

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, February 24, 2004** **1:30 p.m.**
 Date: 2004/02/24
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon, and welcome.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Yankowsky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 30 grades 5 and 6 students and their teacher, Miss Alana Manke, from Overlanders school, which is located in the constituency of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Along with the students and teacher are parents and helpers Mrs. Kim Militsala, Mrs. Rose Howitt, and Mrs. Anna Evenson. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd like them to rise at this time and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. O'Neill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 20 students and two adults, their teacher and a parent, who have accompanied them. They are visiting the Legislature today from Sir George Simpson school in St. Albert. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview I would like to introduce a class that's here with us from St. Martin Catholic school. There are 19 students from the St. Martin Ukrainian bilingual program, and it's the only one-track Ukrainian bilingual program of its kind in western Canada. They are accompanied today by teacher Mrs. Natalie Harasymiw. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly 23 visitors from McNally composite high school. This delegation comprises 20 students and three teachers/group leaders. They are Mrs. Tammy Tchir, Mr. Ian Crichton, and Ms Sue Noddings. These individuals are all in the public gallery, and as they rise to receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly, I would like to note that also in the delegation is one Mr. Bryn Marsh. I had the opportunity of playing hockey with Mr. Marsh, and he's the individual with the Oilers shirt on. If you'd all please rise and receive the warm welcome.

Thank you.

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 a parent. Gerry Russo has a child attending grade 1 at McKernan elementary/junior high. He's present in the members' gallery today because he is concerned about the lack of funding for public education and the quality of public education his child is receiving. I would ask Mr. Russo to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. O'Neill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I introduced the students from Sir George Simpson school, I neglected to name their teacher, Mrs. Carolyn Gabourie, who has for many years brought her students here to the Assembly, and Ms Susan Johnston, the parent who has accompanied them, who is also vitally interested in their children's education. So I wanted to acknowledge them as well.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my distinct pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly this afternoon two parents, Dr. Robert Wilson and Ms Preet Sara, who are members of a group called Education Watch. Dr. Robert Wilson has a child attending grade 2 at McKernan elementary/junior high school, and Ms Preet Sara has two children at the same school. These parents are concerned about the quality of education offered in this province. I'd like them to now rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a long list of members who've indicated their interest in participating today, so might I ask for brevity in both the questions and the answers.

First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Utilities Consumer Advocate

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Bolger report on electricity deregulation is being treated with contempt by this government. The report clearly states that the government should "establish a consumer ombudsman – providing an independent, government-funded third party responsible for investigating consumer complaints and reporting regularly to Albertans." My first question is to the Minister of Government Services. How can the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate be independent when all its funding comes from the gas companies and the Balancing Pool and not the government, as stated in the Bolger report?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, ombudsman is an incorrect word. The actual term that we're using is "consumer advocate for electricity and natural gas," so let's make that correction right off the bat.

Mr. Speaker, the Bolger report did recommend that a consumer advocate be put in place; that has been done under our department. We presently have set up an office for handling complaints from consumers out there, and we handle complaints, everywhere from billing inaccuracies by companies – and it's being handled by the Department of Government Services under the ombudsman. That's the recommendation that was made, and that's what we're doing.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that a recent standing policy committee meeting confirmed that there's a \$4.4 million budget for the utility watchdog, and that is to be paid for by gas companies and the Balancing Pool, how can this minister state that the Utilities Consumer Advocate is independent?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, this is staffed by the Deputy Minister of Government Services responsible for consumer advocacy, and it is for the consumers out there. It is the consumers' dollars that are actually going through the advocate's office to protect the consumers. So, yes, it should be close to government. It should be close to government, and that's what we're doing. We have to make it effective, and the best way to make it effective is to have them report directly to government.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that this government has handed the utilities consumer watchdog over to the industry – it's not even a short leash; it's a choke chain – what authority determined that the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate would be funded by industry? What authority allowed this to happen?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, it's very appropriate – very appropriate – that consumer and corporate affairs actually handles some of the consumer complaints that are out there, and that's exactly what we're doing with this particular office. We are independent. We are part of industry. We get input from industry. We also get input from the department people that we deal with in the Department of Energy. As well, we work with other consumer groups across this province to make sure that consumers are protected under this.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Long-term Care Facilities

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Staffing cuts at the Bethany Care Centre are to blame for a decline in the quality of care seniors are getting. That's according to the government's own Health Facilities Review Committee. The report also says that even more staff cuts are expected. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: is this minister going to stand by while more staff are laid off and the appalling conditions for seniors get worse?

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to refer to a report that hon. members might recall, that was produced by Dr. Donna Wilson, a professor of nursing at the University of Alberta, as she released this report last fall. Dr. Wilson published her research that showed that residents of Alberta long-term care facilities have better health than seniors in the community resulting from the care that they receive. Now, overall, we'd have to say that the 14,000 residents in long-term care centres, some 201 facilities throughout the province, are well looked after.

1:40

What the hon. member here today in reference to the Bethany Care Centre has failed to mention is that the Health Facilities Review Committee does a number of unannounced visits to facilities throughout the province, and Bethany was one of the facilities that they attended, I believe, in July 2003. Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member refuses or neglects to say is that the committee, the Health Facilities Review Committee, made a number of recommendations to Bethany Care Centre, and in fact Bethany Care has made signifi-

cant and positive changes over a period of time, over a number of years, but also in response to the report that was filed by the committee in the fall of last year.

Bethany Care has submitted their response to the committee's recommendations. They've reported progress on all of them. They did that in January of 2004. That response by the Bethany Care Centre is currently being reviewed by the Health Facilities Review Committee, but we have had good co-operation by a good facility trying to improve itself.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: why did the government keep this damning report out of the hands of stakeholders, staff, and family members?

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I think it's important that we focus on what it is that we're trying to do, which is improve the facility, not politicize it.

Mr. Bonner: That was weak.

Ms Blakeman: Very weak.

My next question is to the Minister of Community Development. Why are the people most concerned about enforcement – that is, residents and their families – excluded from the committee that is reviewing the Protection for Persons in Care Act?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, when I appointed a specific committee of individuals to be part of this review, we considered all the other agencies and all the other stakeholders that are involved. If we were to have had representation from every single one of those groups, we would have had a committee of about 60. That clearly wouldn't have been a workable solution for anyone, so we did choose individuals who have great experience and have shown leadership in this field of protective care to join a committee led by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, augmented by two other MLAs: Edmonton-Norwood and the chair of the Seniors Advisory Council, Calgary-West, I believe it is. Together they have come forward with a report with recommendations. We are studying those recommendations as we speak, and I have met with many other individuals and groups, and so, too, has the chair of that committee. So we've got a pretty broad, rounded perspective, and we'll be moving forward with recommendations shortly.

Water Management

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Environment disagrees with local residents that the Red Deer River diversion is an irresponsible use of water, and he is turning a deaf ear to their arguments that he is putting their long-term access to water at risk. Nine local mayors are fighting a diversion, but the Minister of Energy says in this House, "Big deal." My question is to the Minister of Environment. When will your government admit that this is a big deal and acknowledge that the concerns of central Albertans about water scarcity are justified?

Dr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, I first need to correct an assumption she made in her editorializing in the preamble. She said that I disagreed with the communities and the nine mayors and so on. I have not said that I disagreed or agreed.

It's very clear that the issue is in front of the Environmental Appeal Board. We have a process to deal with it, and as I said

yesterday in this House, I believe we're the only jurisdiction in Canada or the only province in Canada that has an open and transparent process, a semijudicial process, to deal with it. Any decision of any director in my department can be appealed, and that's what's happening here. A director made a decision. It is being appealed in the semijudicial process of the Environmental Appeal Board, where there's complete and public airing of the issues. That is happening as we speak, and 30 days or so from the conclusion of that hearing the Environmental Appeal Board will be making a recommendation to me.

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, why didn't this minister delay a decision over the Red Deer River diversion project at least until his Watershed Planning and Advisory Council had made its recommendations? That's what the community wanted.

Dr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a process in place, and we have legislation we have to operate under. Our director granted a licence. Under the legislation that we have to operate under, anybody, a citizen – she could have if she'd been aware enough to do it – could have made an appeal of this director's decision, and that's what's happened. So we will act according to our legislation, and our legislation clearly outlines the process. It's a very public process, and it's ongoing.

Ms Carlson: This minister knows very well that that decision didn't have to be made when it was. Will the minister admit that his Water for Life strategy won't be worth the paper it's written on if the Red Deer River diversion goes ahead with no regard for the water needs of local communities?

Dr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly I won't admit that because it's totally irrelevant to what's happening. As well as having the EAB hearing going on, we have a committee made up of the environmental nongovernmental organizations, the oil producers, the gas producers, and the communities presently meeting, and they are going to give me recommendations by the end of March. One of the issues will be what their position is on oil field utilization of potable water. That is ongoing. The member knows it's ongoing, and as we move forward, we'll be making the appropriate decisions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Health Care Reform

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Tory government today revealed its grand scheme for saving medicare: selling booze to hospitalized patients. That ought to lift spirits a bit as patients recover from serious illness or injuries. The Premier has obviously learned some valuable lessons in his jet-setting travels around the world. First there were limousines and \$27 a shot orange juice. Now we are going to turn sections of our hospitals into luxury centres for the well-heeled and profit centres for the private sector marketing these services. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What studies did the government rely on in advising the Premier that making wine available to patients would aid in their hospital recovery?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to rise in the spirit of debate. I am not an expert on matters as they relate to alcohol since I don't drink, but if I had to listen to this all day, I might think about taking it up.

Mr. Speaker, the core issue here is one of sustainability of our health care system, and the core issue is that our health care expenditures are rising across Canada, not just in Alberta but across Canada, at roughly twice the rate of growth of government revenues, and that's the reason why it's not sustainable. In an effort to look for sustainability, we should be looking at health care systems around the world.

I should say, Mr. Speaker, that there's no person in the world that's probably completely satisfied with their health care system. If you go to the U.K., if you go to France, if you go to Sweden, if you go to Australia, if you go to New Zealand, there will of course be advantages and disadvantages of each and every one of those systems. There are pros and cons to each one of them.

But, Mr. Speaker, it is important for us to be open-minded, to not be ideologues and shut our minds to new ideas that may come from other jurisdictions. We need to strive to find solutions for the core issue of sustainability. I think that there are elements of the U.K. system that are very, very good. There are other parts of it that we would not want to adopt in this province. The same goes for the French system. The same goes for the Swedish health care system. All of them have advantages that we should be able to try and take advantage of, and we should be open-minded to those ideas.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to know that the minister is not entirely humourless.

My second question to him: has the government consulted with the medical and nursing professions about patient safety versus revenue-generating trade-offs when it comes to liquor sales in hospital rooms, and if not, why not?

1:50

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not so much the issue of health care that I find humorous as the manner in which this hon. member is trying to ask a question.

Again, to be clear to the hon. member, the issue of patient safety is a significant one, and I can give a great deal on the subject of patient safety, Mr. Speaker. In fact, when ministers of health met in this province in the year 2002, I asked the chief executive officer of the U.K. National Patient Safety Agency and his counterpart from Australia, Sir Liam Donaldson, to attend a one-day symposium where ministers of health from across Canada would learn about patient safety. Subsequent to that, the federal government saw fit to put \$50 million into a Patient Safety Institute in their federal budget. The Minister of Health, as she then was, the Hon. Anne McLellan, saw fit to locate that Patient Safety Institute here in the city of Edmonton in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we take the issue of patient safety very, very seriously, and it ought not be politicized and trivialized, as the hon. member has tried to do here today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister has not consulted with the medical profession or the nursing profession, let me ask him the last question here. What makes the government think that turning hospitals into private profit centres where private companies can market services to captive consumers, namely patients, will do anything to make the public health care system more sustainable?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, we are looking at all the options to make

things sustainable, and again the core issue is that our health care costs are rising faster than our rates of revenue. As Premier Lord from the province of New Brunswick said: if the province of Alberta, one of the wealthiest provinces in all of Canada, is having difficulty with the issue of sustainability, imagine how difficult it is for the rest of us.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are some that think that this issue of sustainability of the health care system – I've heard the hon. member himself say this – is a cover for something else, that somehow we created this issue. All I can say again in response to that is that if we created an issue here with the government of Alberta with respect to health sustainability, then apparently we persuaded every single Premier of every other province of every other political stripe across Canada that health sustainability is an issue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

School Construction

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Medicine Hat public school district No. 76 is currently reviewing its programs and facilities with a view to consolidating a number of existing school facilities and building new schools in communities that currently lack adequate schools. One of the criteria often quoted by the school board is the Alberta Infrastructure requirement of a system-wide 85 per cent occupancy factor before any new construction can be considered. It sounds reasonable until you ask: 85 per cent of what? My questions today are to the Minister of Infrastructure. Given that occupancy is based upon some kind of arbitrary formula that calculates the number of students per square metre, why does the formula not acknowledge the obvious differences between schools with respect to wide hallways or other common areas that restrict the amount of usable space within that facility?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for that very good question. It's a problem that we identified some time back, and we have set up a committee that is about ready to report. It's a committee that involved 12 individuals. There were some staff from the Department of Infrastructure, but more importantly a number of school boards were represented on the committee and an individual from outside in the private sector.

Now, the problem that the member identified is one where in a lot of the older schools, because of the way they were constructed, the area turns out to be larger than what can actually be used for instructional space. So we're trying to get at that particular problem. I believe that the committee is looking at the possibility of a way where school boards could identify those facilities and have us take a second look at them in order that we could modify what we believe is the capacity of that particular school.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, apart from architectural differences, there are differences in use of facilities. For example, can the minister explain why the formula calculates that 4,000 students are required to occupy the Medicine Hat high school when much of that school was built to accommodate vocational and trade programs that require large labs and shops in addition to classroom facilities?

Mr. Lund: Certainly, the hon. member has identified another area where the current formula creates a problem. I can give him another

example where it creates a problem. This is where we build what we call a core school. The idea of a core school is that you put the infrastructure in so that you can then add portables. When the portables are not there, you cannot get the utilization up to what we think is a required amount of 85 per cent to get good utilization of taxpayers' dollars. So that's another area that we need to look at and have the ability to not be rigid when we're applying that formula.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are just over 6,300 students in the entire district of Medicine Hat public. If they put 4,000 students into one school, it's two-thirds of the students in one school. Can the minister explain how these arbitrary and rigid guidelines can be met without significantly jeopardizing the quality of education in my constituency?

Mr. Lund: As I explained, Mr. Speaker, the committee is going to forward their report to me, hopefully, later this week. We will then be taking it through the process, and I can assure the hon. member that there will be modifications to what is currently there and the application of it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Utilities Consumer Advocate

(continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Government Services: given that ATCO Gas has stated recently to the EUB that they will be required to participate in the funding of Alberta's first Utilities Consumer Advocate, how much is ATCO Gas to pay for the yearly operations budget of the Utilities Consumer Advocate? Tell us how much.

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's one member of a very large industry that benefits from the consumer advocate and the job that it has to do not only for Albertans but also for the industry but, more importantly, for consumers across this province. It's absolutely impossible to go and look at one particular company's participation in that because it's run through a Power Pool. So it's impossible to answer that question at this time.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. If you want to talk about the Power Pool, we'll talk about the Balancing Pool, which is sort of a part of the Power Pool. How much is the Balancing Pool paying in operations costs to fund the Utilities Consumer Advocate?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, this hon. member is asking for specific questions that might be well served by a written question in this House. That kind of detail can be debated at that particular time.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: what authority determined that ATCO Gas would have to pay for the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate? What authority allowed the industry to be funding this, not the government?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, I reiterate my last answer, which is the same question that he gave in his first supplemental. That should be done in the form of a written question before this House so that we can debate the specifics of it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Foothills Medical Centre

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several months ago the Calgary health region contracted an independent air quality expert to develop a plan that would address concerns about mould on hemodialysis unit 27 at the Foothills medical centre. Now the Calgary health region has announced its plans to redevelop the unit. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why has the region chosen to redevelop this particular unit?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, unit 27 at the Foothills hospital was first opened in 1976. When it was originally opened, it was intended to accommodate 23 hemodialysis units. It presently holds 42 such units. So the result is that this particular unit 27 is being overutilized, and the design is inappropriate by today's standards.

2:00

So the Calgary health region had made the decision to redevelop unit 27 into a state-of-the-art hemodialysis unit, and they've moved some of their hemodialysis units into the community where people can have better access to them. Of course, Mr. Speaker, demands on our health care system have changed dramatically since 1976, and I should note that this redevelopment will be a much better work environment for staff and will provide much greater comfort for patients seeking that service.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Nurses who have worked on unit 27 continue to complain about adverse health effects which they claim have been caused by poor air quality resulting from the presence of mould. Has the Calgary health region done anything to address these concerns?

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, the executive medical director of the Calgary health region, who specializes in occupational health, has said that staff complaints are multifactorial and may include a number of different issues such as work environment, work practices, use of chemicals, functional space, and engineering design. The region continues to work in good faith with its employees and workplace health and safety to address these concerns in unit 27.

Again, Mr. Speaker, they're confident that the redevelopment of this unit will address many of these concerns. It's important to say that there are a number of units at the Foothills medical centre that have been redeveloped. To this point in time unit 27 is one such unit, and there are, I believe, five other units that will be redeveloped over time because, again, this facility is almost 40 years old.

Government Aircraft

Mr. Bonner: Mr. Speaker, the government's flight log for April 4, 2002, showed a heightened level of travel between Edmonton City Centre Airport and the Calgary International Airport. There were several municipal leaders, family members of MLAs, and other persons on board these government aircraft that day. Coincidentally, April 4, 2002, was also the Premier's dinner day in Calgary. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: did the government transport municipal leaders to the Premier's dinner, a partisan political event, on the taxpayer's dime?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, what makes this province of Alberta great is Alberta municipal leaders. We work very closely with them. To the hon. member: quite simply, we will use government hangars and government airplanes to in fact assist municipal leaders. In fact, just last weekend I visited Cold Lake and I also visited St. Paul. In that plane if there was any opportunity to allow municipal leaders – because there is only one taxpayer – to in fact enjoy that convenience of travelling with the government members, then absolutely, yes, to the question.

Mr. Bonner: To the same minister and my final question, Mr. Speaker: did any of the passengers reimburse the government for the cost of their trip on the government plane to attend the Premier's dinner?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me be categorical. At no time will a government plane ever be used for political purposes, now, ever before, or ever into the future. Second of all, if it is for political purposes, they are charters, independent, with no cents to, in fact, the government or to the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Cull Cattle

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the continued closure of Canadian borders to the export of cattle more than 30 months of age, Alberta producers are on the horns of a dilemma. Even if they could find a buyer for these older animals, they wouldn't get nearly as much for them because there aren't any markets that can take them. This has prompted some within the cattle industry to call for a mass slaughter of all the older or cull cattle. My questions are for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Is there a need for a mass slaughter of cull cattle?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, let me make it perfectly clear, entirely clear, that I would never support a mass slaughter of cull cattle. First of all, cull is a word that the industry uses, and it means very simply in this case an animal that is no longer important to that breeding herd. It does not signify in any way a reduced value for the meat product in that animal.

I had the opportunity and was invited to address a conference on Friday held in Red Deer which had the Western Stock Growers', the Alberta Auction Market and agent buyers, the Alberta feeder council, and the Feeder Associations of Alberta in attendance. It was a full house, Mr. Speaker, and those four very responsible organizations debated this and other issues very carefully.

My message to them was simply this: the government would not support a mass slaughter, and neither would the industry. These people are too smart to do something like that. They don't need to do that. What this government has done since last summer is work with the industry to find a new home for this product, new capacity, because in fact, Mr. Speaker, prior to May 20 60 to 70 per cent of this product went directly to the United States for processing, whether it was in the dairy herds or the beef herds. So in Alberta we put up money to work with product development. We put the Leduc processing centre available to them, and in fact our industry is looking at this as a new opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, if there is to be a reduction in mature animals, it will be done by the industry in a responsible, orderly fashion.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could you tell me, then, what is currently being done to increase the use of mature animals in Alberta and in Canada and to help producers deal with the lower than usual price they are currently getting for their animals?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, we work with the beef industry round-table very closely on these issues, and as I indicated, we have put some dollars available to product development as well as our processing centre, which has a long history of success in development of product. So we're looking at how we can increase our consumption domestically.

We look at the challenges of using that product instead of using offshore product, and in fact the hon. member might recall that the federal government announced the suspension of all supplementary permits for offshore beef, and that was a very responsible decision made to ensure that we could use more of our own product. So we look at using this mature product in processed products here.

As for us helping producers with recouping the money that they would normally have gotten for that animal, I think we've responded in a very responsible fashion by putting the market cattle program and bull program in place and, finally, working with our other provinces, convincing the federal government to remove the slaughter component from there.

So today, Mr. Speaker, although these cattle are selling somewhere from 22 cents to 30 cents at the top in the marketplace, they will be paid a differential of that price and the normal prices of 50 cents, 55 cents, and they will also receive some feed support and market support from the federal government. So, indeed, the cow-calf producer is recouping not as much but a fair value for those animals, and that's eased the situation a great deal.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 2001 students at Red Deer College have faced over a 24 per cent increase in tuition. Along with the increase students this year will have fewer program choices, and some two-year programs will be reduced to one-year diplomas. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. Why? Why do our postsecondary schools like Red Deer have to face this constant round of tuition increases and program cuts?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will not necessarily speak generically about Red Deer, but what I will do is speak about the system in general. The system in general has seen a considerable amount of money put into it. In the last two or three years it's had upwards of a 20 per cent increase in the amount of dollars that have been funded. Red Deer College, for example, just received a new capital component. They're also looking at developing some of their land on the actual campus, where they're going to be building a senior citizens' home. Red Deer College is doing very well in what they're doing and, in fact, have increased quite

substantially the number of students that are attending Red Deer College.

Just when it comes to tuition, though, there's one point that I want to make, and that point was brought out by the TD Bank a couple of weeks ago. In essence, what it said is that a college diploma, which the hon. member is talking about, is worth about a 15 to 28 per cent a year after-tax, after-inflation increase on your dollars. So that's a wonderful way to spend your dollars, and I would certainly encourage people to go to Red Deer College. I would encourage them to go to the postsecondary system in general, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Massey: No wonder we're in trouble.

How can the minister possibly claim success when schools like Red Deer College, the U of A, and the U of C are in a state of constant financial turmoil?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, financial turmoil? The U of A has increased dramatically the number of students who've gone to it. The University of Alberta received last year between an 8 and 9 per cent increase in their budget, as did the University of Calgary, as did the postsecondary system in general. Those are huge increases when you take a look at what is happening across Canada. UBC, for example, has received zero per cent for the next three years. Try and run a university on zero per cent. Take a look across Canada and see how much money is being put into the postsecondary system and you will clearly see that we are head and shoulders above anyplace in Canada.

Dr. Massey: Again to the same minister: why has the government failed to replace a policy that leaves postsecondary schools in chronic crisis with a long-term funding plan that provides adequate resources? Why not a long-term plan?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, we are the only jurisdiction in Canada that right now has a three-year business plan, and a three-year business plan is something that we intend to keep. These people are assured of at least what is in the three-year business plan every year. British Columbia just received their three-year increases, and as I just mentioned, it was zero per cent over three years.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Dr. Oberg: Zero per cent over three years.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate the answer to my last question. The postsecondary system is alive and well and is one of the top postsecondary systems in the world.

Government Fleet Insurance

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, members of Executive Council, senior staff in the Premier's office, and thousands of other people driving government vehicles have their cars or SUVs insured by public insurance. This Tory government, which has categorically ruled out a public auto plan for the rest of us, uses a government owned, not-for-profit risk management and insurance fund to insure its own vehicle fleet. My question is to the Minister of Revenue. Why is public auto insurance good for the government's own vehicle fleet but bad for the rest of us?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to first clarify some inaccuracies in that preamble. We don't have a different way of

insuring ourselves in the government than any other individual or company in Alberta. We do have a risk management insurance division, and we use a form of both private and self-insurance, and that's just like every individual, like every company. You have choices when you select your company and you buy insurance. You do select the amount of property damage you need for collision, and you select also how much liability you cover, the same choices that we make ourselves. So when we buy private insurance, which we do, for all of the risks of the province, property and liability, we assess how much it is that we should buy of third-party insurance and how much we should have in our own deductibles or self-insurance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister knows that 90 per cent of government insurance is public insurance.

Why does the Premier get to be chauffeured around in a car insured through a public auto plan, but the rest of us are forced to pay the much higher premiums charged by the auto insurance industry?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, the response should not be in response to the debatable kind of nature of the question.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for clarifying that the question was not, probably, an adequate question to respond to. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why doesn't the government ensure that Alberta families get the same sort of deal on their car insurance that the provincial government provides for itself through its system of publicly insuring its own vehicles?

Mr. Melchin: We take the same approach for insuring all of the assets, both property and liability, that every individual in this province takes. We use a combination of private insurance to ensure that costs beyond our exposure that we wouldn't want to take in risks are insured. Beyond that we self-insure. You for your own car are going to choose how much property and how much liability, and you're not going to take everything. You're going to choose that you will self-insure part of that risk yourself, just as the government.

Speaker's Ruling

Oral Question Period Rules

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, *Beauchesne* 428 says that a question must not "be ironical, rhetorical, offensive, or contain epithet, innuendo, satire, or ridicule."

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Government Economic Policies

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's economy has been performing well despite many challenges like the trade disputes with the U.S. As government we're always promoting value-adding to our agriculture sector, expansion of our exciting nanotechnology opportunities, and a junior mining industry, just to name a few. My question is to the Minister of Economic Development. I understand that you're the lead minister dealing with value-added opportunities and so on. I've heard directly from junior mining companies that they can raise venture capital easier in every province in Canada than

in Alberta. Why is this happening? Do we need to change some of the rules within government?

Mr. Norris: Well, of course, Mr. Speaker, that question could probably go to the government as a whole as a policy issue, but I will attempt to answer it from our perspective at Economic Development.

Mr. Speaker, we spend an awful lot of time talking about the spending ministries in this House, and we should, but without the revenue-generating ministries we wouldn't have the opportunity to have that discussion. So we as the Minister of Economic Development and the Minister of Revenue and others are vitally concerned to continue to find ways to increase revenue and industry in the province.

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne has brought up an excellent point. Alberta does not operate in a vacuum, Mr. Speaker. It would be nice if we did because we have the best policies in the world. However, there are jurisdictions to the west and east of us who have different views on that. Alberta has chosen to have a low, broad-based income tax policy and does not get into tax credit as much as other jurisdictions. Having said that though, the Minister of Revenue, myself, and the Minister of Innovation and Science have all looked at this question very seriously because access to capital really does choke off economic development, and it's fundamental to the growth of this province. We have some of the best patents being developed at the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, NAIT, and SAIT, and then the access to capital dries up. They go off to Waltham, Massachusetts, or San Jose, California, to be developed, and we want to stop that.

So to answer the member's question, there have been a number of initiatives brought forward. The Minister of Revenue and myself and the Minister of Innovation and Science will be bringing forward documentation to look at how we can get more active in the venture capital game. I can't think of anything more important than that for the next 20 years in Alberta, because we are developing some of the best ideas in the world here, Mr. Speaker, and they're leaving to be developed, and that's just wrong.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, because we're talking about revenue, I'll ask my next question to the Revenue minister. Given that venture capital is so hard to raise in Alberta and given that our agriculture is so challenged at this time, why not take 2 or 3 per cent of our rainy-day fund, you know, the trust fund, and invest it, not grant it, with our Ag Financial Services to stimulate agriculture?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to clarify, to begin with, that the Alberta heritage savings trust fund is a tremendous vehicle but is not a rainy-day fund. We actually went through a survey a little over a year ago to make sure that we were clear about the reasons why we're saving. Albertans continuously do give us the feedback that they want this fund kept for the future, not taken for even whatever the problems potentially may be of any one particular moment.

Clearly, there are challenges in the agriculture community today, but I would say here's how it is benefiting the agriculture community today. This fund earns more than 2 and 3 per cent of its fund value this year – we'll be able to respond to those answers tomorrow as we release the third quarter – and that money goes back into the general revenues of the government. Those monies have been there to

ensure that the problems with BSE have been resolved, that there have been funds to provide for the emergencies of the province. It's done very well in serving Albertans over its life.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that we can't access that fund, why not use flow-through shares like every other province is using in Canada to access funds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to flow-through shares, clearly there are some vehicles with flow-through shares in the energy sector. But we have said that it still is a priority, as we look forward to improving the economic climate of this government, to reduce the corporate income tax rate. That still is our priority. We reduced it to 12 and a half per cent this year. In our forecast we showed that this next year it will be reduced again, and that'll be in our budget documents. That continues to be our priority. It's the best thing we could do to strengthen the economic activity of Alberta.

Speaker's Ruling

Oral Question Period Rules

The Speaker: To the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, *Beauchesne* 409(1) says: "It must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate."

Roadside Emissions Testing

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, this government talks about reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but they won't take any action. We need mandatory emissions testing on old cars like they do in Ontario and B.C. The average car in Alberta is twice as old as those in Ontario. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. When will this ministry demonstrate its commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Alberta and implement a program of roadside emissions testing?

Dr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again I must clarify a false assumption in her initial statement. She said we are not taking any action. We have taken more action than any jurisdiction in this country. We, for instance, have made a purchase of green power so that 90 per cent of the power that this government uses will be green power by 2005. It's the largest purchase of green power in the history of North America. [Dr. Taylor coughed] It chokes me up. I'm so moved by my own words.

Mr. Speaker, I can go through other examples. I will say that we will be releasing our climate change action plan and the actions that we have accomplished within the next couple of weeks. So I won't go into further details. They will be forthcoming.

Ms Carlson: It's hard for the minister to spit those stories out.

Here's my second question. Given that the Alberta Motor Association supports a program of roadside emissions testing with mandatory penalties, why won't this ministry implement a measure that actually has teeth?

Dr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, Climate Change Central is an agency at arm's length from government. It is funded some by

government but mostly by the private sector, federal government – a number of agencies contribute to the funding. I must say that it's a very good organization, that it has its own board of directors that makes the decisions for Climate Change Central. Climate Change Central recently did a study on cars and roadside emissions testing, and as a result of their study they concluded that roadside emissions testing was not an effective way to control greenhouse gases. What I will do, because obviously the member has not read that study – I will be sure that Climate Change Central sends her a copy.

Ms Carlson: Then, Mr. Speaker, could the minister address why Ontario and B.C. have stated that roadside testing has proven to be very effective in reducing both the environmental hazard of greenhouse gas emissions and the health hazard of smog?

Dr. Taylor: Well, in the first place, Mr. Speaker, when she talks about smog, we have different situations in regard to smog in Alberta. We're not at risk of smog, as Toronto is or Vancouver is.

I can't tell you how Ontario and B.C. made their decisions. Obviously, they didn't do a study. Obviously, they didn't look at the best economic indicators and decide that they should do what's best for the environment and do what's best in terms of spending the dollars in the most effective way.

The Speaker: Hon. members, momentarily I'll introduce the first of a number of members to participate in Members' Statements, but might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Mr. McClelland: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of our colleague from Edmonton-Norwood – I don't know if they're in the galleries at this time, but if they are, may we recognize the presence of the Glenrose Start program and 10 visitors with the group leaders Laura Maddison, Millie Morgan, and Katy Costello. If these visitors are in the galleries now, we would ask them to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly six seniors who are visiting the Legislature today. They're here in support of the tabling of a document from a seniors' newsletter which outlines seniors' concerns. With us today are Bill and Val Osborne, Joan Abramason, Vivian Small, Ed Friesen, and Bob Long. They are seated in the public gallery. With your permission I would ask them to now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Redwater.

Snowmobile Rally for Breast Cancer Research

Mr. Broda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. WOW stands for Way Out

Women. Anna Choquet of Bonnyville, Jackie Pederson of Edmonton, and Gisele Hebert of High Prairie are just such women. They represent Team Alberta in this year's 2004 Polaris snowmobile relay. They picked up their keys and Polaris snow machines in Grande Prairie from Team British Columbia and snowmobiled approximately 1,000 kilometres to Cold Lake where they turned over their keys to Team Saskatchewan.

The purpose of the ride is to raise money for breast cancer research and to profile women in snowmobile sports. On January 6 I was fortunate to be able to join these fantastic women and ride with them from Waskatenau to Desjarlais Crossing, about 120 kilometres of groomed trails along Iron Horse Trail, Jack pines, and the banks of the North Saskatchewan River. The team then continued on to Two Hills and on to Cold Lake.

I would like to thank the village of Waskatenau, the town of Smoky Lake, and the county for their hospitality and generosity. However, this would not have happened if not for the efforts of the Smoky Lake Trail Twisters snowmobile club members Dan Kotylak, Darrell Ketsa, Delmar Huchulak, Dwayne and James Gorenjuk, and Smoky Lake town councillor Vern Billey and other riders.

Last year Team Alberta raised \$24,000 for breast cancer research, and Team Alberta would like to surpass that amount. I offer all members of this Assembly a challenge to open up their wallets and donate to this worthwhile cause. Breast cancer not only affects women but men as well. I will be passing an envelope around.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

Alberta Winter Games

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this moment to recognize a tremendous accomplishment for Alberta and, more specifically, the Peace region. In 2002, the North Peace Games Society won the bid to host the 2004 Alberta Winter Games. The dream of hosting the most regional games ever was realized as 19 regional partners, including four aboriginal communities, came together and hosted this year's provincial Winter Games on February 12 to 15. Never before has a regional partnership of this magnitude hosted a provincial game. I am certain that the overwhelming success of this year's games will open opportunities for other small communities in Alberta to join together and take on projects usually reserved for larger centres.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the pioneering spirit and ingenuity of the North Peace Games Society. The accomplishment of these provincial games has once again proven that all of Alberta plays an instrumental role in maintaining and promoting the Alberta advantage.

2:30

As my colleague the MLA for Peace River indicated last week, I would also like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the 2,526 volunteers, 1,620 athletes, 432 coaches and chaperones, and 211 officials, without whom there could have been no games. They made the weekend exciting and very enjoyable for all those that had the opportunity to attend.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the communities of the Dunvegan and Peace River constituencies, who opened their doors to the rest of the province. The 19 communities involved came together as one and made this year's Winter Games an overwhelming success.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Grande Cache

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize and salute the citizens of Grande Cache. On February 20 I had the pleasure along with well over 60 people of attending the northern opportunities seminar hosted by the Northern Alberta Development Council. They had guest speakers from the oil and gas industry, value-added forestry opportunities, coal industry, West Yellowhead Community Futures Development Corporation, and a tourism panel.

Since the change in demographics in the industries of Grande Cache, the town and its citizens had come together to form the Grande Cache Community Forest Action Committee. Members of the committee soon found that they needed to expand their scope and involve other industries in this initiative. Now they're called the Community Initiatives Council of Grande Cache. The council and its members are looking into where the town could see what each business is doing and how they can capitalize on that to make the community much stronger.

Mr. Speaker, the number of people who came to the seminar last week just goes to show the great tenacity that this community has. They certainly lived up to their slogan, Grande Cache: A Natural High.

On behalf of all of the Members of the Legislative Assembly I would like to wish Grande Cache all the very best in all their endeavours.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Alberta Farmers

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about a group of Albertans who have contributed so much to our province but who have suffered greatly over the past few years. I am speaking, of course, about Alberta farmers.

Alberta has a long, proud history of agriculture and agricultural producers. So many Albertans, including members of this Assembly, have known the life of tilling the soil, giving care and attention during calving season, and many other activities that make farm life so rewarding. Alberta agricultural producers have contributed and continue to contribute so much to our province and our country.

Sadly, however, the challenges of farming and ranching have become so difficult over the past few years. Years of drought, grasshoppers, and in the last year the diagnosis of one case of mad cow disease have hurt the great occupation of farming and the lifestyle of living on a farm. As I glance at this year's 2004 grasshopper projections, I worry for those Albertans who have committed themselves to the land. It is no secret that the concerns which face agricultural producers don't stop at the farm gate. Rural communities as a whole suffer when the farmers and the ranchers do.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta needs to do more to make farming more sustainable. It needs to participate actively in developing a live test for BSE. It needs to put monopoly controls on mega slaughterhouses, like they do in the United States. It needs to ensure that ad hoc programs are not the response to farm income losses.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta agricultural producers are a strong and self-reliant lot. They have committed themselves to an honest and decent life. I urge all hon. members of this Assembly to continue their support for Alberta's farmers and ranchers, and I urge this government to invest in proactive solutions to the problems faced today by so many of Alberta's agricultural producers.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

**Bill 12
Financial Administration Amendment Act, 2004**

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 12, the Financial Administration Amendment Act, 2004.

This bill will streamline and clarify how government manages and invests funds, clarify the wording and definitions, and make other technical amendments for your consideration, sir.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 12 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 13
Forest Reserves Amendment Act, 2004**

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development I'm pleased to move first reading of Bill 13, the Forest Reserves Amendment Act, 2004.

Changes in the Forest Reserves Act will update the current legislation, that's not been revised since 1980. These adjustments will continue to provide Alberta's livestock industry with access to secure public rangeland for grazing in the Rocky Mountain forest reserve.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 13 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, the people of Red Deer are once again proving perfect hosts in hosting this year's Scott Tournament of Hearts, but my job today really is to table five copies of Alberta ingenuity fund's 2000 to 2003 triennial report. A copy of this document is being sent to all members of the Assembly from Alberta Ingenuity.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Dunford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table six reports actually all dealing with radiation protection. The first is the 2002 report of the Alberta Dental Association and College radiation administration program; second, the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association radiation protection program 2002; thirdly, the College of Chiropractors of Alberta 2003 radiation health adminis-

trative organization; the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta 2002-2003 radiation health administrative organization; the University of Alberta 2002-2003 authorized radiation health administrative organization; and lastly, the University of Calgary 2002-2003 radiation health administration organization.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a seniors' newsletter signed by 59 seniors. The document outlines four requests: that the government "restore the seniors' exemption from paying health care premiums," that the government "restore the seniors' exemption from paying education tax on their homes," that the government "restore reasonable costs for long term care facilities," and that the government "restore medical and dental benefits."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Interim Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Lethbridge-East I would like to table the required number of copies of a letter from Dixie Lee-Smerck of Fort McMurray raising the question of removing principals from the Alberta Teachers' Association and questioning why it's even being considered.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. McClelland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Attorney General, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, I'd like to table three letters: one from Heather Gibson regarding the teachers' convention, one from Phil Lister regarding the Bighorn wilderness; and Patricia Worger regarding the Learning Commission.

Thank you.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is the required number of copies of the Alberta Advisory Council on Electricity Report and Recommendations on Consumer Concerns. I believe this is the final report.

The second tabling I have is a very interesting tabling, and I would encourage all hon. members to have a look at this. It is from the *New York Times* dated Sunday, February 8, and it compares the costs of public versus private health care. I would urge all to read it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Mr. Dave Burkhart, a resident of St. Albert, addressed to the Premier. Mr. Burkhart is asking the Premier the following question: why should the Premier not consider the introduction of a public auto insurance system in Alberta that has enabled drivers in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, or British Columbia to pay lower auto insurance rates?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on a purported point of order.

Point of Order Abusive Language

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rose reluctantly earlier during question period today on a point of order with respect to the preamble to a question being put by the hon. third party leader. Perhaps I could shorten my presentation by saying that it was with respect to exactly the same reason for which you later admonished the hon. member's seatmate for the preamble to his question: under 23(h) and (j) making allegations and using abusive or insulting language and under *Beauchesne's* 428, the question must not "be ironical, rhetorical, offensive, or contain epithet, innuendo, satire, or ridicule."

It's perhaps unfortunate for me to raise the point of order with respect to this hon. member because I ought to have raised the same point of order on numerous times in the House over the last week when the members opposite were bringing forward in preambles to questions things which they know not to be true, trying to bring into ridicule and trivialize the whole process that we're doing here.

I'm speaking specifically now about the hon. member's preamble in which he talks about the Premier specifically, making allegations about the Premier jet-setting around the world and buying orange juice at \$27 a shot. Now, I think it's common knowledge among most people in the House that a shot is one ounce. So just on the face of it the hon. member is telling a lie because he knows that the facts have been put on the floor of this House, that the orange juice in question was three jugs.

I don't want to belabour that point. The point that I wanted to make and I think the point of order which is important is that – the opposition has a job to do, and this hon. member has a job to do. I respect that job, and I think other members of this House respect that job. But they ought not put into the preambles of questions such ludicrous aspersions and such falsehoods when they know that the facts have been put on the floor of the House, the aspersions have been corrected and the continued use of these sorts of things to drag down not just the reputation of the minister or the Premier that they're addressing the question to but every single member of this House.

So I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that you rule that the hon. member was using abusive and insulting language, was making allegations, was being rhetorical and offensive in using satire or ridicule in the preamble to his question in an inappropriate manner and in so doing raise the stature of questions in this House in the future from all members opposite and from all members of the House.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, did you wish to participate?

Dr. Pannu: Yes, Mr. Speaker, with your permission. I do want to acknowledge that inadvertent though that reference was, it was based on erroneous factual information. Therefore, I regret making that reference to \$27 a shot and, with your permission, withdraw that portion of my statement.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, there was a point of order. There was a legitimate point of order. It was raised by the Government House Leader, and it was also very honourable that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has basically dealt with that.

I asked hon. members for co-operation today, and I'm going to ask for it every day. Today we had 36 questions and answers, which is 10 per cent more than we had yesterday. This place is for all hon. members to participate, so if we have brevity and pointed questions, we should have brevity and pointed answers.

In the case of the question today from the hon. Member for

Edmonton-Strathcona it was actually five sentences long. I could have said five long sentences, but I said five sentences long. So let's just get that old pencil sharpened tomorrow and reduce it to maybe three and forget about some of the exaggerations with respect to certain items. But the hon. member has withdrawn his erroneous statement about "\$27 a shot orange juices," which is the quote.

So there was a point of order. It has been dealt with honourably.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mr. Griffiths moved that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

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

[Adjourned debate February 23: Mr. Strang]

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, what an honour and privilege to speak today on the Speech from the Throne delivered by Her Honour at the start of this session and to highlight and profile for this Assembly the words surrounding the organization of a round-table on family violence in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, last October when our Premier announced the round-table on family violence, it was with the thought that there has to be a better way for us to find solutions to make Alberta communities safer and free of family violence and bullying. So the activities that are currently underway are activities that I dedicate, first of all, to the April 1999 shooting of Jason Lang, to the 2002 killing of Cole Harder, and to the most regrettable recent death of Alex Fekete, a three year old who told his daycare worker: I'm going to get killed'd. Then he and his mommy, Betty, were killed indeed.

Mr. Speaker, it's time for it to stop: family violence whether between a man and a woman, an elder and their son or daughter, a child and his mother; bullying whether it's on the playground, coming to school, or going from a community activity. It's time for us as Albertans to take up the championship and to respect one another sufficiently so that we eradicate the scourge of family violence and bullying.

It is, indeed, a pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to work with the ministries and the ministers of Justice, Community Development, the Solicitor General, the ministers of Learning, Human Resources and Employment, Health and Wellness, Finance, Seniors, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, and International and Intergovernmental Relations to together determine whether this government and the people of Alberta can make a success on the issue of family violence. Wouldn't it be wonderful if one year there were no deaths attributable to family violence? In 2002 there were more deaths attributable to family violence than deaths attributable to gang wars or gang fights. There were six that died.

Bullying, Mr. Speaker, has touched many more of us than we would like to believe. Sometimes the bully is, in fact, a victim himself. Sometimes the victim becomes a bully in another situation. There's a dynamic power and control issue that, in fact, affects everybody. It is well known that children who have adult supervision and who on playgrounds are exposed to a rigorous discipline of adult supervision and monitoring are less likely to perpetrate bullying of their playmates.

But, Mr. Speaker, the very fact that significant absenteeism occurs in our schools in this province every day is evidence that some children are fearful of going to school. They are fearful of the repercussions at the school. Yes, some may fear an exam, but others fear a peer, a playmate, somebody who has turned their back and worse yet laid their fist to them.

2:50

It's more imminently necessary for us to have a solution to family violence because last year there were 7 and a half per cent more women coming to shelters and almost 4 per cent more children, and shelters, Mr. Speaker, are not the answer. Shelters are not the solution to family violence. The solution starts with the growth and development of an individual both as a child and as a young and maturing adult to recognize that power and control, real power and control, mean that you don't have to hit anybody, that you don't have to abuse somebody, that you don't have to put somebody else down.

Mr. Speaker, there have been fears that this is only about something dealing with women. I assure you that it's not. When Hugh Campbell spoke about verbal abuse, he was speaking about verbal abuse that everybody and anybody could be subject to. When native women talk about men that have been abused, they are not talking men abused by their peer group but men who have, yes, also been abused by their spouses. There is no incidence of family violence that should be condoned. Research indicates that at least 4 per cent and even sometimes as high as 10 per cent of seniors in Canada are abused in some fashion: yes, financial abuse, and, yes, from time to time by intimidation.

We must ask ourselves: why is this happening? Why does Alberta have the highest rates of violence against women across the country? Why are deaths in our province attributed to spousal abuse increasing? Why are more women and children being admitted to shelters in Alberta? Why do as many as one in four Canadian children say that they have been bullied? We need to ask these questions, and we need to find the answers.

Mr. Speaker, four of the workshops have already begun. We have had several of these workshops in communities so far, like Fort McMurray – Grande Prairie will be held tomorrow – Bonnyville, and we will go throughout Alberta, and ultimately on May 7 there will be a round-table held in Calgary that will culminate in what we believe will be an action plan to change beliefs and attitudes toward family violence and bullying. We'll need to know then what services are necessary and how a collaborative, co-ordinated community response can be achieved.

Mr. Speaker, last June when I spoke in Prague on the subject of family violence and our new identities for victims of abuse and violence, I spoke to a group of people who at a meeting following my delivery suggested to me that if they could go anyplace in the world and find the place where the best template, the best community co-ordinated response was in addressing family violence, they would go to London, Ontario. What is it about London, Ontario, that makes it special?

Well, number one, it had the foresight and wisdom to have the right leadership. Dr. Peter Jaffe of London, Ontario, is an internationally recognized speaker on this subject dealing with every facet of violence in schools, in the community, in the home, anywhere that people are. He has encouraged us in Alberta to develop that kind of approach where we look at an action plan, not to take place as a snapshot in Alberta but to look at a three- to five-year action plan of changing the culture in every facet of community life.

In London, Ontario, one person in every public-sector endeavour is the champion of eradicating family violence. So the police have

a policeman. The schools under the superintendent of schools have an assistant superintendent. Every single authority, health authority, community advisory committee for individual schools has someone who monitors and evaluates whether or not they're making a significant difference on programs of prevention, on programs to build the capacity of safety in their community. Mr. Speaker, one of the exciting things is that they're not afraid to talk about violence. The day that we were there an NFL coach was coming to talk to a men's Rotary club about the importance of eradicating family violence.

You know, our society is an interesting one, Mr. Speaker. The day that Janet Jackson lost half of her top during the Super Bowl halftime, I was expressing to friends: "What do you think about that? What should we think about that when we're watching that on television with our children?" One of the moms in that audience said: well, what do you think about the entire game when people are forcefully hitting one another?

Now, I happen to be a fan of sport. I'm a fan of rugby, football, and hockey, contact sports, when people know the rules and follow them and pay attention to those rules. I accept that because those that play that game accept that sport and act within the confines of that sport, but it does not mean that that type of behaviour outside that sporting arena is acceptable. It does not mean that behaviour that assaults one other person is ever acceptable, and we have to know when to play the game, how to play by the rules, and how to institute a society and a societal norm that will make bullying and violence unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, focus groups have been organized so that if the regional round-tables do not capture all of the issues, we have different perspectives being provided by the faith community, immigrant women and children talking about the struggles they face, the gay and lesbian community, the men's community where they have felt they have not been listened to, where they've felt they haven't had a voice dealing with violence that has affected them. Information from every one of these perspectives will be presented at the May 7 round-table.

Discussion in Calgary will build on the good work that's already been done in Alberta and other provinces. Participants will create recommendations for a plan of action in Alberta: a new way of preventing and responding to family violence and bullying, a new co-ordinated approach at the local, regional, and provincial levels so we can one day eliminate family violence and bullying in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank every single solitary Member of this Legislative Assembly who's taken it upon themselves to submit names, to encourage people to come forward to participate in the round-tables, to participate by sending their views in on the web site, and I encourage them still further to look at the questionnaire that's coming on the web site this week and to fill in that questionnaire and provide us with their best ideas for solutions.

This is not an issue that can any longer be contained behind closed doors. Researchers say that family violence across Canada carries an annual price tag of \$4.2 billion in social service costs, education costs, criminal justice costs, labour and employment losses, health and medical costs. Everybody is affected, and not the least of these, Mr. Speaker, are the retired and elderly that watch with faded and sad eyes as our society and our families are crumbling in certain crises.

The time has come for all of us to recognize that we have an important role to play in stopping family violence and bullying. We need to all speak up. We need to hear everyone's voice, and we must focus on solutions. We must all work together to create an environment in our great province where family violence and bullying are simply not tolerated, an environment where our children

have compassion and respect for others, and an environment where they are not scared and not devastated by violence in their homes and communities.

I know that these goals can and will be achieved. The process has already begun, and I am confident that the lives of Alberta's children will be forever changed and improved by the new plan of action that will be formed at the Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege as well to rise this afternoon to offer a response to the Speech from the Throne that we heard last week from Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor. I'm almost tempted not to speak because of the powerful nature of the speech that we just heard, and I want to say to my colleague how profound her comments were and how important they are to the future of Alberta. Domestic violence, family violence, is a matter which must be brought out into the open and must be discussed, and the round-tables which are currently on are a very significant step forward.

3:00

I did also want to talk about the future of Alberta that we want to have and we want to capture and that we can capture if we can have the human capital of our children and our families developed in the manner of which my hon. colleague spoke so eloquently.

So I do want to speak about the Speech from the Throne that was delivered by Her Honour with the grace and dignity that only she can bring to the task, a grace and dignity in which she offered a message of hope and promise for every Albertan. The speech that I heard spoke to renewed commitment to a better Alberta for our children, our children's children, and, yes, for ourselves. The Speech from the Throne sets the stage for an exciting journey not only for government but for all partners in our community, ensuring that Alberta continues to be the best place to live, work, and visit.

I am personally very excited by the government's direction and in particular our 20-year vision and plan. In many ways it speaks to my own very heartfelt beliefs about what is best for our province and how we can go about ensuring that those good things can continue to happen. If I may, I'd like to take a few moments to share some of my own reasons as to why it's so important for us to embrace this vision of our future and make and execute our plans and take that leap of faith into the next two decades.

The opposition may say that we're being unrealistic looking that far down the road. How can we possibly look 20 years hence? They may say that we ought to be dealing with the potholes of today, but frankly I think it's quite the opposite. We must plan for that seemingly distant future. Why? Because that is our children's future, and our children are the promise of everything that Alberta can be.

As many of my colleagues know, I'm a strong advocate of strategic planning in government. I believe that the past year has been one of the most exciting opportunities that we've had for elected colleagues and appointed officials to participate in the most important process of business planning and strategic planning. In fact, the government of Alberta has been a pioneer in planning. It was the first government in Canada to implement three-year business plans and has been a leader in establishing visible measures of success ever since.

In recent years we've refined our approach to accountability and, even further, are now focusing more strategically on the outcomes for Albertans. There is no question that over the last decade this

planned approach to government has worked very well. Thanks to sound strategic thinking and a co-ordinated approach to business we have eliminated the deficit, reduced the debt to a mere fraction of what it once was. Alberta is in an enviable position. As a result of our commitment to hard work and foresight and self-reliance we have some exciting options available to us.

As the throne speech outlined, we're taking the long view in our planning. Over the next 20 years we'll continue to build our communities and foster growth with the same hard work, hope, and optimism that built this province over the last 100 years.

The throne speech outlined four key areas, pillars, that will be crucial to Alberta's continued success: unleashing innovation, leading in learning, competing in a global marketplace, and making Alberta the best place to live, work, and visit. These are all specific areas for action, but they're by no means mutually exclusive. Any action we take in one area will indubitably affect another. That is the nature of the interconnected, pluralistic, modern society that is Alberta.

In the spirit of the time I have available, I don't intend to talk at length about all four pillars, but I'd like to focus my comments on two in particular: leading in learning and unleashing innovation. What better way to ensure a positive and fruitful future for our children than through learning? As the Greek biographer Diogenes said back in the third century, "The foundation of every state is the education of its youth." The same holds true today. Learning is about much more than the acquisition of skills and knowledge. It instills pride and confidence. Learning helps young people achieve their full potential and take on whatever challenges life throws their way. Education lays the foundation not only for future learning but for a life rich with and open to all kinds of opportunity.

The throne speech introduced a truly great initiative. The Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Act will help to mark Alberta's 100th birthday with a new program that encourages parents to think about and save for their child's future education, and I hope to speak to that bill in debate in the House, so I won't say more about it here.

I'm also pleased that the throne speech spoke about our young people who are already in the learning system. The increased funding for kindergarten to grade 12 will give our children every possible advantage, and a new community-focused funding framework will enable each school board to more effectively respond to local needs and issues. This fits very well into my view of how we should work in our own communities to address community concerns.

The throne speech also announced new funding for the postsecondary learning system. Thanks to this injection of support we'll have an enhanced apprenticeship system. We'll see new spaces in high-demand programs and greater availability of degree-granting programs. The Campus Alberta quality council is a particularly exciting development, ensuring that the quality of new degree programs will help build an even finer system of adult learning.

That the throne speech talked about education in such detail and at such length speaks to a priority that this government places on learning. We see with great clarity that the future of Alberta and Alberta's children lies in having the best learning system in the world.

Our future health, wealth, and dare I say happiness also lies, however, in innovation. As reiterated in the throne speech, we must unleash innovation in order to continue growing as a province and compete in a changing, increasingly global marketplace. Without a doubt, our children will play a huge role in unleashing the power of innovation. As the future workers, citizens, and leaders of Alberta they hold the key to our creative potential. However, we must also

act in the present. We must not only discover the entirely new but also find ways to make the most of what we already have.

As business guru Peter Drucker has said, "Innovation is the specific instrument of entrepreneurship." It is "the act that endows resources with a new capacity to create wealth." I think that when Mr. Drucker was talking about resources, he meant all of our resources, including human, natural, social, and other resources. Here in Alberta we're privileged to have an abundance of many. Let's take that abundance and continue to turn it to our advantage.

The throne speech talks about finding new ways to add value to our resources. There are countless opportunities, be they in the more traditional areas of strength like oil and gas or the emerging sectors such as agrifoods. I ask: why would we ship our raw materials before we've had the opportunity to create jobs for people in Alberta? I say: let's keep the money; let's keep the jobs in Alberta for Albertans; let's not be afraid to find new ways to make the most of the great gifts that our land has provided to us. This doesn't mean abandoning our traditions or ignoring the value of things that have worked well and brought us economic reward. What it does mean is being aware of some of the great opportunities that still lie right below our noses.

Innovation has brought us some remarkable inventions and developments, especially in information and communication technology. Where would we be without VCRs to tape hockey games or favourite television shows? How would we get all those wonderful junk e-mails without the great wonder of the ICT world and the Internet?

Seriously, Mr. Speaker, it's innovations exactly like the Internet that have allowed us to unleash our creative powers and reach new heights in innovation. How else could we market Alberta simultaneously to hundreds of countries around the world? We can give literally millions of potential investors, customers, and visitors detailed information about all the opportunities that our province has to offer. We can sell our technical expertise and know-how to any variety of customers globally.

Closer to home ICT has enabled us to develop exciting innovations in education like the LearnAlberta web site, a digital learning environment for Alberta's teachers, students, and parents. Clearly, innovation doesn't have to be about inventing an entirely new product or gizmo. It doesn't have to be about the most amazing thing since sliced bread or about the Internet. Sure, here in Alberta we have plenty of those examples. Just think of the islet transplant program at the University of Alberta and you know what I mean by amazing.

Innovation can simply mean a better process or approach. Our government's three-year business plans are the product of innovative thinking. They may not be thrilling or amazing in and of themselves, but they have led to some thrilling and amazing results. There are endless opportunities for innovation in all parts of our economy and all parts of our society. They lie not only in our traditional areas of wealth generation but in newer areas as well.

The life sciences sector embraces everything from forestry and agriculture to health and water research and bioenergy. Many of these sectors also have, in fact, a long history in Alberta. For example, the forest industry has long been a foundation of Alberta's economy. So has agriculture. How many of our ancestors, the founding fathers and mothers of the province of Alberta, were farmers? But what is new and innovative is how things are being done. Thanks to groundbreaking research and truly creative thinking some of the most exciting innovations we're seeing today are coming from these sectors.

Forestry has evolved from a commodity-producing industry to a highly diversified economic sector that exports a variety of value-added products around the world. New technologies have played an

important role in that diversification by enabling the automation of manufacturing processes and, indeed, in new products.

3:10

The agriculture sector, the true life part of our economy, is continuing to branch out into exciting new areas of research and food and agricultural product processing. These industries are growing and thriving thanks to the spirit of innovation. They are pursuing new knowledge, ideas, and markets with the firm belief that we can compete in a changing world. Mr. Speaker, that's why I was delighted to hear the throne speech refer to a new life sciences institute that will co-ordinate research in these sectors. What better way to ensure that the innovative power of Albertans can be successfully unleashed? What better way to continue our evolution towards a knowledge economy than to support the creation of new knowledge?

Which brings me back to my original comments about education and learning. Education and learning are the foundations for all of this. Whether it's the scientist investigating the potential of nanotechnology in fighting diseases or the entrepreneur looking at new business processes or the child learning how to read and write for the very first time, learning is ultimately the key to our future success as a province. Yes, it can be difficult to keep an eye on the long term while we're busy fixing potholes or reacting to the latest crisis. Learning is a lifelong process, and I think we can learn to be an even better Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, as the throne speech showed us, we can learn to be a better Alberta by taking the long view, by looking ahead to the next generation, by having the courage to face the future with optimism and hope. Alberta is already a great place to live, work, and visit. It is a land of opportunity that competes successfully in many areas of the world stage. It is a province where we embrace innovation and know that learning is paramount. Thanks to our strong convictions, a formidable work ethic, uncompromising values, and self-reliance we've done exceptionally well over the last 99 years and especially well over the last 10.

Thanks to our very recent efforts we now have in place a 20-year plan for the future of Alberta and the future of our children. It's a plan to guide government, business, educational institutions, communities, service providers, and all partners and, most importantly, everyday Albertans. It's a tool to help us all understand where we are going and what we have to do in order to get there.

Twenty years? The throne speech is talking about two decades. How can we possibly think that far ahead? It's easy. We look to the horizon. We take our inspiration from the generations of Albertans who have gone before us and, may I add, a truly inspirational Albertan among us now, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor. We take that leap of faith. We shoot for the stars. We look to the heavens for guidance and inspiration while sowing the seeds of success with our feet firmly planted on the ground.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I take it that the hon. Government House Leader adjourned the debate with the words at the conclusion of his debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

**Bill 5
Family Support for Children with Disabilities
Amendment Act, 2004**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North on behalf of the hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to begin debate on Bill 5, the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Amendment Act, 2004. The act outlines five minor amendments to the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act brought forward during the spring session in 2003. The amendments address minor issues that were identified while regulations were being developed for implementation of the new act.

As you know, this legislation is the first of its kind in Canada because it provides separate and distinct legislation to cover services for children with disabilities. The first amendment is to the definition of disability. This amendment will clarify and broaden the definition. Currently, disability is defined as a chronic developmental, physical, sensory, mental, or neurological impairment other than a condition or impairment that is primarily a medically treatable illness. The proposed change is to clarify that a medically treatable illness means a condition for which the primary need is for medical care or health services to treat or manage the condition. However, when that medical condition significantly limits the child's functioning in daily life, then the child would be eligible for services. An example might be where a child has cancer and is undergoing treatment. The child's functioning in daily living might require additional supports and services.

Another amendment includes changing the phrase "therapeutic services" to "child-focused services." The word "therapeutic" is more commonly associated with health-related services, which is not the intent of this act. "Child-focused services" more accurately describes the kinds of supports and services that will concentrate on a child's individually assessed needs.

A new addition will require that the director appointed under the act and the appeal panel consider a family's specific circumstances as set out in regulations when making decisions that affect services to be provided. The amendment provides candour respecting the factors that are to be considered when the director and a family negotiate the levels and kinds of services to be provided.

Another new addition to the act will stipulate a residency requirement for children and families receiving services under the act. To be eligible for supports and services under the act, the director must be satisfied that a child has Canadian citizenship or permanent residency within the meaning of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (Canada) and ordinarily resides in Alberta. This includes refugees because they can apply to become permanent residents.

A further new addition to the act will provide that a parent under the age of 18 may enter into a valid contractual agreement regarding supports for their disabled child. This amendment ensures that young parents have access to the same supports and services.

These are the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act amendments proposed in Bill 5.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North participated in second reading. Unfortunately, the hon. member has not moved the motion for second reading, which would be helpful. As 20 minutes is allocated, I will recognize the hon. Member for Red Deer-North again to perhaps exercise that motion.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move second reading of Bill 5.

The Speaker: The hon. Interim Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to make a few comments on Bill 5, the Family Support

for Children with Disabilities Amendment Act, 2004. I think that as the Member for Red Deer-North has indicated, the proposed changes to the act are minor although not insignificant, especially with respect to the first amendment, which has to do with the definition. We had some discussion about definition when Bill 23 was before the House and had raised some questions at that time in terms of the narrowness of the definition and so are pleased that what we have before us is a broadening of the definition and the youngsters that can now be included as part of the act.

For those who are not working with the act on a daily basis, I think it can still be somewhat unclear as to exactly who the definition applies to. The speaker from Red Deer-North gave us an example of a youngster with cancer as being someone who would be included under a chronic condition that "significantly limits a child's ability to function in normal daily living." The way the definition is written, it almost requires an accompanying list of examples so that it is clear to parents exactly where their youngsters fit into the act. I'm assuming that "disability" means, for instance, cerebral palsy, that those are ones that we intended originally to have included under the act. I have questions, then, about youngsters with autism. Are they, too, included under the first part of the act?

As I said, it does raise some questions. In trying to make that distinction between those that are getting medical care yet it's a condition that's chronic and the other youngsters, I'm not sure that it still is as clear as it potentially could be, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

The other changes. It was really around the definitions of "disability" that we had some concerns raised by some groups that were interested in the legislation the last time, Mr. Speaker. The concern then was that it medicalized disabilities and re-established a medical model of dealing with disabilities, and I think that the intent and the impact of what happens when this bill is passed will allay those fears, that there will not be that same concern. But I'm still worried that when a parent reads this act, there are going to be some questions in their minds about which children are eligible.

Another comment, Mr. Speaker – and it's more of a question, I suspect – is about the notion of residency and the qualifications of what is a resident of Alberta and how this affects, for instance, youngsters from the Northwest Territories, those jurisdictions that have youngsters that receive services in the province at this time. Does it in any way affect any of those agreements? Is service to those children still going to be available?

I think that other than those two concerns, still some concern about the clarity of the definition and concerns about residency, the other changes are minor. I think there's some benefit to changing the term to "child-focused services" and removing "therapeutic services."

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, if I recognize the hon. Minister of Children's Services, this now closes the debate on second reading of this bill. Are there any other additional members who wish to participate at second reading? There being none, then the hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond to the questions that have arisen from the Leader of the Opposition in this way. "Child-focused," in light of the protocol that has been signed between Children's Services and the health minister and the Learning minister, incidentally, will help in the following way. If a child is sick, acutely ill with cancer or with any other disabling circumstance, then they are treated under the health model, under the

therapeutic model, but when at such time they are no longer acutely ill but considered chronically ill, then they will move to the Children's Services supports for their lifestyle on an everyday living basis.

So the circumstances will be that the child doesn't have an overlap in care but has the appropriate health care where Health and Wellness is the dominant provider, and then when Children's Services would retain the respite capacity assistance for counselling and therapy, those kinds of ongoing circumstances that would help children with disabilities, that's when Children's Services will be involved. The fear of having it too confined to the therapeutic model is why, as you have properly noted, the broader, child-focused model. We have spent an extensive period of time, in fact extended that time to the end of February, so that we can consult with not a few parents but all of the parents. All of the parents, through either their association or through focus groups or through regional discussions, have been contacted asking them for their comments and feedback on it.

Now, here's what I expect at the end of the day. Prior to proclamation we have to do a proper assessment to make sure that we are looking after each child. There are many children that receive smaller amounts on a monthly basis in support to the families that I would call respite or some babysitting assistance, sometimes some transport assistance for particular situations, but by and large their amounts of reimbursement for handicapped services are small. On an annual basis they would probably equate to between \$6,000 and \$8,000. That is by far the bulk of the children that will be served by this legislation.

Then there is another group that I would define as certainly needing more supports, certainly needing a greater level of support on a consistent basis, and with every one of those groups and those in that group – there may be probably about 1,500 of those children – I think it's imminently reasonable for those parents to expect that we would look at their circumstance on an individual basis, see whether the supports were sufficient to enable that child to achieve to his or her full potential, and make sure that whether it's an occupational therapist or counsellor, speech pathologist, they have the supports that were required for their own unique, special disability.

We have probably in the neighbourhood of 300 to 400 that would be severely complex cases, that would really require some intensive review. Now, for those children, while there will probably not be very much change at all that might happen with them, some might receive a little more service. It's not intended that people would receive less service under this legislation but child-appropriate services and provision for those services.

One in the area of the hon. member representing St. Paul, for example, was a child that was coming back and forth to Edmonton, and because they hadn't received the proper rejection by the school authority, they weren't eligible for certain supports from Children's Services. Well, we changed that. There's no reason to punish parents because they deserve something but haven't followed the process or don't have an understanding of the process. That to me is not the way to administer a program.

So this piece of legislation, along with an implementation plan, we are making very specific in two ways. One, to support the parent and the child. That is a given. Second, to support the culture within that children's authority so that the people that are performing the assessments of children that need supports have an understanding, a compassion, as comprehensive understanding of the medical needs as they should have in order to make a proper assessment, and extra supports to make that assessment workable for the child. I would say to all members of this House that if you find out that that isn't

being done in any situation, well, I will be very pleased to make sure that it is done, because I think we're making it eminently clear that those people need to have that support.

Mr. Speaker, if I may for just a minute. These are God's children, and whether we chose to have a child with a disability or not, they deserve every bit the same opportunity that any other child does in Alberta. I am proud that this legislation and the support by this Assembly, by everyone, is going to enable us to get that in the future.

On the matter, finally, of the immigrant child this will not affect those coming out of the Northwest Territories. Our agreements will stand; our supports will stand. This will simply mean that people can't shop for Alberta because they suddenly realize in another state, another country that this is the best place if you have a child with some kind of disability to land and to get those services. We want those families to be resident, to be contributing members of society in Alberta, to understand that their child, then, will qualify but certainly not just to ferry themselves across the border for services by what used to be handicapped children services and now will be resources for children with disabilities.

So I can assure this Assembly at the close of second reading that the intent of these amendments is to clarify; the intent of these amendments is to be inclusive, of making sure the children receive the proper supports for their medical condition; and the intent of these amendments is to be sure that they serve Alberta children and Alberta children only unless there is an agreement that has been accepted by the government of Alberta either through Health and Wellness or through Children's Services to serve those children that we have so many of in the Northwest Territories and beyond.

3:30

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, rather unique. We now have a question and answer/comment period under Standing Order 29(2)(a), should there be questions you wish to direct, in this case, to the last speaker, being the Minister of Children's Services.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

Bill 11 Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2004

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 11, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2004.

The Alberta Personal Income Tax Act gives the province the authority to collect personal income taxes in Alberta. These amendments will make some technical changes to the provincial act so that it stays consistent with federal legislation and will make some clarifications that ensure that the act reads the way it is administered and meets our policy goals. There are three aspects that I wish to address in particular: the wording used to calculate the tax liability of nonresidents in section 6(5); the administration of the foreign tax credit, particularly as it is affected by the federal Income Tax Act; and thirdly, changes needed to reflect changes made to the Alberta Corporate Tax Act, as there are some references that cross over between the two pieces of legislation.

Calculating the tax liability. The Personal Income Tax Act in section 6(5) calculates the tax liability for nonresidents. The term "taxable income earned in Canada" is defined earlier in section 5. We need to clarify in section 6(5) that the tax liability of nonresidents should be based on the term in section 5. So the same wording

should be used in both sections. Section 5 uses the words “individual’s taxable income earned in Canada.” Section 6(5) reads: “the individual’s taxable income for the year earned in Canada.” It needs to be amended to ensure that the defined term “taxable income earned in Canada” is not separated by the words “for the year.” So the new provision would read as follows: “the individual’s taxable income earned in Canada for the year.”

The foreign tax credit in section 23 will be amended in a number of ways including: to parallel federal amendments and legislation to ensure that the credit is not denied unintentionally when an individual pays tax in more than one foreign jurisdiction, to prevent the credit from being unintentionally reduced by business income taxes paid to the federal government, and to ensure that individuals are not disqualified from the credit due to death.

The first issue to address relates to calculating foreign tax credits when an individual pays tax in more than one jurisdiction. Under section 126 of the federal act an individual is required to calculate a separate foreign tax credit for each country. However, some of Alberta’s legislation treats all the foreign countries as a single group. As a result, the nonbusiness income tax paid to one particular country is reduced by the total of all federal foreign tax credits that have been claimed under the federal act for all countries. This has an effect of reducing the provincial foreign tax credit and causing a person to pay higher taxes than they should be paying under the intent of the policy.

The proposed changes ensure that Alberta’s foreign tax credit, like the federal credit, is calculated on a country-by-country basis so that the provincial foreign tax credit for a particular country is not reduced by the foreign tax credits claimed for other countries. Changing our legislation in the way proposed ensures that an individual who is due a foreign tax credit receives it.

The second issue to address under the foreign tax credits will ensure that an individual’s Alberta foreign tax credit deals only with nonbusiness income taxes as was originally intended. Under the present wording of the Alberta act, businesses’ income taxes included in the calculation of an individual’s special foreign tax credit will reduce the amount of an individual’s Alberta foreign tax credit. Given that the provincial credit does not include taxes paid on business income, reducing our credit by the portion of the federal special foreign tax credit that relates to business income unduly penalizes Albertans.

These changes would ensure that an individual’s Alberta foreign tax credit for a year is worded in such a manner that any business income taxes included in the calculation of an individual’s special foreign tax credit do not affect the calculation of an individual’s Alberta foreign tax credit. This will ensure that an individual’s Alberta foreign tax credit deals only with nonbusiness income taxes as was initially intended.

Finally, the current wording around a foreign tax credit may unintentionally deny the credit in the event of an individual’s death. You know the old saying that only two things in life are certain: death and taxes. I admit that this is the odd part of the law, but from the point of view of the tax collector you’re not officially dead until your last tax return is filed. It’s a fact of life.

Suppose that Bob Jones, an Alberta entrepreneur, earns nonbusiness income in United States and pays \$300 tax on this income to the federal and state governments in the United States. Bob also pays federal and provincial tax on this income in Canada. To remove this double taxation, the government of Canada and Alberta provide foreign tax credits. Assume that if Bob lived till December 31, he would qualify for a federal tax credit of \$250 and a provincial credit of \$50. Under the current wording in the provincial act an individual must be a resident of Alberta on December 31 to qualify for the

provincial credit. The way the act reads now, if Bob died on December 30 of the year, he would not be a resident of Alberta on December 31. He would receive his federal credit, but he would be denied his \$50 provincial credit. This amendment ensures that Bob will receive the provincial credit. I should mention that the act has been administered as though this change were already in effect, so there have been no denials of credit that we are aware of.

Changes to the corporate tax calculations made under the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2003, Bill 41 of last session, will need to be reflected in the Personal Income Tax Act. Currently, the Alberta royalty rebate in the Personal Income Tax Act is based on the royalty deduction in the Corporate Tax Act. In particular, the personal act directly references the definition of attributed Canadian royalty income in the Corporate Tax Act. The royalty tax deduction was amended to replace the attributed royalty income definition with the new pooling type concept.

3:40

Further, the act unintentionally denies the rebate to nonresidential individuals. Due to the changes in the Corporate Tax Act the methods of calculating the royalty rebate in the personal act is unclear as the act references concepts that no longer exist in the corporate act. Consequently, amendments are required to reflect the changes made in the Corporate Tax Act. These changes will ensure that nonresident individuals are not intentionally denied the tax credit.

Mr. Speaker, the changes proposed in this amendment act will serve to clarify aspects of the Personal Income Tax Act and will ensure that tax credits are not denied to individuals unfairly. I urge all members of this Assembly to support Bill 11.

Thank you.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m happy to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 11, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2004. It’s such a good example of how this government has participated in sloppy legislation over the years. If they had done their work properly in 2000 and gone through their reviews . . . [interjection] It’s very true. You can get up and debate this if you want to.

Had they compared it to the federal legislation at the time, had they even just had a grammar check on their computer systems, they would have seen that they needed to make some necessary changes at that time. We don’t need to be coming back here four years later to close loopholes that should have never been put in place in the first place. It’s a matter of taking all those great numbers of people that you have in the departments over there and having them take a look at the legislation closely. Time after time we come into this Legislature and waste our time by having to clean up sloppy legislation, and this is just another example of that.

We will support this bill because it’s very necessary, but I can’t, in principle, not speak to the problems that are in this bill for no other reason than that someone didn’t do their job.

So that’s all I have to say on this piece of legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn’t intending to participate in debate, but I can’t let those comments go by without indicating that in Alberta and particularly within this government we have some of the finest draftspeople and legislative planners that there are. They happen to be resident in the Department of Justice,

and the staff is led by Peter Pagano, an incredibly talented group of people who work very, very hard for the people of Alberta in drafting legislation.

I've had the opportunity of chairing Leg. Review over the years, and now it's chaired by the Deputy Government House Leader. I still attend it, and I'm constantly amazed at the ability of the people in legislative drafting to be able to do the intricate work and the detailed work that they do. I don't think it's appropriate to malign their work in the manner that was done just now in this House.

In fact, federal tax legislation changes almost yearly, and it is a constant of every provincial government in this country to constantly work to align provincial tax statutes with federal tax statutes. There is no sin in that. There is no sin in the timing. There is no sin in the question of whether or not we are bringing an act forward now to align with the federal act.

It is entirely inappropriate, Mr. Speaker, to malign the good work of the people who work for this province in a very, very strong and ethical manner, a very competent manner in drafting legislation.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for five minutes should it be requested by any hon. member.

There being none, we can proceed with the continuation of the debate.

There being none, I call on the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul to close the debate.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that I believe that the legislation that is being proposed is to have increased clarity and to parallel current administration and ensure consistency with federal legislation, and I think that's what this does. So with that, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

Bill 3 Architects Amendment Act, 2004

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

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 3, the Architects Amendment Act, 2004.

I'd like to acknowledge the significant contribution of the architect profession in the development of the proposed amendments. Representatives from the Alberta Association of Architects worked closely with the staff of Alberta Human Resources and Employment to identify these amendments, that improve the Architects Act.

The proposed Architects Amendment Act was developed to allow licensed interior designers and members of the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta, or APEGGA, as most of us know it by, to have a restricted scope of practice within this province's architectural profession. The Alberta Association of Architects supports the amendments proposed in this bill. In addition, stakeholders from government, private industry, other professional associations, and academic institutions all support the proposed amendments. These amendments ensure that licensed interior designers and those APEGGA members who perform such restricted architectural services adhere to the high standards of professional practice and safeguard the interest of all Albertans.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The proposed Architects Amendment Act has eight sections, which are as follows. Section 1 provides the authority to amend the Architects Act. Section 2 includes definitions for persons who are either a licensed interior designer or a restricted practitioner in the act. Section 3 authorizes licensed interior designers to perform specific architectural services as defined in the Architects Act supporting regulations. Section 4 amends the council membership provision by adding that a licensed interior designer shall be elected to serve on the association's governing council. Section 5 establishes regulation-making powers in defining the practice of interior design and specifying the registration, continuing education, and professional conduct requirements for licensed interior designers. Section 6 provides for persons who are restricted practitioners to be included in the association's register of members. Section 7 establishes the registration, certification, and licence renewal requirements of APEGGA members who are authorized to become restricted practitioners. Section 8 specifies that this act comes into force upon receiving royal assent.

So, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the amended Architects Act establishes clear registration, certification, and accountability requirements for licensed interior designers and other restricted practitioners providing specific architectural services to Albertans. I would ask for the support of this Assembly in passing this act.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to make a few comments about Bill 3, the Architects Amendment Act, 2004. The substance of the bill deals, as the mover has indicated, with the profession of interior design, and I think it's a long overdue move to have this section of the act amended and for the inclusion of interior designers to be here.

If you look at the profession and the responsibility that they hold with respect to improving the quality of life and the responsibility that they take on with respect to designing spaces that protect the health of citizens and the public, and that they have a responsibility with respect to safety and, as I said, the welfare of the public, it's a rather large responsibility, and it's appropriate that they would be governed and conduct their affairs as many other professions in this province do.

They conduct a wide range of services, and rather than the view of the current television craze of the Designer Guys and the others that we sometimes get from television, I think they provide a very serious and much-needed service to the province.

3:50

They, as I said, have the responsibility in terms of preparing drawings and specifications for interior construction, the selection of materials and finishes, the space planning of furniture and equipment. They have to collaborate with other professionals with respect to mechanical, electrical, and load-bearing design. They have to be aware of regulations that affect the environment of the building, and they have to be deeply involved in trying to evaluate and solve environmental and space problems.

So they have an important responsibility, and as I said, it's appropriate that they will now be under the act and that the provisions for the governance of their profession are included in the bill before us this afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also support this particular bill. It certainly is something that the Association of Architects has been asking for, and we've been seeing some requests from the interior designers associated with this association to also have this legislation brought forward.

It's good to have the rules outlined in terms of what they can and cannot do, and it's also very good now for interior designers to be a part of the council. One can now be elected to be a member, so that brings a perspective that will represent all of those people who are members of the Alberta Association of Architects.

We have not received a single complaint from anyone, either architects or interior designers, on this particular bill, and it will receive support.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29?

Anybody else wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills to close debate.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have nothing to add except to thank the previous speakers for their support of the bill and hope that all the other members would support this.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

Bill 2

Black Creek Heritage Rangeland Trails Act

[Adjourned debate February 19: Mr. Mason]

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to respond to Bill 2, the Black Creek Heritage Rangeland Trails Act. We heard some eloquent speeches from the Minister of Community Development and the Minister of Government Services on this bill Thursday last. They spent a great deal of time talking about and congratulating themselves on what a great job they'd done in the area of protecting the land. Inasmuch as the land is protected, it was a great job. So I would like to congratulate them on having created a nationally significant protected area in the Whaleback and designating the Black Creek as heritage rangeland and also the other piece of rangeland that's adjacent and somewhat inserted into the Black Creek heritage rangeland, which is the Bob Creek wild-land.

Good work was done on that. They worked on this for a number of years starting in 1999 to get these areas designated under the special places program. Since then, they've put a management plan in place, which was also a very good thing. It states that

the primary goal of the Wildland and the Heritage Rangeland is as follows: To preserve the natural heritage (i.e., soil, flora, fauna, landscape features, and natural/ecological processes) of the two protected areas in perpetuity. Other provincial protected area program goals (i.e., heritage appreciation, outdoor recreation, heritage tourism) are [very much] of secondary importance.

And that's as stated in the government's own documentation with respect to these particular protected areas. "The heritage appreciation and outdoor recreational goals may be met" – not must be met; may be met – "but only to the extent that their attainment does not conflict with or impinge on the preservation goal."

So that's where we see a problem come in with this particular bill, because what Bill 2 does is propose to allow off-highway vehicle access on designated trails through one particular protected area, which is the Black Creek heritage rangeland. They're saying that

that's necessary because as the Minister of Community Development, who's responsible for this, stated in his comments, they virtually eliminated any other possible access points, so they need to be able to allow these off-highway vehicles into this protected area.

Well, that's a real problem for us because it sets a couple of precedents that we didn't want to see occur. First of all, this area was supposed to be protected and protected for a good reason. It's ecologically sensitive, and the flora and fauna in the region will be greatly disturbed by off-highway vehicle access.

They need to find a different solution to this problem. This is not the right way to go about this. If they have to allow those off-highway vehicles in this area, then there have to be different ways for them to get in there. They can't go through this protected area. It was protected for specific reasons, and this government protected so little land in this province in this kind of a capacity, so much less than what we actually need in order to preserve the natural beauty of the region and the ecological integrity, which is at least equally important.

Protective legislation is originally brought into place as more than a convenience. It's brought in for specific reasons, which the government clearly outlined at the time, and they shouldn't be overruled whenever it's the most convenient way to allow access.

So we don't like this particular bill. We know that off-highway vehicles have a very detrimental effect on wildlife habitat. It disturbs them. It increases water, air, and noise pollution in the area and certainly has been known to cause significant soil and stream erosion.

There has to be significant policing put in place if this is even to be considered, and I don't think that the government is prepared to put people on those trails to ensure that the people stay on them as they're supposed to. Anyone who has travelled in the backcountry, particularly where there is OHV access, knows that it doesn't take many bad players to completely destroy an area. I've seen so many hillsides completely wrecked by people coming off the trails and going up and down the hills. The habitat is destroyed in the first place, initially, and then over the long term because what those trails do with those tire treads is create stream beds that cause a great deal of erosion when there's either rain or snow.

We have received many, many letters of concern about this particular bill, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to read a little bit of background from the Alberta Wilderness Association, who put out an action alert on this particular bill to its membership to give them an outline of what's happening. They talk about the proposed changes to the area allowing access into this newly protected area, and that's what the real problem is. We fought so hard to get these areas protected, and the Whaleback was shrunk and shrunk and shrunk, and the actual significantly protected areas were greatly reduced from what the original expectations were, and then just a few short years later we're seeing off-highway vehicle access going to be allowed even though it's currently banned. So this is a real problem.

What we're talking about here is this area having been protected was over 20,000 hectares from the Bob Creek wild-land area, which is where the off-highway vehicle access is allowed. It's surrounded on two sides by the Black Creek heritage rangeland, which is a much smaller area. It's one-third of the size. This specific region is the most extensive, least disturbed, and least fragmented montane landscape in Alberta, so it's really a unique piece of land. It's been extremely important for bears, wolverines, lynx and is one of the most crucial wintering areas in the province for elk and moose. So to keep this protected is very important.

4:00

Last year when the draft management plan for the two protected

areas was produced, the plan stated that the primary goal was as I read, and this is what the Alberta Wilderness Association was sharing with their membership. So now in direct opposition to that prime protection we are getting proposals for OHV trails. While the government members talked about this only being 3.5 kilometres of trail, that's very significant in an area this size and in an area that's this crucial to wildlife and the habitat itself. So they're asking for action against this bill from their members.

I have received a great many letters and phone calls on this issue, three more today, just this morning before coming in here. We definitely are not supporting this, and I would hope that the Minister of Community Development would share the concerns that he's hearing from people. One of the letters that came was from Christyann Olson from Calgary, who was very alarmed to find the legislation being proposed allowing this vehicle access through the Whaleback. She states that it's very disappointing to realize that the management planning process hasn't been officially completed yet and the government is "surging forward eroding the intent of the process and the desire of the public of Alberta." She also wants full protection in the Whaleback because of the reasons that I have previously cited.

I would hope that members would reconsider their position on this particular bill. It's not enough just to go to the off-road vehicle users when taking a look at whether or not new trails should be put through highly sensitive and well-protected areas, changing how the area is, in fact, protected. There needs to be extensive consultation with those whose primary concern is to keep the area protected and viable into the future, and that wasn't done here.

So, Mr. Speaker, we will not be supporting this bill, and as the days go on, we'll be tabling more letters from people who have concerns about it.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29?

Anybody else wish to speak? The hon. interim leader.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to voice my concern about the bill before us, the Black Creek Heritage Rangeland Trails Act. The rangeland is the only rangeland set aside in the province. The Black Creek area is unique, an area of about 20,000 acres. It runs adjacent to the Whaleback ridge, an area that's been of great concern across the province in terms of what happens to the area. It's already traversed from north to south by a power line right-of-way, so in terms of having it a truly preserved area, it already has incursions with respect to a right-of-way for power.

I think it's unfortunate that we would have the bill before us. The fight in the province to have land set aside has been a long and hard one, fought by a number of groups and individuals. They've been successful, but I think we have to keep in perspective that protected areas make up less than 9 per cent of provincial Crown land that is set aside for nonmotorized access, Mr. Speaker. If you look at the grandeur of this province and the possibilities, something less than 9 per cent of the Crown land is a very small portion of the land that has been set aside. To think that once having set aside an area like this, we can't then protect it from off-highway vehicles just somehow or other doesn't seem to fit, that for a small population that would actually traverse the area, we would be willing to sacrifice the principles that underlie the preservation of wilderness land. It seems somehow, again, so very, very inappropriate.

I think the proponents of the bill have indicated that it's not a long trail, but any incursion violates what the understanding was when this area was put in place by this province and has to be resisted. The scale is much different, but I can't help but look south of the border and to the great debate that's going on in Yellowstone over

the use of snowmobiles in that park. Although, as I said, the scale is not the same, it may be an omen in terms of what is to come with respect to wilderness areas in this province. I think that the province has done well in terms of the kind of progress that we've made, and for this kind of bill to come before us to attempt to modify or to reverse that progress is, I think, as I've indicated, Mr. Speaker, very, very unfortunate.

If you look back at the preservation goals, one of the important goals was that any kind of activity does not conflict with or impinge upon the goal of preservation, and this proposal before us certainly does just that. It impinges upon that preservation goal. I hope that the Assembly will take a long, hard look at the bill and do the right thing by the area by turning this bill back.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Mr. Bonner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to add my comments to Bill 2, the Black Creek Heritage Rangeland Trails Act. Like the previous speakers from our caucus, this is a bill that I can't support.

Certainly, one of the reasons that we cannot support this bill is because of the very sensitive nature of the Black Creek heritage rangeland. Now, this is situated on the eastern slopes of the Rockies, and we all are aware that over the past few decades there have been quite a few climatic changes in our weather, and certainly on the eastern slopes we don't get the rainfall we once got. We certainly do, if we look at this particular year, get the possibility of a huge snowpack, which is roughly twice the size that we've had in previous years, as I understand.

4:10

If we do put off-road vehicles into the Black Creek heritage rangeland and they damage those sensitive areas and the grasslands in that area, then certainly we are going to expose that particular section of our province to erosion. Certainly, when we look at the snowpack, for example, of this year, a quick thaw and a huge runoff would certainly cause extensive damage due to erosion. By allowing off-road vehicles to use the Black Creek heritage rangeland to access the Bob Creek wild-land, then we are putting a very sensitive area under even greater stress.

So I think we have to go back and we have to look at the goals to preserve these sensitive areas, and we realize that the goal is to preserve the natural heritage, and that includes the flora, the fauna, the soils, the landscape features, and whatever. Certainly, one of the reasons that people wish to use this is the very nature of the fact that access to the area is limited. We also have a very sparse population there. When we look at enforcement of off-road vehicles using the approved route, it would be virtually impossible, and it would not take long with the equipment that is available to people today to do extensive damage to the Black Creek heritage rangeland. Also, the opportunity for this damage to repair itself is limited, and certainly we could, with the examples I gave earlier, see extensive damage to the natural ecological process that does occur in this protected area.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I certainly would urge all members of the Assembly to vote against this bill. It is not a bill that is going to preserve the 9 per cent of provincial Crown land that is set aside for nonmotorized access. I certainly cannot agree with the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor, that made the comment that we have lots of land. Well, we don't have a lot of land when we look at land such as the Black Creek heritage rangeland, that is very sensitive.

I think, as well, that when we look at the rangeland that is in this particular section of the province, it is home to elk and moose populations, and certainly any destruction of their food chain will diminish the numbers of those large, beautiful mammals that grace our province.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to make some comments on Bill 2, and I look forward to further debate on this. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29?

The hon. Government House Leader to close the debate on behalf of the Minister of Community Development?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:16 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Goudreau	O'Neill
Ady	Graham	Ouellette
Amery	Griffiths	Rathgeber
Broda	Haley	Renner
Calahasen	Hancock	Shariff
Cao	Herard	Snelgrove
Cenaiko	Hutton	Stelmach
Danyluk	Knight	Stevens
DeLong	Marz	Strang
Evans	McClellan	Tarchuk
Forsyth	McClelland	VanderBurg
Friedel	McFarland	Vandermeer
Gordon	Melchin	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Bonner	Mason	Massey
Carlson		

Totals: For – 39 Against – 4

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

**Bill 5
Family Support for Children with Disabilities
Amendment Act, 2004**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, interim leader as well.

Dr. Massey: Yes. Just a couple of comments, Mr. Chairman. First, to thank the minister for the explanation about the definition under section 2(c). I think that was a useful clarification as was the information with respect to nonresident children. I don't think that

we need to labour the discussion this afternoon. We'll be supporting Bill 5.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a question for the minister on the bill. It's in section 2, where you're redefining disability in the current act to not include a condition that is primarily medical unless it is a chronic condition. Who determines that, and is there an appeal process? We've dealt with some situations in our constituency office that would be, if not borderline, at least something that could be considered potentially not to be chronic.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This is an excellent point raised by the hon. member opposite. Who is in determination of that? Parents frequently feel like they are the ones that are best able to assess the disability. But, in fact, there would be a different assessment perhaps required for every child. Although that sounds like a fairly strong statement and an unachievable objective, it would depend on whether it was a doctor and perhaps some occupational therapists, some other type of specialist, a speech pathologist, and so on. So the definition, we believe, will enable us to use a multidisciplinary team when that is appropriate, to use the assessments of more than one individual, and to provide an opportunity, which I think is most important, for the parents to be involved in defining that assessment for the objective of bringing forward a program. In other words, you can't have a clinical assessment without the view of the parent, the observations of the parent, and the observations of other people.

4:30

I think what's become most difficult with the severe cases, probably some which the hon. member opposite is talking about – and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has similarly raised some of those types of cases for me. What I understand is that when there are multiple disabilities that affect a child, what Children's Services has to be satisfied with at the end of the day under this legislation is that the family is given supports appropriate to the disabilities and appropriate to the symptoms of those disabilities so that the family has some assurance that the wellness of the child as much as possible is being achieved. I think this broadens the definition in a way that the families wanted so it's not so clinical to fit into one clinical definition, such as cerebral palsy or autism, or the other. It gives it a broader focus, and it broadens, in my view, the assessment tools that can be available.

Ms Carlson: Mr. Chairman, I like what the minister has to say. It's been the primary concern of parents that I've been involved with that it's a yes/no kind of decision decided by someone at the top. If the intent is to go to building more of a panel of caregivers and those who've been directly responsible for the child, I would very much support that as a way of deciding for these children. I'm not saying that the parent has to be involved at every step of the discussion, but they have to have some input and then more than one person analyzing the data and being a part of the decision-making process.

I still hope that there's an appeal process. I would expect that at the very least we could appeal directly to you if the situation arose, but it seems to me that I'm pretty satisfied with this bill, and I'll be supporting it.

Ms Evans: Well, I could just make one observation. One of the things that has been problematic for many of the parents with children requiring support is that they've had to go right through the child welfare appeal process. They have spoken to me through the consultations and said: "Why can't we have an administrative appeal process where there's a resolution to the situation without putting them through unnecessary legal and emotional constraints? Sometimes the child has a lapse in delivery of care during this period." I agree wholeheartedly, so we will also be looking at that so that where people have a concern, ultimately, obviously, the Child Welfare Appeal Panel is there, but we should be able to resolve most of those concerns up front within the department resources as well as the director of child welfare.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also have a question that's similar to the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie's, and that's with regard to children with disabilities that may be considered chronic and not permanent. For example, I have a situation in my constituency. I recently sent a letter to the minister. I have a mother of a very young child in my constituency who has a very chronic disability. They're basically one hundred per cent disabled, but there is possibly a cure 10 or 12 years down the road. So the mother was concerned that perhaps with some of these changes this child would be cut off, and as I read the bill, I don't think that this child would be cut off. I know that in the discussion guide it seemed to talk about a permanent disability versus a chronic disability, so I'm wondering if once again the minister would just clarify that.

The other question that I have, Mr. Chairman, for the minister is: is there any kind of a grandfathering clause for those families who are currently receiving support for a child who may be affected by this definition change?

Ms Evans: Mr. Chairman, I think that through the process of looking at the legislation there may be some concerns that have been raised by parents who haven't had an opportunity to talk to someone in Children's Services or somebody above the definition of their caregiver or their social worker. There's not an intent to use this new legislation to be more restrictive for parents in receiving services, and for anybody that might feel that that has come forward, no, that's certainly not the intent.

I think that what you have to recognize and what so often hasn't been recognized in the past is that when you have a disability – and let's take a disability like cerebral palsy – you're not going to grow out of it. You might change; circumstances might change. There might be some clinical redefinition of your own particular capacity to deal with what you've got, but too often in the past, in the way of making sure that we were being accountable in the service delivery for children with disabilities, there were frequent assessments and there were certain sunset periods for re-evaluation, and parents have found this sometimes to the point of ridiculous; you know, in six months you will have another assessment and so on. So when something is chronic and has been defined medically to be chronic – well, it's chronic in terms of a health definition – it becomes a permanent disability in terms of the Children's Services definition. It becomes something where we will be, I think, compelled and rightfully so to provide supports for the delivery of services that are age appropriate for that child.

I very much appreciate when members do come forward with some of these circumstances, as other hon. members have done in the past, where parents might have some temerity because of this flux of decision-making to come forward. We will be in Red Deer

later this month actually doing another parental review of the terms of the new legislation, going through the discussion guide, but the most important thing we'll be doing, Mr. Chairman, is going and sitting with those parents with, hopefully, a compassionate ear to see: have we got the right program in place, is this being able to help that parent with this disability, and are we making a positive difference?

I thank the hon. member for his question.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Mr. Bonner: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I welcome the opportunity to rise and ask a question of the minister and make some comments. Not too many years ago this minister stood up in this House and made a commitment to all members that if they did have difficulties with a situation involving children to certainly give her a call and she would personally look into it. On the occasions that I have done that, you and your department have done a marvellous job, and I thank you very much for that.

One of the cases that I did talk to the minister about was a family with children with multiple disabilities. In fact, one of the children had died from one of their disabilities. I had a call from the father again last week, and we've been talking. We talked again today. He has a struggle because it is a huge, huge responsibility for him and his wife to take care of handicapped children, children with many disabilities. Along with that struggle, he also is having troubles at the end of the month when he submits receipts for these children that have been cleared for a number of months and then all of a sudden he's denied again, so he has to go back and fight the same battle over and over.

Now, then, in this particular case he did go back. Everything is now taken care of, but he's tired. He's very tired of having to go through the same process over and over. So his question to me today was: you know, I fear the end of the month. Is there any way that we can get consistency in a case so that someone who is in his position and clearly has children with identifiable multiple disabilities does not have to fight the system month in and month out, doesn't have to worry about whether things are going to be approved or not approved? This is what his question was of me today. I told him we'd have an opportunity to talk to you today and that I would get back to him, so if you have any comments, I'm sure he'd be more than welcome to hear them.

4:40

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Chairman, if you've ever lived for a week on five baked potatoes and half a loaf of bread and tried to make sure you have enough money for your kids, you understand the absolute ridiculousness of having to wait for a government cheque to cover the costs of a child who has a handicap. So I will give my word to the member opposite that if I can find out who that is, we will make sure that we do something to make sure that these processes change, because that is not the intent. That is not what should happen, and if that does happen, I think we have to know about it. Our practice should not be to punish people or put them through the wringer and make them worry about the end of the month and whether or not they can pay that respite caregiver for their child. I thank you for bringing that forward, and I fully understand the problem and will get it solved.

[The clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 11
Alberta Personal Income Tax
Amendment Act, 2004

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Chairman, I just want to say that the amendments that were brought forward in second reading and now in Committee of the Whole will just make technical changes to the provincial legislation so that it stays consistent with federal legislation. There are also technical changes for clarification purposes and changes to ensure consistency with the current administration.

I think that's all I need to say, Mr. Chairman.

[The clauses of Bill 11 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report bills 5 and 11.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

Ms Graham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: bills 5 and 11. That's the report.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn until 8 tonight.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:46 p.m.]

