE SPEAKER: Now we have the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition on a Standing Order 30 application.

Romanow Report

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, I rise today under Standing Order 30 to request an emergency debate, the timing of which is very urgent for this Assembly. Today the Romanow report was released. As you know, this report itself and the recommendations contained therein are of great importance to the future of health care not only for our province but for our country. The question may be asked: why are we raising this debate now? The answer is simply that we have not had the full report from Romanow until today. The debate over these recommendations that will affect our province is, of course, necessary and is very urgent for several reasons.

First, health care is not on the government's agenda for this session. There has been no health legislation introduced this fall. As a result, there will be no opportunity to talk about the Romanow report and its effect on our health care until plans are already on the way to implement it. Mr. Speaker, this will be the last opportunity for this Assembly to discuss this matter before the Premiers' meeting in January, less than two months away. This meeting would signal the beginning of closed-door meetings, the contents of which probably will not be available for public consumption until an implementation plan is reached. That's too late.

It has also come to light that the provincial, territorial, and federal health ministers will be meeting in eight days to begin planning the broad strokes of health care renewal for Canada. The need for this debate therefore becomes even more urgent than before.

Mr. Speaker, this government is on the verge of implementing changes to our health care system in this province. We know that there are discussions on regional health boundaries with the news released today. It is imperative and urgent that we have this debate now to see how the Romanow report will affect those changes, many of which will be expected soon.

Why, Mr. Speaker? Because it has been made clear that the goals of the Romanow report and the goals of this government are at odds. We need to discuss how the two will integrate. This is our last chance before potentially wide-sweeping changes are made to our health care system behind closed doors and past the scrutiny of the majority of elected officials in this province and this country. The Romanow report will have lasting changes on our province. I ask you in this Assembly to allow this debate, the window for which is almost closed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I would just rise to remind all members of the House, including our colleague from across the way here, that under Standing Order 30(7) the essence of what constitutes Motion 30 is explained, and it reads:

(7) A motion under this Standing Order is subject to the following conditions:

(a) the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration.

And it goes on.

Now, while I would agree that there's great importance attached to these reports, including the one previous, which Senator Kirby had released, and the one before that, which Hon. Don Mazankowski had released – so, too, I'm sure, is the Romanow report of some importance – I don't think it comes to us as a case of urgency because it was only released today, and it's been 18 months in the preparation. Clearly, if it was urgent, it would have been dealt with in that way by the federal government, who, in fact, are the ones that

commissioned it. But it wasn't dealt with in that way. It was given 18 months to be written, and I expect that there will probably be a significant portion of time allotted to its debate to get some feedback, to allow the ministers of health a chance to really study it in great detail as well as first ministers, our Premiers to do the same.

So this decision by the federal government is pending. I don't think they've given any indication yet in response to the Romanow report as to whether or not they're going to accept any of the report recommendations, all of the report recommendations, or just some of the elements of that report. They will need a chance to respond to that, as will we and as will other provincial and territorial governments. So I fail to see why we would recess the House for an urgent debate on something that has not yet been accepted or officially responded to by the federal government. I don't believe that was the precedent set with respect to the release of other reports such as the Kirby one or the Mazankowski one as referenced earlier, nor would it be done this time.

What's important here, though, Mr. Speaker, is that this Romanow report, which, as I say, has been waited upon by Canadians for many, many months, is now a public document. It contains, I understand, about 400 pages or thereabouts. I don't think that any members of this House have yet had a chance to read every single section of that report in great detail, although our Minister of Health has had an opportunity to look at most of it by now, and he's doing more of it as we speak. But I don't think it's fair to impose a debate on members of this House in an urgent fashion (a) where no urgency exists and (b) where all hon. members haven't had a chance yet to even really consider what that document really contains in any great detail.

I am aware, Mr. Speaker, that ministers of health did talk earlier today, and they confirmed their intentions to meet next week, so there will be an opportunity for them to discuss the content of that report with the federal Minister of Health. The federal government has confirmed that the first ministers' meeting will be held early in January, and I think this will be key to determining what the position is that they come forward with regarding the Romanow report. So we'll be taking some time to review the report in greater detail, and I know that there will be discussions amongst federal health counterparts and amongst Premiers. At the same time, I know that health ministers are going to continue to be saying and to be doing whatever they find is necessary to continue on with finding the solution to a truly sustainable health care system that is there for all Canadians regardless of where they live when and how they might choose to need it.

So in that respect, I would suggest that one of the important factors referenced in the report is the need for the federal government to step up to the plate with additional funding. I know they will need some time to consider how to do that and what the source of that funding will be.

As a result, Mr. Speaker, and in conclusion, I would suggest to the hon. member and to others here that there is no case for urgency at this time for this Standing Order to proceed.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

DR. NICOL: Thanks for the promotion.

MS CARLSON: That's okay. I won't take that promotion, thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader has the floor.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the

urgency I speak primarily to the fact that we don't have any opportunity to debate this particular issue prior to the meetings that the Deputy Government House Leader just alluded to. In fact, we have a few question periods left in this particular session. Question period is question period, not question and answer period, so there is no ability to debate within the rules of that particular structure. We do not have anything left on the Order Paper that could even remotely be considered to relate to this kind of a health debate so that we could have an open discussion.

It's very important that a public document like this be debated publicly in an open and transparent manner so that all Albertans who may or may not agree with the proposed government position have an opportunity to have their comments heard on the floor of the Assembly and then assimilated into the message that the Minister of Health will go forward with and the Premier will go forward with in the future. It is urgent that this happen sooner rather than later so that their thoughts are actually considered when the decisions are made as early as next week on December 6, when these proposed meetings start.

We will not have an opportunity to debate this particular issue before those decisions are made before we come back in the spring because the spring session will not start until some time in February, at which time most of the major decisions will have been made.

AN HON. MEMBER: Question.

THE SPEAKER: No. There's already been input there, hon. member.

That's the conclusion, then, with respect to this input with respect to the Standing Order 30 application? Hon. members, the chair is prepared to rule on this leave for a motion to proceed under Standing Order 30. First of all, the Leader of the Official Opposition has given the chair proper notice of his intention to seek permission to present this motion under Standing Order 30. The chair confirms that notice was received by the Speaker's office yesterday at 10:44 a.m., so the requirements under Standing Order 30(1) have been met.

Before the question as to whether this motion should proceed to be put to the Assembly, the chair must rule whether the motion meets the requirements under Standing Order 30 as to whether the matter is of "urgent public importance" that calls for immediate and urgent consideration by this Assembly. Needless to say, one has listened attentively to the arguments put forward in considering whether the proposed debate on the Romanow report is of such an important, urgent nature that it warrants the postponement of the business schedule for this afternoon in this Assembly.

The chair has also earlier today reviewed the parliamentary authorities in this matter, specifically *Beauchesne's* paragraphs 387 and 390 and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice's* pages 586 and 589. The chair would like to point out as well the two important factors that are relevant in considering whether or not a motion is in order. First, in determining the issue of urgency of the debate, the chair must consider whether there is another opportunity for the members of the Assembly to discuss the matter. Secondly, the chair must also consider whether or not it is the general wish of the House to have the debate.

Upon reviewing the Order Paper, the chair is of the view that there does not appear to be another opportunity in this fall sitting for this issue to come forward to debate. There are no motions or bills that are relevant to the matter, nor does there appear to be an opportunity afforded by other types of debate such as the throne speech or consideration of the estimates, which were options available earlier in the session. Having heard earlier the report from the Deputy Government House Leader with respect to the agenda identified for

next week and the subsequent week's activities, there was no notification given that this matter might be on the agenda as well.

3:40

The chair would also like to point out via page 589 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* that Speakers have periodically allowed for an emergency debate on an issue which was not necessarily urgent or a genuine emergency, but the issue was one that prevented members from participating as a result of the parliamentary timetable for discussion on such a matter. What we have here today is a report that was released just this morning in which, although in itself it does not constitute a genuine emergency, the subject matter appears to be of great interest, and there does not appear to be another time that this matter will be brought forward during the fall sitting for debate by this Assembly.

Accordingly, the chair finds that the request for leave to adjourn the ordinary business of this Assembly is in order, and before putting the matter to a vote pursuant to Standing Order 30(3), the chair would remind members that the debate under this Standing Order does not entail any decision of the Assembly. The chair will now put the question. Shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, you have to know the rules if you want to play the game. Okay? You've got to know what the rules are if you want to play the game. I don't have to explain the rules if you want to play the game. I put the question forward.

MS CARLSON: And we said yes.

THE SPEAKER: You've got to rise under the rules.

The question was: should the debate on the urgent matter proceed?

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:42 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, what we have now before the Assembly is a division with respect to a motion that was put forward by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. Because there tends to be some degree of confusion with respect to this Standing Order and there tends to be maybe even some misinterpretation by some or lack of understanding by some with respect to the ruling given by the chair with respect to this, members should know that the chair has indicated at this point in time that the motion put forward by the hon. Leader of the Opposition met the tests that would be used today in evaluating the question. It has to be made very, very clear once again that even though our Standing Orders talk about a genuine emergency, there are also recognitions and leverages given to the chair by other precedents in terms of the timetable that might be available to all members in order to deal with a particular issue.

After looking at and hearing the timetable that's been laid out in this particular Assembly for the subsequent week and the week thereafter, it appeared quite clearly that this would be probably the only opportunity that members might even have to make a comment with respect to the question put forward by the Leader of the Official Opposition. On that basis, the chair ruled that the test had been met with respect to this matter, and the chair did put the question before the hon. members so the debate on the urgent matter could proceed.

The chair might have also asked those members at that time to rise. It was just inherent in chair that the members would rise immediately.

So now what we have is a division before us on the question: shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed? And this is what will happen depending on how hon. members would deal with this, and members might be further confused by what the chair will say about the decision of the vote. If less than 15 members vote in favour of the question "Shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed?" then there is no procedure with respect to the debate. It ends there. If more than 15 say yes but a greater number say no, the matter will still proceed because our Standing Orders say that you must have at least 15. So the question will now be put. The Standing Orders, remember, are the Standing Orders of the Assembly. What you have here is an interpretation of the Standing Orders that are written by the members.

So, for all clarity, the question was: shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed?

For the motion:

Blakeman	MacDonald	Nicol
Bonner	Mason	Pannu
Carlson	Massey	Taft

Against the motion:

Abbott	Haley	McFarland
Broda	Hancock	Nelson
Cao	Herard	Norris
Cardinal	Horner	Pham
Coutts	Hutton	Renner
DeLong	Jablonski	Shariff
Dunford	Jonson	Snelgrove
Evans	Klapstein	Strang
Forsyth	Kryczka	Tannas
Friedel	Lord	Vandermeer
Gordon	Lougheed	Woloshyn
Goudreau	Lukaszuk	Zwozdesky
Graham	Lund	

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 38
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[Motion lost]

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 33
North Red Deer Water Authorization Act

[Debate adjourned November 25: Mrs. Jablonski]

MRS. JABLONSKI: Mr. Speaker, I spoke on this bill and adjourned the debate, so I have no further comments except that I encourage everyone to support this bill because of the need for drinking water in Blackfalds, Lacombe, Ponoka, and Hobbema.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to rise and speak to this particular bill in second reading. I listened intently to the comments from the member who introduced the bill the other day and was encouraged that those comments were what I thought

the interpretation of this bill was. In brief, it's a water basin transfer from the South Saskatchewan River basin to the North Saskatchewan River basin, and it's required by the communities, as she said again, of Blackfalds, Ponoka, Lacombe, along with several First Nations bands, for drinking water. The actual object of the bill is to issue a licence under the Water Act that will provide for the transfer of water between these basins in an amount not to exceed 13,391 cubic decametres annually.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

We know that these communities have been experiencing problems in both the quality and the quantity of available water supplies. This solution that has been devised takes the water from the Red Deer River and pipes it into the communities, Mr. Speaker. The problem is that Lacombe and Ponoka are both located in the North Saskatchewan River basin, and the transfer of water is, therefore, technically an interbasin transfer because the water would be returned to the North Saskatchewan River rather than the Red Deer River.

Any interbasin water transfer requires an act of the Legislature under the terms of the Water Act. We are very supportive of that requirement that it require an act of the Legislature under the terms of the Water Act. While we are happy to take a look at any of these transfers on an individual basis, we have very, very large concerns about this becoming a situation that occurs with any frequency, not even more frequently, and we certainly would be opposed to large interbasin water transfers, and we certainly would have a few more concerns if this one didn't actually end up back in the same basin eventually. The good news for this particular transfer is that an environmental impact study was commissioned, and it concluded that there are no biological issues and that the proposal would have minimal effect on the volume of flow in the Red Deer River, the two key issues for us when it comes to water basin transfers.

4:00

We, in fact, have a bill coming up – looks like it was on the Order Paper; it wouldn't come up for debate this time; we'll reintroduce it again next year – that says: just say no to interbasin transfers unless there are some really strict conditions being met. So, then, very, very strong fences built around the ability to do that. This interbasin transfer appears to meet all of those conditions. Normally I would be opposed in principle to any kind of an interbasin water transfer and then perhaps vote for a bill subsequently in committee in third reading, but in this particular instance I'm not even opposed in principle because it is very minor in nature. There are a few red flags that we like to raise at times like this, though, because there are some real potentials for problems down the road.

As we see the increasing changes in weather conditions around us, we see that the potential for interbasin transfers could significantly increase. The demand in southern Alberta for clean water is only going to grow. It is exacerbated by weather conditions, by changing weather patterns, by rising temperatures generally, and regardless of whether you believe that those conditions are caused by global warming, they are at the very least a weather pattern that we are in for some time, not just for a year or two. It looks like we could be in a cycle that could last anywhere from three to 10 to 15 years if not longer, and at least I don't think anyone can challenge the science of that.

So this is going to become an increasing problem in particularly southern Alberta, although northern Alberta has many water issues too. People think that we have lots up there and that it's all clean, but in fact that isn't the case. Water will definitely be, I think, the

crisis of the coming decades and a subject that we increasingly hear debated in this Legislature and other Legislatures who have similar kinds of weather patterns.

The general policy of our party and the Official Opposition is against interbasin water transfers because they are potentially very environmentally damaging and are expensive in nature. We believe that we need to start looking at where we have communities located where there are severe strains on the existing water flows and particularly in those areas where we have some control over development, so particularly in terms of industrial development, and I include intensive livestock operations within that framework. We need to ensure that we are not adding an additional burden to water flows in regions that are already under some stress or even that we project to be under some stress in the next three to five years. I'm not saying for the next 50 years, but at least in the short term we need to look at those areas and ensure that we are going to be minimizing the impact on the environment and the stress on the water flows before we make any decisions.

We really need an integrated strategy to assess the effect of water transfers on the landscape, and this is the only way that we can ensure that we really have sustainable development in this province that includes the needs of people, industry, agriculture, the landscape, the flora and fauna. That is a definition of sustainable development that we need to talk about, not just how we progress through supporting industry's needs for growth. It's a way bigger issue, and it needs to be addressed.

Another red flag we would like to raise on this particular issue is the discussion about water becoming a commodity. We hear that being talked about occasionally by the Minister of Environment particularly, and that does raise some ramifications for us in the long term. I asked a question earlier this week that the Minister of Environment was not prepared to answer, and I will be bringing that question back in this House, and we do expect an answer from him. Does he believe that water is a commodity? Does he believe that we are well enough protected to be able to keep control of our own water in upcoming considerations?

If people think that the fight about trees and softwood lumber is a big deal now between Canada and the United States, it is nothing compared to the fight we will have about water if water becomes a commodity as defined under NAFTA. That is something that this government should be addressing at this stage. It is something that they should be making public and having a general debate on, I believe. So we would like them to definitely progress in that particular area.

I hope we never see a time in this Legislature where the government brings forward any positions to eliminate the need to have this kind of a debate in the Legislature when we talk about interbasin transfers. There is and has been for many, many years a plan that this government instituted in the very early years of their takeover from the Social Credit which talked about serious interbasin transfers from the north of the province to the south of the province. It would require another dam. It was a plan that was built with canals and pipelines to facilitate this transfer. I really hope that that thing is buried under a tonne of dust and never sees the light of day, because that would be hugely controversial in this province and a real detriment, I think, to the challenges we see before us.

Essentially, that's all I have to say in principle to this bill at this time. When we get into committee, I will be introducing an amendment on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition which just puts a little bit stronger fence around this particular bill in terms of who has distribution of the water rights in the future. I hope that it will be seriously considered and debated, if not passed, by members from the government. Until that time, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and participate in the debate on Bill 33, the North Red Deer Water Authorization Act. It's quite interesting that this legislation would be before the Assembly at the same time that we're having this national discussion on the Kyoto protocol. Certainly, when we consider water quality, not only, again, in the area of central Alberta but throughout the province and throughout the country, I for one believe that it is an issue that is of concern not only to the citizens of Blackfalds and Ponoka and Lacombe and many of the smaller communities surrounding those towns, but also it certainly is an issue of concern for citizens in Walkerton in Ontario and North Battleford in Saskatchewan.

When we consider that we now must transfer water from one basin to another, in this case from the South Saskatchewan River basin to the North Saskatchewan River basin – and it is required; it is necessary for those towns to have, I guess we could just simply call this, potable water – this indicates to this hon. member that we'd better have a good look at the entire water supply in the rest of the province. Maybe this bill is a wake-up call.

There are certainly many resources in this province. Water is perhaps one of the most precious resources, but also, in my view, one of the most precious resources of this province would be Dr. Schindler from the University of Alberta. The knowledge that this professor has accumulated on this particular issue is respected around the world, and I'm certainly curious as to what an individual with the academic background and the stature that Dr. Schindler has would have to say regarding Bill 33.

Whenever you think of the communities of Blackfalds, Lacombe, and Ponoka along with several of the First Nations peoples and when you consider the problems they are experiencing in both the quality and the quantity of available water supplies, a solution certainly had to be devised, and this looks like for them the right solution. However, when we look at this – and all members across the way can be silent on this – I think this is also related to the debate on Kyoto.

4:10

AN HON. MEMBER: How so?

MR. MacDONALD: "How so?" one of the backbench hon. members questions. I would have to say that there's no doubt that the drought conditions that exist, the recent dry years that have existed in this province, are not only a result of a natural weather pattern or a natural weather cycle; they are also affected and unfortunately there is an increase in drought conditions because of global warming. It was in the paper today – I believe it was in the *Globe and Mail* – that there's going to be a significant reduction not only in the area but in the thickness of the Arctic ice cap over the next number of centuries, and we cannot argue that global warming is not affecting this. Mount Logan, I believe it was – scientists from the University of Calgary had conducted some extensive studies regarding the snowpack on Mount Logan and concluded that global warming was affecting their climate.

Now, we have that issue to deal with whenever we look at the present situation that is, unfortunately, upon Blackfalds, Lacombe, Ponoka, and their surrounding areas. Perhaps the Minister of Environment, in the normal practice of participation in debate in this Assembly, can answer this question in due time, Mr. Speaker, and that is what effect oil and gas activity has had on the water supply and the water table surrounding Blackfalds, Lacombe, and Ponoka.

I note in here in an information package that was provided that the

town of Blackfalds has three wells. Two wells have high levels of H₂S and fluoride. I would have to wonder why. Is this a natural occurrence? Have these levels increased? Is the water table decreasing, Mr. Speaker? Now, Lacombe has seven active wells. Ponoka has eight wells. When you consider that we now use water for enhanced oil recovery, large volumes of water, perhaps it's time to reconsider this practice or perhaps it's a time to look at alternate sources of obtaining this water for enhanced oil recovery. This bill is an ideal opportunity from which to perhaps discuss some of these issues.

Now, perhaps we could quit using water altogether in this province for enhanced oil recovery and start using CO₂.

MR. BONNER: I thought you were going to compare it to no breathing.

MR. MacDONALD: Well, the no breathing policy or the heavy breathing policy is obviously not going to work. You know, the only thing it's going to do to the hon. members across the way is perhaps increase risk of oxygen deprivation. It's certainly not going to work.

I would certainly encourage the members opposite to consider this; that is, to replace the water that's used in enhanced oil recovery, save it for those communities and those surrounding industries, and use CO₂. CO₂ has certainly been used in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, for enhanced oil recovery. As a matter of fact, as I recall, pure CO₂ is coming from Joffre, the industrial complex. Pure CO₂, Mr. Speaker, is a by-product of that industrial process, and that's being used to sweep a formation east of Red Deer, east of some of these very towns, for enhanced oil recovery. So why could we not expand that? Why do we have blinders on about Kyoto? Why don't we see CO₂ as a resource, as a resource perhaps to be utilized so that we can take another precious resource, water, and correct our rather haphazard practices regarding the use of that water? Certainly, we could take the coal-fired plants and experiment with compression. [A cell phone rang] Dr. Schindler, I assume.

Mr. Speaker, I think we should look at compressing the flue gases and piping them from the coal-fired plants to some of those areas in central Alberta where we're currently using water for enhanced oil recovery. We should have a serious look at this and take our water and recognize that it is a precious resource that is not endless. The water supply in this province is not endless.

Now, I'm sure the hon. Member for Peace River – there are certainly vast amounts of water in northern Alberta. Are we going to look at a policy in the future perhaps with northern development – and I believe that hon. member is the chair of a committee – of moving development and people to the water instead of moving the water to more arid areas where, unfortunately, there is less water than what is currently needed.

So we can look at this bill and we can say that this is just a minor transfer from one basin to the other, or we can look at this bill as the start of a public debate not only on how we can use Kyoto as a means of economic activity in this province but also as a warning that water is not endless and it is precious. Perhaps this bill is that warning, and perhaps we're going to look at how we use water.

I for one have had the pleasure of working down in the Clearwater River basin. Many times I have worked there. The water is racing out of the mountains; the flow rates are aggressive. I was startled to learn that a lot of that water is taken out and used by resource companies. Some of the farmers in that neighbourhood – and this is in the Rocky Mountain House region – are frustrated with the use of that water. They're frustrated to the point that they're willing to speak out on national TV.

I watch the CBC. I'm guilty of watching the CBC, and I enjoy the

CBC. I think it's terrific. The CBC had quite a story with residents of the Sundre area and their concerns about water allocation. I realize that water problems are a provincial issue, and they're certainly not just limited to the north Red Deer River or any of the surrounding communities.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to consider replacing water that's used currently for enhanced oil recovery with CO₂. This doesn't have to be done overnight. We could gradually work this into the plan so that industry could get a handle on this without it costing them enormous sums of money. I think it can be done. We can look at a long-term strategy so that there's going to be plenty of water for everyone and for every purpose in this province, regardless of where they choose to live.

Thank you.

4:20

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Under Standing Order 29 we have five minutes for questions. The hon. member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just curious. The member mentioned that he's an avid watcher of CBC television. I was just wondering what his favourite program was.

MR. MacDONALD: *The National*, and my second favourite program, Mr. Speaker, would be *This Hour has 22 Minutes*, because it portrays this government as what it really is.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would be remiss if I didn't stand up and actually thank each and every one of you that has debated this bill thus far, Bill 33, the North Red Deer Water Authorization Act.

A little history and background. The town of Lacombe and the town of Blackfalds have a severe water shortage and have had a problem for quite some time, so their need is immediate. The four First Nations bands at Hobbema and Ponoka have also identified that their need is growing, and they're being very, very courageous to sit down, all four of them, to work through this to find a solution.

What I would like to do today is thank all those municipal people that have spent considerable time. First off, I would like to thank the mayor of Lacombe, His Worship Bill McQuesten. Bill has probably spent in the last year probably about 55 to 60 percent of his time on this particular act and what was needed here. He is the chairman of what they now call the Regional Water Committee. It does my heart good, because it's a number of communities working together in a very proactive fashion, and I think that they are to be congratulated. They really have taken a regional approach to this since they have started and have come this far. They have had other municipalities in the area phone them and want to sit down and talk about their need for water, and I think this is the beginning of something that's going to work and work very well.

I also would be remiss if I didn't thank the Minister of Environment. He has done an exceptional job of listening to and acting upon what he's heard from these various communities. As well, several discussions have been held with the Minister of Transportation, and he, too, has been willing to listen and respond to a need. As such, I would thank each and every one of you because you've also listened. I know that when we get to the final point and the last vote on this particular bill, it sounds to me like we will have your okay for it to go ahead. Water, as my hon. colleague from Red Deer-North said, is a top priority of this government, but water is a

top priority of every municipal government in this province as well. It's very, very detrimental to your community when you know that your aquifer is no longer there, yet you have a growing population and you have a need for water. Something that I think we must do – and it's been talked about with other pieces of legislation that have come before this Assembly. I think that we have to be very proactive as we move ahead and try to educate the electorate, try to educate the people on water use, because each and every one of us in our own houses in our own communities, I think, could really take a hard look at how much water on a given day we waste, that totally goes down the drain. I think that we need to be very proactive in that. With new housing construction starts there are a number of new plumbing fixtures that can certainly reduce the amount of water that's used. I think that if we are going to have to look at this, which in time I know we are throughout the whole province, we need to be proactive here and in municipalities and try to work very much to educate the general public.

So I'm not going to go over what has been said here. I again want to thank all those from those various communities that worked very hard. They have done an environmental impact study. They spent considerable days and hours on public consultation, asked for written submissions. I just want to say thank you to them for working together and then bringing forward what they found and the compromise and the solution that they thought would best serve them. Hopefully, we're able to accommodate them through this Legislature.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Standing Order 29(2), five minutes. There being none, the chair recognizes Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon and talk to Bill 33, the North Red Deer Water Authorization Act. I think that when we look at the purpose for this bill, we have to realize that this is the first legislation of its kind in Alberta, but it won't be our last. It certainly is an effect of global warming, of climate change, and because of that I think it is incumbent upon this body here to certainly pass legislation which not only transfers water but looks at our future requirements for water and where we're going to allow communities to build in the future and where we're going to allow industry to locate.

Now, then, this water transfer is unique. It is interbasin, but because of the way the water flows, they will join up down the line, so in some sense this is a very special type of interbasin water transfer. It's one that is desperately required. It's desperately required by the communities of Lacombe, Ponoka, Blackfalds, and the First Nations' Samson, Ermineskin, Montana, and Louis Bull communities. It is critical. This is one of the basics of life, and it's certainly incumbent upon us to provide water to those communities who are lacking water, because it is one of the essentials.

So when we do consider the cost of \$23.5 million to build a 66-kilometre pipeline to fulfill the requirements of these communities for water, I don't think as a Legislature we have any other choice, but I also think it brings to light what can happen when we start these types of transfers and where they go. I certainly think that if we are not careful with the way we transfer water, particularly interbasin water, there is enormous potential for adverse ecological impacts.

All we have to do is look at the program that Russia undertook a number of years ago where they tried to transfer and reverse the flow of water from the north to the south. The ecological damage that has occurred in Russia as a result of that is widespread. It's not only widespread, but it is irreversible. It is not only irreversible, Mr.

Speaker, but it is also irreparable. So, again, I think that what we are seeing with this piece of legislation is simply the tip of the iceberg, that the impact on Alberta has only just begun.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar referred to Dr. Schindler earlier. Certainly, I've enjoyed many of his talks when it does come to Alberta's stake in regards to water, and I think we have many living examples in the province that are strong indicators that we must take some action. I think of the Bonnyville area, where we have Muriel Lake. Muriel Lake is a mere slough compared to the beautiful lake it was some 25 years ago when I was looking at buying a lot on that lake. I think that when we look at the wetlands not only in Alberta but across western Canada, they are virtually dry. I look at statistics that have been compiled on the Peace River. We all think that northern Alberta does have this enormous supply of fresh water, yet the Peace River is flowing at 30 percent less of the volume that it did a hundred years ago.

4:30

In our discussions yesterday and the previous day about Kyoto we heard of how the Columbia Icefield was an enormous glacier and is receding rapidly. We also have many other examples of that around the world. So if it's happening at Mount Kilimanjaro, if it's happening at Mount Logan, if it's happening at the Athabasca Glacier, then it is certainly something we have to make the appropriate plans on now, because we are going to have to address a shortage of water in the future.

I think it's also important at this time, Mr. Speaker, that we do look at an overview of public comments as conducted by the department. For most Albertans who provided comments on the discussion paper, their first comment was that there was a negative impact on river ecosystems if we have a huge transfer of water. So as the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie had indicated, there were studies done which indicated that we would not have a great negative impact if this amount of water was transferred. We also have to realize, Mr. Speaker, that ecosystems are extremely sensitive. History has shown, as I mentioned earlier, that when these ecosystems are put under stress, the changes that occur are irreversible and the damage is irreparable.

As well, in the public consultations to the discussion papers there were many that felt that in special circumstances – and I would think that this is one of those cases when we do have a special circumstance – the interbasin transfers were acceptable but only for short periods of time. I think that what we're going to see in Alberta, particularly because of climate change and because climate change is one of those things that does not turn around quickly – they felt that interbasin transfers of water should only be for a short period of time and not a long period, but I think we will see that. I think that we're going to see more and more communities in this province requiring some type of assistance in the way of a pipeline to deliver water.

Certainly, members of this caucus strongly believe that this is a good bill in the fact that it will address the shortage of water in those particular communities. We would like to see that only for urgent needs would we see bills like this come before the Legislature, and I would certainly urge all members of the Assembly to support this bill.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Standing Order 29. Any questions for the hon. member? The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I just wonder if the member might consider for a moment this whole issue of interbasin transfer

in light of the fact that my understanding is that at the end of the day all of the waters that are referred to in this bill eventually feed together and end up in Hudson's Bay. The member spent a good deal of his time during his speech referring to the calamities that can happen in the case of interbasin transfer. Is the member aware that at the end of the day, no matter whether or not this bill is passed, water from these communities will end up mixing at some point in time anyway?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Yes. I thank the member for that question. I think if he'll go back and check the Blues, he will certainly see that that was exactly the point I made very early in the debate: that these waters will join up farther down. What makes this a good bill is the fact that they will join up farther down. So I thank him for that question.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, did you want to speak on the bill?

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciated the comments from the Member for Lacombe-Stettler thanking us for participating in the debate here. It's clearly an issue of profound importance for her constituency and for many other residents of central Alberta. Indeed, I have family and friends who will be directly affected at both ends of the pipeline that's being proposed here. I agree: I think it's the consensus here that this is a serious problem for those communities and that we really have no choice but to proceed. I appreciate the way the bill is structured. I think that from the people I've spoken to, it doesn't trigger any considerations or worries under NAFTA. It seems to be carefully thought out and well written, so I, like other members of this Assembly, will be supporting this bill.

But I do need to raise my concerns that we are here treating a symptom. We're treating a symptom of a much more profound problem, and that's the problem of Alberta basically drying out. It's a problem that I think we're all aware of as we've gone around this province. My colleague from Edmonton-Glengarry I think put it extremely well; I don't need to repeat those points. But there is a sense that this is a band-aid to a much bigger disease. I do worry about farmers, for example, in the areas of Ponoka, Lacombe, Blackfalds, and the other communities involved who are tapping into those same aquifers that may be drying out. What does the future hold for them? Do they have any opportunity to participate in this water supply? I assume not. Then what happens to the economic viability of those farms and the agricultural basis of that area? I think that's something we need to attend to. Again, we may reach a point in this province where it's simply not practical to be piping water all over the place. Historically we've been able to rely on natural sources. If the natural sources are gone and we can't pipe water everywhere, what's our choice? What are we going to be doing?

One option to this problem – and I assume that the communities involved are looking at this very aggressively – is conservation. As I go through my background documentation, the information I have is that the residents of the communities involved use an average of about 80 gallons of water per person per day. It's a stunning amount of water. I imagine that all of us are equally guilty, and we don't even realize it. Every time we flush the toilet or turn on the dishwasher or have a shower, we're using a tremendous amount of water. It may well be that in areas across this province we're going to have to change our lifestyles, and it may be that the leading

communities that can teach all the rest of us how to do that will be the communities of Lacombe, Ponoka, Blackfalds, and the other communities covered under this bill. Let's hope so, because we are all going to be, I think, needing to learn these lessons, and we're all going to need teachers to teach us how to live by using less water.

So it would be great if there was some program, some extension of this legislation, or some extension of other government activities to improve our water conservation efforts. Maybe that will come through building codes. Maybe that will come through other provisions. I'd love to have more information on it if the Member for Lacombe-Stettler or elsewhere has any information on how that conservation will be achieved.

4:40

Another issue may be, ultimately, some kind of limit to growth. I mean, maybe it's the fact that central Alberta can't sustain a city the size of, say, Saskatoon or Edmonton or Calgary. At some point we may actually have to start designating limits to how big communities can get. I don't know the answer to that, but I think that's an issue that needs to be on the table. How do we get there? How do we achieve that? Do we do that simply by some kind of regulation or planning, or do we do that just through letting the market sort it out and at some point the cost of water just becomes prohibitive and people stop locating there? I don't know which way is the best way to go, but I think we will be quite possibly encountering limits to growth in this area of Alberta and indeed other parts of Alberta and Canada.

So with those comments – an encouragement to these communities and to all Albertans to look at conserving energy, concern about the rural base in this area and their access to these rapidly declining aquifers, and a general concern that we are here treating a symptom and not the disease – I say to the government: a job well done on drafting a clean, simple, straightforward, effective bill that addresses a concrete kind of problem. I'll be there supporting it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Standing Order 29. Any questions? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just ask one brief question. The hon. member opposite is promoting energy conservation, a very worthwhile goal, and water conservation, which is often promoted as a worthwhile goal too. But it seems to me that when someone, whether it be an individual or an entire city, baths in water, they don't destroy it. All that happens to it is that it comes out of the river, gets cleaned. They bath in it. It goes down the drain back into the river dirty. So I'm wondering why the hon. member opposite would promote the idea that we are somehow annihilating or destroying water by using it to bath in or using 80 gallons a day, as he has mentioned, and whether or not he's ever realized that it doesn't actually get destroyed.

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, sticking with my own personal policy, I'll respond to that in committee, which is the time, in my view, for question and answer.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North to close debate.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ensuring a healthy and sustainable water supply for all Albertans is a top priority of this government. Bill 33 will help us to do that for these central Alberta communities.

One of the concerns raised in the debate was concern for our

farmers. We have considered that if we pipe treated drinking water into all residential areas in Blackfalds, Lacombe, and area, there will be more water in the aquifers for the farmers to use. Members in the House have also repeatedly raised the concern that we need a long-term solution for water concerns in Alberta. The Department of Environment is currently leading the development of a provincial water strategy to ensure that we have safe and sustainable drinking water supplies now and in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members support Bill 33 so that our friends, neighbours, and family members in the central Alberta towns that we've mentioned here will have safe drinking water.

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a second time]

Bill 37

Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act, 2002

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 37, Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act, 2002.

The act proposes five major amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Firstly, Bill 37 increases the maximum fine for a first offence under the act from \$150,000 to \$500,000. The maximum fine has not been changed since 1988, and stakeholders have told us that \$150,000 is not a sufficient deterrent for a large corporation. This change will give the courts the ability to ensure that fines match the severity of an offence. Second and subsequent offences – and we trust there will never be any with these new amendments, Mr. Speaker, but if so – will increase from a maximum of \$300,000 to \$1 million.

Bill 37 also introduces penalties other than fines or incarceration for OHS offences, such as introducing safety programs or education programs. We believe that compelling a negligent employer to speak to their peers or their community about what they did wrong will act as a deterrent and increase awareness of the importance of workplace safety. It turns a negative into a positive, Mr. Speaker. It brings good out of bad.

Thirdly, Bill 37 streamlines the process for updating workplace health and safety rules by allowing the creation of an occupational health and safety code to govern the codes of practice for work site safety. This will include the requirement that government must consult with stakeholders before changing the code. By creating a code, Mr. Speaker, our technical safety standards for work sites can be updated without having to reopen the legislation or regulations. This will ensure that our safety standards keep pace with our rapidly changing work environment.

Now, number four: Bill 37 will allow for the use of administrative fines similar to those awarded for traffic violations. The introduction of these fines will depend upon the results of our current review of such fines in other jurisdictions to determine their effectiveness. While there is stakeholder support for introducing administrative fines, government will not do so until we are sure of the effect they would have in Alberta. Ontario has similar legislation that allows officers to give, quote, tickets, unquote, for noncompliance of specific safety regulations only at a construction work site. The penalty amount is typically small, between \$100 and \$200. The administrative fines or tickets are mostly applied to workers who refuse to follow safety procedures; for example, not wearing a hard hat. The system is well received by employers as a means to promote safety compliance among workers at a work site. The

Ontario Ministry of Labour issued 90 fines out of 300,000 workers in the construction industry. So this regulation will create a partnership of safety between employers and employees; in other words, shared responsibility, Mr. Speaker.

Finally, the fifth amendment: Bill 37 also allows for the publication of the names of employers with the best and worst safety performance in the province. Now, as in the case of alternative sentencing, we believe that this will work as an effective deterrent for employers with poor safety records. Mr. Speaker, Alberta employers generally have a good record on workplace health and safety, but in my time as the chair of the Council on Workplace Safety I have spoken to a number of Alberta employers who believe that we can do better. Albertans are number one in terms of economy and productivity, and now we want to be number one in safety too.

In the past 20 months I've also spoken to the families of dead workers, Mr. Speaker, and I've heard how their lives have been shattered by these workplace incidents. When a person is killed on the job, it does more than reduce the workforce by one. All of us grieve their lost potential. We can never really know what we have lost because we do not know what these people would have contributed to our society had they lived. Tragedies like these occur on Alberta work sites 118 times a year, and it is time to say that enough is enough.

In May of this year the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment assembled 150 representatives of industry, labour, and safety associations and asked them to help develop a government and industry plan to reduce workplace injuries in Alberta by 40 percent by the end of 2004. Now, this is an aggressive plan, Mr. Speaker, but we believe these amendments will help to achieve this. Workplace safety 2.0 is intended to be both a journey and a destination. There is no question that we need to make workplace safety part of the way we do business. Only by challenging ourselves can we make a difference. The time has come to change the way we work, the way we teach workplace safety, and the way we regulate workplace safety. Bill 37 sets the wheels in motion and represents an important step forward.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of my colleagues to join me in support of Bill 37 and look forward to hearing their comments during the debate. We must make safety our new bottom line.

Thank you.

4:50

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 37, the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act, 2002. At this time I would like to express my gratitude not only to the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar for the work that he has done on this legislation but also for the commitment that has been shown by the Minister of Human Resources and Employment in increasing the safety and with that safety the productivity of Alberta work sites.

I certainly have noticed that there has been a significant change in direction towards workplace health and safety by this government in recent times, and I think it is a tribute to the leadership of the hon. minister and his recognition that we cannot have accidents like we had a couple of summers ago when a person under the age of 16 was unfortunately killed on a luxury condominium construction site in this province, in this city as a matter of fact. The minister over the last number of years while the department has been under his stewardship has certainly made an effort. It is unfortunate that the

day this bill was announced there was yet another series of accidents on work sites in this province. Unfortunately, and unnecessarily I believe, three Albertans in the window of 48 hours lost their lives as a result of workplace accidents. That is unfortunate and it is sobering.

I think all hon. members of this Assembly should pay close attention to Bill 37. It is going to affect how Albertans work for the next number of years. I see this bill as an admittance that voluntary compliance did not work. Voluntary compliance was introduced and supported by past ministers in charge of this occupational health and safety legislation, but I believe I can say that this minister does not support this notion that voluntary compliance is the answer to everything.

There are certainly going to be some changes in the occupational health and safety laws that I think are an improvement. Certainly, whenever we look at the statistics and we look at the double-digit increases in WCB premiums, hopefully we won't see that in the future because of this legislation. I think that we can work safely in this province and we can work productively. I think one goes with the other. Certainly, education is needed, and I think this is something, also, that is recognized by this minister, but, Mr. Speaker, whenever we look at Alberta's prosperity and the staggering price that workers have paid for that through injury and loss of life, it is important that we recognize the significance of this legislation. The number of workers covered by the WCB increased by only 4.8 percent in 2000 compared to 1999, but the number of new claims reported to the WCB jumped by over 18 percent in 2000 compared to 1999.

The minister and the hon. member are on the right track with this bill, I believe. The number of lost-time claims reported to the WCB rose by 10 percent in 2000 compared to 1999, and the number of work site trauma fatalities escalated by a shocking 35 percent in 2000 compared to 1999. When you look at the government's fiscal plan released on April 24, 2001, it shows that the WCB's provisional rates were forecast to be \$1.25 per hundred of gross payroll, and that is currently the lowest among the provinces. As a result of accident rates we know what happened with the double-digit increases, and these rates cannot be sustained. I don't know how much more business can pay, but it's in the economic interests of businesses to have safe and productive work sites. It makes good economic sense.

Now, in recognition to the minister the Department of Human Resources and Employment has also recently stepped up efforts to prevent injuries and fatalities. I understand that they have hired six more work site inspectors and a new workplace safety call centre. We've discussed this in this Assembly before, and I'm told that there will be more occupational health and safety officers hired in the future. I for one believe that vigilant enforcement of occupational health and safety laws and regulations will work.

Just the other day I learned where we're going to spend \$9 million from the WCB to support work site safety through the occupational health and safety department. That is a small price to pay for safe work sites that are productive and also a small price to pay because I think we can reverse this trend of premiums of the WCB unfortunately increasing on an annual basis at a double-digit rate. I think this is a step in the right direction.

Now, with the bill itself, Mr. Speaker, one has to be very cautious with some of the initiatives. This idea that we can simply take proposals to allow for the implementation of administrative fines – and I realize that may work well in Ontario, but I'm not so sure that we need to go this route. There are many people here, including the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster – I'm sure that on a work site that hon. member was on, if a worker was not working safely as instructed, as per the occupational health and safety law and its regulations, then they would be terminated. You're getting one

chance. If you're not working safely, get rid of them and hire someone else. It's that simple, and that sends a strong message to everyone else on the site. I think this is the route that should be taken.

I think we should be cautious about this idea that occupational health and safety inspectors may show up and start ticketing people. We should be very, very cautious about that approach. I think the occupational health and safety officers have enough to do. Certainly, whenever we look at the accident rates in this province and we look at the number of fatality claims accepted, it's way too high. It ranges from 120 victims in 1997, unfortunately, to 118 in 2001. That's over two per week, and consider that occupational health and safety officers have to investigate these accidents and write a report.

5:00

If hon. members across the way have any doubt about this legislation and how it may improve the work sites, I would advise them to go to the minister's department, Human Resources and Employment, just up the hill here, and go to their local library. It's almost like you're looking at a coffin. There's a long steel filing cabinet there, and it has the accident reports that have been written by the occupational health and safety officers on each case. You open that, and you can go through there from years back. The steel is cold on that filing cabinet, to say the least. It's an uncomfortable feeling to go through those files. There are photographs of the sites; there are written reports. Sometimes I would like these reports to be in greater detail, but unfortunately they're not. But my point is that the occupational health and safety inspectors have enough work to do without running around with a ticket book.

Then there's also the appeals process, which I have questions about. How do I appeal? For instance, let's say that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands was moonlighting as a construction worker, and someone gave him a ticket for working on scaffolding that was unsafe. The ticket was for \$75, and he was to go to another site, Mr. Speaker, and he wanted to appeal that. What sort of process is there for an appeal? I don't know. Perhaps in the debate we will get to that.

But when we look at occupational health and safety, we have to remember those that have lost their lives and we have to reverse this trend of over two Albertans a week dying on the job or in job-related activities. The reversal of this trend is not going to be done through an administrative penalty, in my view. How are we going to do this?

I read with a great deal of interest the hon. minister's speech, I believe, that was presented to the Australian occupational health and safety authorities, I assume this summer. I saw it on the Internet. The minister mentioned many things in that speech, but the thing that caught my eye was that 1 percent of Alberta employers are responsible for 26 percent of the accidents. I want this minister and the officials in that department to name names, and I'm going to get to that a little later, but there are other work sites in this province that are very safe and very productive at the same time, Mr. Speaker. As you may be aware, union construction sites in this province are the safest in Alberta with millions of hours worked on some of the largest construction projects in Canada, and they're done without lost time. The workers are trained, they're safety conscious, and if they don't work safely, they're run off. It's that simple. They don't have a job tomorrow. Now, I can't say that about the rest of the province.

I would encourage all members of this Assembly to have a look at the records that are available, and certainly there are two sets of accident records in the construction industry. It's noteworthy to compare. Now, where would these inspectors, if they're going to do administrative fines, start? Hopefully, they will start in the areas that

the minister was describing to the Australians, and those are the 1 percent of outfits that are responsible for 26 percent of the accidents. That's a shocking figure. That's why this is good legislation, and I think we can make it better, Mr. Speaker. We're going to get at this in committee at some time. The minister shall – not may but shall – name names. That would be one amendment that I would like to see.

Another way to make this bill better, I think, Mr. Speaker, would be to also increase the amount of time that occupational health and safety inspectors have to investigate an accident. I know there are plans to hire more, but whenever you look at this accident rate of more than two fatalities a week, occupational health and safety inspectors under this legislation and the work load they have – they must be getting a lot of overtime, because certainly they're going to be working very, very diligently. I would like to see the amount of time that they have to investigate accidents and present their results of their investigations to the Crown prosecutor increased from one year to two years. I think this is a good idea. Certainly, in the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act there is a two-year period from which you can lay charges from the date of the release or whatever. I think the same should apply to the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

This caught my eye whenever I was investigating the Hub Oil explosion, the tragic explosion at Hub Oil that left two individuals dead. I saw all the media reports. Since then, I've had the opportunity to meet some of the family members of the victims, and if there's one thing we can do, it's ensure that this sort of explosion does not happen again. There was a great deal of work done in the one-year time period. Charges were laid under the Occupational Health and Safety Act for the explosion at Hub Oil, and then almost two years to the calendar there were charges laid under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. These charges somehow were dropped in the first week of January this year.

AN HON. MEMBER: What?

MR. MacDONALD: Those charges were dropped the first week of January this year, much to my dismay. There have been criminal charges laid in this matter, but the charges in regard to the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act were dropped, and I still consider that, Mr. Speaker, to be clouded in mystery. How this occurred – I think it was January 4, before a justice of the peace in Calgary. How that occurred after all the effort that went in by occupational health and safety inspectors and I don't know who else – but I can imagine the amount of time that went into these files. For that to occur, to me, is a justice not done.

I certainly hope this doesn't happen again. I'll be watching for it. But when I see that, I can't help but think that this is a way, again, to improve matters for all Albertans on job sites, and that's to increase the time period from one to two years from which an investigation and, potentially, charges may or may not be laid. I think this is a very good start.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I would like to say that I think the object of this bill, to reduce workplace accidents and put in place penalties that act as a deterrent, is a good start. We are looking at amendments to current legislation, and I'm looking at the consultation process that has gone on in regard to this bill, and it seems to be adequate, to say the least. There seems to be a great deal of interest in this. Many people from across the province, particularly in the construction industry, as I understand, have had input into this legislation. But there are some concerns expressed by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. These concerns, I think, are valid. When you consider that there are close to 9,000 members in Alberta, one has to take their concerns to heart. Everyone is affected by this, not only the workers and the supervisors but the business owners as well. Again, a safe work site is also a productive work site, and when you think that a safe and productive work site is going to, I believe, reduce the WCB premiums that these individual companies are going to pay, I would encourage those businesses to phone the minister's office directly and ask about the certificate of recognition programs and the partners in injury reduction programs. It astonishes me that there's such a low participation rate in those programs. I would encourage the businesses to do that: phone the minister directly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

5:10

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 37, the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act, 2002. [interjection] No. If you understand the rules, the person who speaks first to the bill gets 20 minutes without questions.

This is a bill that in principle is a good bill, but it also in principle gives us an opportunity to raise many concerns about how health and safety has been handled in the past in this province. Given that, all of my colleagues in this Assembly wish to speak to it in principle. In reviewing the time and the good work that we've done this week, though, Mr. Speaker, I would now ask to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Once again, a very productive week, and that being the case, I move that we now call it 5:30 and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, December 2.

[Motion carried; at 5:13 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

